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Political Organisational Silence and the Ethics of Care: EU Migrant Restaurant Workers in Brexit Britain

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore the experiences of EU migrants working in UK restaurants in the aftermath of the Brexit vote. We do so through a care ethics lens, which we bring together with the integrative approach to organisational silence to consider the ethical consequences of the organisational policies of political silence adopted by the restaurant chains in our qualitative empirical study. We develop the concept of *political organisational silence* and probe its ethical dimensions, showing how at the organisational level it falls short of constituting a practice of caring for migrant workers in politically divisive and hostile times. We argue that organisational policies of political silence emphasise the exploitative nature of the business of (im) migration, which prioritises concern for profits over care for the needs of others. Organisations refuse caring responsibility for migrant workers, leaving care to the migrants themselves and their co-workers and managers. Whilst peer-care practices partially fill this politically silent care-vacuum, this leaves individuals to negotiate difficult tensions without institutional support at a time of increased uncertainty, complexity, hostility, violence, and vulnerability. Drawing lessons from our study and its aftermath, we call for a care manifesto to inform the business of (im)migration, which would need to include *caring political responsibility* towards migrant workers exercised through caring political organisational voice as well as silence.

Keywords Political organisational silence · Care ethics · Migrants · Silencing · Brexit · Political organisational voice · Caring political responsibility

Introduction

Brexit is a sad time. I do not know if I can stay, this is big change for me. Here, nothing is said about Brexit. I can ask my manager, I can search on the app, but it is not the same as caring about us (Catalina, Waitress, Coral, quoted in fieldnotes).

The business of (im)migration[1] is conducted in an increasingly uncaring world. In recent years, care ethicists have sought to draw attention to the crisis of care with

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1 We use the term '(im)migration' following the remit of this special issue to emphasise the fluidity between the notions and practices of 'migration' and 'immigration' and the uncertainty of the movement of bodies associated with these notions. In particular, Distinto and colleagues (2022) write:
 'Migration refers to cyclic or temporary movements of bodies with the possibility of returning to their original place whilst immigration indicates the desire for a permanent relocation. In practice, the distinction between migration and immigration is not clear-cut, due to the unpredictability and dynamism of the movement itself and the underlying intentions and plans of the individuals. We use the term "(im)migrate" to highlight the fluidity of this movement of bodies'.
 The unpredictability, uncertainty, and anxiety of the distinction between immigration and migration as encapsulated in (im)migration are particularly relevant to our focus on EU workers in Brexit Britain.

growing urgency, showing how the fundamental and universal human need for care has been neglected, with devastating consequences, by the advent of neoliberal capitalism, which "has neither effective practice of, nor a vocabulary for, care" (Chatzidakis et al., 2020:4). As economic production, growth and profit-making became the near-ubiquitous organising principle of life, as competition (rather than cooperation) came to dominate social organisation, as individualised notions of resilience and self-care ousted those of community and social welfare, and as individuals became overwhelmed with too many competing demands on their time, the care deficit deepened (Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Tronto, 2013). The result is the world in which carelessness reigns, permeated by a systemic level of Arendt-esque banality, and marked by unbearable collective anxieties associated with living in such a world (Chatzidakis et al., 2020).

The care ethical implications for the business of (im) migration are in urgent need of examination. Although they contribute significantly to social and economic development, as 'bodies across borders' (Distinto et al., 2022) (im)migrants have always tended to face greater vulnerability, precarity, and exploitation compared to non-migrants (Anderson, 2010; Carens, 2013; ILO, 2020). These challenges have been exacerbated in the context of the care deficit, as right-wing and authoritarian populisms once again proved seductive, overshadowing care with totalitarian, nationalistic and xenophobic logics "that rearticulate and reorient our caring inclinations towards 'people like us'" (Chatzidakis et al., 2020:4). Populisms of Brexit and Trumpism, for example, have unleashed and fuelled waves of xenophobic and racist Othering and violence already present in UK and US societies (Bristow & Robinson, 2018; Kerr et al., 2022; Virdee & McGeever, 2018), in some cases tipping migrants into conditions of extreme vulnerability and modern slavery (Segarra & Prasad, 2020, 2022). Migrants are therefore potentially experiencing, on the one hand, intensified need for care due to heightened vulnerability, and, on the other hand, being actively or implicitly de-prioritised for ever-more scarce care as increasingly marginalised Others.

In this paper, we respond to the special issue call for deeper ethical discussions of (im)migration (Rajendra, 2017; Shanahan, 2021) in the workplace (Carens, 2013) by turning the lens of care ethics on the micro-level of the business of (im)migration (Distinto et al., 2022). Considering organisational ethics and politics to be inextricably linked (Pullen & Rhodes, 2015) and applying this understanding also to the impact of the broader political context on organisational lives, we explore, specifically, the experiences of EU migrants working in UK restaurants during the political negotiations of Brexit. We focus on the restaurant industry as it, a) employs particularly high numbers of migrants, and b) previous studies have shown that its particularly chaotic, high-paced, exploitative nature puts employees – and especially disadvantaged employees – in positions of heightened vulnerability (e.g. Burrow, Scott and Courpasson, 2022). Within this context and in the aftermath of the EU Referendum vote, the already vulnerable (by dint of being both migrants *and* restaurant workers) yet previously relatively privileged (compared to non-EU migrants) EU migrant workers swiftly acquired additional layers of vulnerability as their automatic rights to live and work in the UK were called into question and subsequently lost. Understanding their experiences and feelings as they were experiencing these developments provided a unique opportunity to surface their responses to organisational practices of (lack of) care during a macro-political crisis when they particularly needed that care.

Our qualitative empirical study combined observation and semi-structured interviews, with the data collected between June 2019 and January 2020 by the first author as part of her PhD research. We were particularly interested in exploring the care ethical aspects of the political and emotional challenges faced by EU migrant workers in the context of Brexit, but also their responses to these challenges, highlighting that they were not merely passive victims (Agustín, 2003) but have 'agency to negotiate, resist, or reinforce the challenges of (im)migration (Doshi, 2021; Segarra & Prasad, 2020)' (Distinto et al., 2022).

We found that our participants' understandings and experiences of (lack of) care (central to them in the context of Brexit) were intricately entangled with organisational silence on Brexit. This allowed us to refine our theoretical angle as we brought together insights from organisational silence and care ethics literature to interpret the ethical dimensions of this entanglement. Specifically, we add to the budding literature positioning organisational silence as relational, complex, multifaceted, and contradictory, with the potential to be both emancipatory and oppressive, and experienced in a multitude of ways (Bigo, 2018; Vu & Fan, 2022). To these understandings, we contribute the specific political and ethical aspects, developing the concept *political organisational silence (POS)*.

We use this concept to refer to the many complex and contradictory care ethical facets of silence on political issues in organisations, variously manifesting at individual, group, or organisations levels. Connecting POS to our care ethical concerns with the business of (im)migration, we address the following questions: (1) to what extent and in what ways do EU migrant workers feel cared for at work in the context of Brexit? Who cares for them? (2) What is the relationship between POS and care, or lack of care for EU migrant workers? And (3) What are the care ethical implications of POS for the business of (im)migration?

In addressing these questions, we probe the care ethical dimensions of POS. Following Fotaki et al (2020), we see care as a fundamental aspect of how work in organisations is experienced, and approach it as relational ethical practice constitutive of complex webs of interdependent connections and relationships that make up organisations. To analyse our research participants' experiences, we draw on the work of the prominent feminist political theorist and care ethicist Joan Tronto (Fisher & Tronto, 1991; Tronto, 1993, 2013) and her conceptualisation of the ethical practice of care. Evaluating POS against Tronto's ethical standards, we show how at the organisational level the former falls short of constituting a practice of caring for migrant workers in politically divisive and hostile times. More specifically, organisational policies of political silence ethically fail at Tronto's very first phase of caring practice, which requires attentiveness to and caring about the needs of others (Tronto, 1993), which also makes the enactment of the rest of the care ethical process impossible.

Drawing on the broader care ethics (Antoni et al., 2020; Fotaki et al., 2020; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012), organisational morality (George, 2014; Jackall, 1988; Sanchez-Burks, 2002), and ethical blindness (de Klerk, 2017; Fotaki & Hyde, 2015; Palazzo et al., 2012) literature, we subsequently argue that, at organisational level, policies of political silence engender and amplify uncaring neglect and alienation of migrant workers by employing organisations. POS therefore needs to be considered as a facet of exploitation in the business of (im)migration, enabling operational prioritisation of profits over care for the needs of migrants. POS thus also helps to understand how the deep conflict between business and care (Antoni et al., 2020; Fotaki et al., 2020) is operationalised, experienced, and responded to in organisations. We show that by resorting to POS, organisations in our study refuse caring responsibility for migrant workers, leaving care to the migrants themselves and their co-workers and managers. We also show how this care-vacuum created by POS at the organisational level is part-filled by micro-practices of peer-care at the individual level using both voice and silence. This leaves individuals to negotiate difficult tensions without institutional support at a time of increased uncertainty, complexity, hostility, violence, and vulnerability.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. First, we provide more context on the migrant experiences of Brexit. Second, we review key aspects of organisational silence literature pertinent to our argument and develop our concept of POS. Third, we discuss our approach to care ethics, outlining Tronto's conceptualisation of the ethical practice of care and connecting it to broader business ethics literature. Following a discussion of methods, we then proceed to the analysis of findings. Finally, in the discussion and conclusion sections, we address our research questions and draw together our contributions.

EU Migrants in the Context of Brexit

McDonald and Erez (2007) write that being a person in a foreign land carries with it a special set of vulnerabilities and disadvantages that add to and interact with other social statuses. Even individuals who are considered relatively privileged are "forced to the back of the social line when they become foreigners" (p.6). Before the UK electorate voted to leave the European Union in 2016, EU citizens had the right to free movement, allowing them to live and work in the UK without the need for formal applications for visas. However, leading up to the Brexit vote, the Leave campaign problematised free movement as allowing 'uncontrolled' immigration from the EU (Kilkey, 2017:228), making "the concept of "EU immigrants"… a symbol of the tension between the EU and the UK" (Tong & Zuo, 2019:463).

Prior to the EU Referendum, many EU migrants in the UK were already experiencing hostility, xenophobia, and racism (Guma & Dafydd-Jones, 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2019; Virdee & McGeever, 2018). Yet these were significantly exacerbated in the aftermath of the Brexit vote due to the right-wing populist anti-immigrant campaigns (Kerr et al., 2022; Luthra, 2021; Tong & Zuo, 2019), Brexit thus becoming "a notable landmark in the UK's more generalised hostile environment" (Kilkey et al., 2020:5). Brexit campaigns and vote unleashed a wave of verbal and physical violence against people and property, re-legitimising and amplifying the hateful abuse of migrants (Bristow & Robinson, 2018; Guma & Dafydd-Jones, 2019; Kerr & Śliwa, 2020).

Brexit has also been characterised by both sudden and protracted uncertainty, due to, on the one hand, the unanticipated (by polls and experts) EU Referendum outcome (won by Leave by a narrow margin), and, on the other hand, the protracted negotiations of the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement (not ratified until 2020, followed by a transition period, and even now questions remain, e.g. the status of Northern Ireland borders). Whilst uncertainty is inherent to migration, mostly driven by an individual's decision to move across borders, Brexit has been a highly unsettling event (Kilkey & Ryan, 2020), as 'Brexit uncertainty' materialised overnight and lasted for years, becoming 'the new normal'. It forced EU migrants to contemplate everyday activities formerly taken for granted, as Brexit constrained their agency, diminished their rights, and evoked sentiments of separating 'us' and 'them' (Luthra, 2021). For example, at the time of our empirical study (2019–2020), EU migrants had experienced three and a half years of uncertainty about what Brexit will mean in terms of their legal rights as EU citizens. Overall, therefore, the
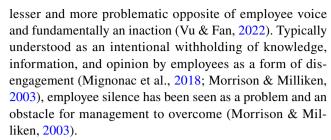
Brexit vote made visible existing vulnerabilities among EU migrants as well as creating new ones (Burrell & Schweyher, 2019).

The emerging literature, thereby, begins to consider the role of anti-immigration discourses in the Brexit vote and the impact of the latter on EU migrants (see also, e.g. Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017). However, there are still few empirical studies exploring the implications of Brexit from the perspectives of EU migrants in the UK, especially in organisational context. There is also still insufficient understanding of how organisations have responded to Brexit, and how they can mediate the experience of Brexit for EU migrant employees (Luthra, 2021). One exception to this is Luthra's (2021) paper which explores these issues in the context of UK Higher Education. Luthra's findings show how EU academic and professional staff faced major disruption in "their perceptions of the UK as a place to work and to live", demonstrating that even "highly skilled migrants… experience vulnerability and a feeling of unwelcome" in the context of Brexit (Luthra, 2021:191). Moreover, Luthra found that the three universities in her study helped EU staff in mediating precarious experiences of Brexit, providing "symbolic and material support which was appreciated by employees". However, Luthra also notes that such responses "represent a 'best case' as employers who are particularly well suited to address concerns from Brexit" (p.203).

In this paper, we contribute to this emerging literature by 'org-studying the consequences of Brexit' (Kerr & Śliwa, 2020: 494) and in particular how Brexit is experienced and mediated in organisational context by organisational policies, EU migrant workers, and their co-workers and managers. We do so through the lens of care ethics, asking to what extent and in what ways EU migrant workers feel cared for at work in the context of Brexit, how they respond to such organisational (lack of) care, and what the ethical implications are for the business of (im)migration. Unlike Luthra (2021), we explore the experiences of less-skilled EU migrants working in the precarious restaurant industry and also provide a contrasting analysis in terms of less supportive organisational responses to Brexit. The key to this latter aspect is our focus on the role of political organisational silence.

Political Organisational Silence

Our conceptualisation of political organisational silence builds on and contributes to the organisational silence literature. Until recently, silence has been relatively neglected or treated simplistically in management and organisation studies (MOS) (Bigo, 2018; Vu & Fan, 2022). From a managerialist perspective, silence in organisational context has tended to be reduced to employee silence and treated as a

lesser and more problematic opposite of employee voice and fundamentally an inaction (Vu & Fan, 2022). Typically understood as an intentional withholding of knowledge, information, and opinion by employees as a form of disengagement (Mignonac et al., 2018; Morrison & Milliken, 2003), employee silence has been seen as a problem and an obstacle for management to overcome (Morrison & Milliken, 2003).

Conversely, critical scholars have drawn attention to the oppressive and exclusionary processes of employee and organisational *silencing* as part of power dynamics and asymmetries in and around organisations (Brown & Coupland, 2005; Fernando & Prasad, 2018; Lauwo, 2018; Lescoat, 2021; Manning, 2021; Schwiter et al., 2021). For example, Dulini and Prasad (2019) demonstrate how women are silenced about the ubiquity of sexual harassment in the everyday function of the workplace, and Pierre (2021) explores the silencing of the word 'race' in French language. Processes of silencing can operate at the individual (Milliken et al., 2003), group (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003), and organisational levels (Milliken et al., 2003). However, Vu and Fan (2022) note that silence in general remains underexplored at the organisational and management levels, most literature focusing on the silence of employees.

As within critical literature silence is seen as an instrument and a product of oppression, exclusion, and othering, silence is often juxtaposed with voice, in the form of speaking out or speaking up, as a strategy of resistance and empowerment (e.g. Fleming & Spicer, 2007). This is particularly prevalent in business ethics in relation to whistleblowing, where the ethical dilemma is between staying silent or speaking out against organisational wrongdoing (e.g. Kenny & Bushnell, 2020). In a similar way, critical scholars have positioned their research as speaking out against silence. For instance, Hurd (2021) challenges silence around stress in academia through voice, and Dorion (2021) reflects on being a feminist ethnographer, arguing for writing as an emancipatory process which helped her come out of silence. On the other hand, critical perspectives have also included understandings of organisational silence as a kind of voice and action in its own right that can range from accommodating and resisting oppression to being an expression of creativity and empowerment (Bigo, 2018; Brown & Coupland, 2005). Such conceptualisations of silence evoke research in health and social care, where silence has been positioned as expressive, including constituting active presence and therapeutic communication (Bassett et al., 2018).

In this paper, we contribute to the recent efforts by organisational scholars to develop more integrative and multifaceted understandings of organisational silence, recognising the latter as relational, complex, and contradictory organisational practice taking place at and across individual, group, and organisational levels, with

the potential to be both emancipatory and oppressive, and experienced in a multitude of ways (Bigo, 2018; Vu & Fan, 2022). This includes "as deafening, insipid, daunting, oppressive, indifferent, suspended, dreary, pregnant, thick, cosy, inspiring, significant, heavy, ominous, poetic, enveloping, [and] colourful" (Bigo, 2018:122). The integrative perspective does not seek to resolve the contradictory manifestations of silence but rather sees them as part of the persisting dialectics and paradoxes of organisational life.[2] This necessitates treating silence 'like a Rubik's cube,' requiring a nuanced exploration of its complexity and a 'consideration of the multiplicity of dimensions that are interconnected and constitute the ongoing formation of each other' (Vu & Fan, 2022: 319). Taking this approach, we respond in particular to Vu and Fan's (2022) call for further development of the integrated understanding of silence by exploring 'the dynamics of the interwoven constructive and oppressive aspects of silence that is an ongoing negotiation, where what is seen as emancipatory can be a form of/basis for control, and what is established as a formal discursive rule may cultivate emancipation' (p.308).

We contribute to this approach in several ways. Firstly, we add the specific political aspect, developing the concept *political organisational silence* (POS) to refer to multiple complex and contradictory facets of organisational silence on political issues. This new conceptual focus is important and timely given the recently growing debate in organisation studies and business ethics on the role of business organisations in extra-organisational politics, including in relation to Brexit (Bristow & Robinson, 2018) and populism (Mollan & Geesin, 2020), corporate political activism (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Chatterji & Toffel, 2019), and responsible leadership and political corporate social responsibility (Frynas & Stephens, 2015; Maak et al., 2016; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). Despite the risks of ostracising stakeholder groups (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Smith & Korschun, 2018), businesses and their leaders are increasingly expected to take a stand on macro-political events (Eabrasu & Wilson, 2022), especially in politically turbulent and divisive times (such as Brexit). POS turns such macro-political attention inwards, extending the remit of the integrative approach to organisational silence to enable a nuanced exploration of how macro-political dynamics play out intra-organisationally in terms of political silence and voice, and with what consequences. This is of direct relevance to understanding the experiences of migrants working in organisations in times of international political crises.

Secondly, we contribute by developing a care ethical perspective on the integrative approach to organisational silence. As elaborated in the next section, this allows us to explain propensity to political silence at the organisational and managerial levels (i.e. levels underexplored in organisational silence literature (Vu & Fan, 2022)) in terms of the deep-seated conflict between care and business (Antoni et al., 2020; Fotaki et al., 2020). It also allows us to explore the complex and contradictory effects of POS at the level of individual responses as the silent care-vacuum left by POS at organisational level is partially filled with micro-practices of peer-care operating through both voice and silence. This approach thus enables us to address our question about the relationship between organisational silence on macro-political issues and (lack of) care for EU migrant workers in a nuanced way, unpacking how uncaring/caring silence/silencing can co-exist and be intertwined with caring/uncaring voice.

Probing Political Organisational Silence as an Ethical Practice of Care

As mentioned in the previous section, silence has attracted some attention in the business ethics literature. This mainly considers silence in the contexts of whistleblowing (Kenny & Bushnell, 2020; MacGregor & Streubs, 2014; Teo & Caspersz, 2011), justice (Whiteside & Barclay, 2013), integrity (Trinkaus & Giacalone, 2005; Verhezen, 2010), corporate social responsibility (Lauwo, 2018), and spirituality (Karakas & Sarigollu, 2019). However, less is written on organisational silence from the ethics of care perspective. One notable exception is Simola's (2005) study, in which she applies concepts from Gilligan's ground-breaking care ethics research (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1988, 1990, 1991) to the field of organisational crisis prevention. Two of these concepts are voice and silence, which are also entangled with resistance and connection. In particular, Simola explores how individuals can use voice as resistance against relational violations (such as harmful words or actions, failure to listen to the needs of others, and failure to fulfil responsibilities to others and themselves) that threaten to disconnect them from others, but also how, because the political risks of voice are high, they can instead or ultimately be reduced to silence. This puts Simola in line with the critical literature on organisational silence, which sees voice as a means of resistance and silencing as a process of oppression (e.g. Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Hurd, 2021).

In this paper, we argue that the integrative approach to organisational silence (Bigo, 2018; Vu & Fan, 2022) can

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[2] The integrative approach thus recalls Adorno's negative dialectics (1973) that seeks to understand the complex interplay between contradictory elements without resolving them, in contrast to Hegel's dialectics which seeks to resolve the tension between the thesis and the antithesis by absorbing them into a higher-order synthesis.

offer a more nuanced interpretation of care ethical practice in relation to silence and voice, and, vice versa, care ethics can enrich the integrative approach to organisational silence. Whilst Vu and Fan (2022) do not explicitly touch on ethics, Bigo (2018) writes of silence as a potential source of ethical creativity, where a retreat to 'innermost silence' can enable self-effacement, facilitating true listening and through it ethical transformation. For Bigo (2018: 123), 'innermost silence is a state of receptivity that corresponds to the most unimpeded level of availability to others', creating space where organisational actors can 'do' organisational morality (Watson, 2003) with responsiveness and care. Although Bigo does not engage with care ethics, she therefore opens up the integrative approach to organisational silence to its consideration. We follow up on this opening, yet what we find when we bring in care ethics to illuminate it in our empirical context of migrant restaurant work in Brexit Britain is more complex and layered than the transformatively caring organisations and management that Bigo hopes can be enabled by silence.

The ethics of care is a relatively young branch of ethics, being only a few decades old (Held, 2006). It originates from a number of fields, including moral philosophy, political theory, education, feminist ethics, and health and social care. Within MOS, care ethics is an emergent interest, starting with Liedtka's (1996) foundational article and recently attracting increasing attention (Fotaki et al., 2020). Despite calls to ground organisational understandings in philosophies of care rather than just business theories (Kroth & Keeler, 2009; Tomkins & Simpson, 2015), empirical studies on the ethics of care remain limited (Elley-Brown & Pringle, 2021). We contribute to these calls and literature by probing empirically and conceptually the care ethical dimensions of POS within the context of the business of (im)migration. Following Fotaki et al (2020), we see care as a fundamental aspect of how work in organisations is experienced, and approach it as relational and thus constitutive of complex webs of interdependent connections and relationships that make up organisations. In particular, we draw on the work of the prominent feminist political theorist and care ethicist Joan Tronto (Fisher & Tronto, 1991; Tronto, 1993, 2013) and her conceptualisation of the ethical practice of care. Tronto's work is particularly fitting to our study because of its political orientation and ongoing influence on the care ethics literature including business ethics (e.g. Elley-Brown & Pringle, 2021; Fotaki et al., 2020; Tomkins & Bristow, 2021).

For Tronto, as for many care ethicists, care is a fundamental human need and activity that involves responding to the needs of others. It is also deeply relational, being:

> "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Fisher & Tronto, 1991:40).

Furthermore, for Tronto, care is a practice, requiring both caring thought or intent and caring action. More concretely, Tronto (Fisher & Tronto, 1991; Tronto, 1993, 2013) writes of the different interconnected phases and elements of ethical care practice that together constitute a standard against which we can judge the effectiveness of care.

The first of these is *caring about*, which involves the recognition of a need for care and that this need should be met. Caring about someone requires the moral element of *attentiveness* to their needs. Tronto (1993:127) argues that this standard of 'the ethic of care would treat ignoring others–ignorance–as a form of moral evil,', linking the lack of attentiveness to Hannah Arendt's banality of evil and those who ignored the atrocities committed during World War II. The second is *taking care of*, which involves assuming some *responsibility* for the identified need of others and deciding on how to address it. The third is *care-giving*, the actual action of directly addressing the need for care, which requires some caring *competence* from the care giver. The fourth is *care-receiving*, which explicitly includes those in need of care into the caring practice and centres their views as to whether their needs have actually been met. Tronto (1993:134) writes that care-receiving requires the *responsiveness* of care receivers, which can be complicated given that 'by its nature, care is concerned with conditions of vulnerability and inequality' and that to need care 'is to be in a position of some vulnerability.' Fittingly, in her later work Tronto (2013) adds *caring with*, requiring the building of *solidarity and trust* as the fifth element of ethical care practice.

Overall, Tronto's standard is a comprehensive one. She writes that the ethical practice of care 'involves more than simply good intentions' but also 'a deep and thoughtful knowledge of the situation, and of all of the actors' situations, needs and competencies,' as well as 'knowledge of the context of the care process' and the willingness and ability to make judgements about conflicting needs and strategies (Tronto, 1993:136–137). This becomes particularly challenging in what Held (2006) calls 'unsatisfactory contexts of domination,' which abound in the uncaring world of neoliberal capitalism that curtails our capacities for care (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). In particular, within the neoliberal capitalist organisations, caring for individuals 'as ends in themselves rather than as means for achieving organisational aims' is often seen to be in deep conflict with the business objectives of performance and profitability (Fotaki et al., 2020:11). Antoni et al. (2020) write that the dilemma of

care allocation, which arises because the needs of care are infinite but the resources to provide care are limited (Held, 2006; Tronto, 1993) is pervasive in work organisations, where care for work conflicts with and is prioritised over care for co-workers. This is rooted in the contemporary nature of Western organisational morality, which emphasises 'professional' detachment from the needs of employees (George, 2014; Sanchez-Burks, 2002), setting what is moral in workplaces apart from what is moral in other spheres of life (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2015; Jackall, 1988). Issues 'that would be recognised as ethical outside the work context may not be recognised as such within the organisation' (Antoni et al., 2020: 451; Palazzo et al., 2012). Care in particular tends to be relegated to the non-work side of the personal-professional divide as part of the 'professional' setting aside of personal issues (Antoni et al., 2020; Sanchez-Burks, 2002). Instead of Tronto's (1993) caring attentiveness to the needs of others, ethical blindness can take hold (Fotaki & Hyde, 2015; Palazzo et al., 2012), including blindness to seeing workers as whole persons (Antoni et al., 2020), making organisations uncaring towards and between employees as well as other stakeholders (Contu, 2008; Jackall, 1988; Linsley & Slack, 2013).

Against the background of the tension between the capitalist profit orientation and care (Fotaki & Prasad, 2015; George, 2014), different organisations and their members respond differently, some suppressing the tension, and others surfacing and engaging with it, attempting to reconcile caring for work and for workers (Antoni et al., 2020). Many organisations fall back on relying on sacrifices made by organisational members to respond to the needs of employees (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). Our analysis of POS on Brexit in the context of migrant restaurant workers deeply resonates with and furthers understanding of this regression of care in organisations, illuminating layered and contradictory dynamics of silence and voice as uncaring and caring practice. We show that at the organisational level, silence on Brexit is a far cry from Bigo's (2018) vision of silence as caring creativity, which falls at the first hurdle of Tronto's (1993) ethical standard of care: attentiveness, constituting instead ethical blindness (Antoni et al., 2020; Fotaki & Hyde, 2015; Palazzo et al., 2012). This leaves EU migrant workers reliant on peer-care from their co-workers and managers, who respond through a range of micro-practices of detachment and care through a mixture of silence and voice. It is at this level of individual responses that we see more evidence of silence as caring practice holding up to all of Tronto's (1993) phases and attributes. Yet because these practices are limited to the micro-level and are part of a patchwork of mixed and contradictory responses, some of which further entrench uncaring silence, the overall configuration of POS in our case ultimately fails to constitute caring for migrant workers in politically divisive and hostile

times of Brexit. We explore these dynamics further in the empirical sections below.

Methods

We draw on a qualitative empirical study of EU migrants, their co-workers, and managers working in three UK restaurant chains. The hospitality industry was selected purposefully, as at the time of the study it employed the largest proportion of EU nationals as a percentage of the total workforce. More specifically, the restaurant sector was listed as the second highest to rely on EU migrants–between 13.8% and 26% of the workforce (KPMG, 2017). Furthermore, studies have drawn attention to the particularly chaotic, high-paced, exploitative nature of the restaurant sector, which puts employees–and especially disadvantaged employees–in positions of heightened vulnerability (Burrow et al., 2022; Gill & Burrow, 2018). With the twist of Brexit, this context therefore offered the opportunity to research a more extreme case of EU migrant workers' experiences, vulnerabilities, and needs for care than what has been done previously (cf. Luthra, 2021).

Access was agreed with senior managerial gatekeepers of three restaurant chains–hereafter Coral, Luke, and Eddies (pseudonyms to protect organisational and individual identities). The data were collected by the first author as part of her PhD during the intensive political debate and negotiation of Brexit leading up to the implementation of the UK/EU Withdrawal Agreement between June 2019 and January 2020. The first author spent a total of 29 days (totalling 104.5 h) observing in the field and conducted 47 semi-structured interviews (averaging 45 min in length) at nine restaurants of the three chains. Combining the two forms of data (interview data and observational fieldnotes) collected through this fieldwork has enabled us to explore contextualised experiences, viewpoints, meanings, and interpretations both from the perspective of the participants (in interview responses) and the researcher (from her observational notes).

Although our primary interest was in the experiences of EU migrant workers, the relational perspective informed the research design from the start (Brannelly & Barnes, 2022). This meant that it was important to understand the relationships between the EU migrants and their co-workers and managers, rather than just the EU migrants' perspectives in isolation. We therefore maintained open-mindedness and 'flexibility in the procedure of sampling' (Shaheen et al., 2019:25), potentially including anyone who was employed by the three restaurant chains. This involved opportunistic sampling with 'on-the-spot sampling decisions that help collect data from new opportunities that arise during the process of data collection' (Shaheen et al., 2019:35). The opportunistic sampling technique also enabled the researcher

to remain open to new opportunities and directions during the fieldwork (Brady, 2011). This ensured a broad mix of participants was included whilst centring the experiences of EU migrant workers.

The resulting demographics of participants were broad ranging. The researcher encountered a total of 88 employees and closely observed 55 employees who worked in the restaurant chains. Out of these, 29 were male and 26 were female. The 47 employees who were interviewed (21 female and 26 male) included 23 EU migrants, 1 non-EU migrant, and 23 British employees. The age range of all 55 participants was between 19 and 47 years old, and they had lived in the UK ranging from when they were born to a total of approximately three months. The nationalities of the participants included (in alphabetical order) British (23), French (1), Greek (1), Italian (6), Lithuanian (3), New Zealander (1), Polish (6), Romanian (4), and Spanish (2). Out of the 47 interviewees, 18 held managerial positions (General Manager, Assistant General Manager, Shift Manager, Head Chef, District Area Manager) working in front or back of house, or the head office. 12 employees held back of house roles (chef, sous chef, and kitchen porters), and 17 employees held front of house roles (waiter/waitress and bar staff). The participants had worked in the organisations ranging from 6 weeks to 15 years. To protect our participants' anonymity, we use randomly allocated pseudonyms throughout the paper.

The interviews and observations focused on the experiences of EU migrants in the context of Brexit. The interviews were voice-recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved several phases of individual and collective interpretation. Initially, the first author read and re-read the data collected, taking notes, and grouping ideas together. Subsequently, both authors were involved in several iterative rounds of discussion and analysis, in which we moved repeatedly between our data and literature to deepen our layers of interpretation, and which was further enriched by the two authors being themselves a Brit and a migrant.

We started with coding initially informed by literatures on the business of (im)migration and care ethics and guided by our research questions about the EU migrants' experiences of Brexit and to what extent they felt cared for in their workplaces. In line with Brexit and migration literature (Hall et al., 2022; Kerr et al., 2022; Luthra, 2021), codes included 'increased vulnerability' of EU migrants as a result of the Brexit vote, their experiences of 'racism', 'xenophobia', and 'violence', and their 'urgent need for care'. They also included the contrasting codes of the 'lack of care at organisational level' versus 'peer-care' reported by EU migrants. We were also struck by the prevalence of the code 'silence on Brexit', which emerged inductively.

This led us to explore the literature on organisational silence and its connection to care ethics, followed by another round of coding and then grouping codes into themes. In this cycle of analysis, it became clear that the codes on Brexit care and silence were deeply interconnected and together presented a rich picture of complex and contradictory dynamics that in some ways resonated with literature and in others went beyond it. For example, most of the theorisations of organisational silence had some resonance but individually were too one-sided and incomplete compared to what we were seeing. The emergent integrative approach to silence (Bigo, 2018; Vu & Fan, 2022), however, with the addition of the macro-political focus encapsulated in POS, enabled us to make sense of the multiple coexisting and contradictory manifestations of silence on Brexit. Connecting this approach with care ethics enabled us to carefully weave together our theoretical and interpretative framework.

We used the patterns we were seeing to form themes and categories, paying attention to the complex dynamics between them. In these dynamics, the restaurants in our study failed to be attentive to the Brexit-related needs of EU migrant workers, responding instead with *uncaring silence* and thus falling at the very first hurdle of Tronto's (1993) ethical standard of care. Business-as-usual and profits were clearly prioritised as attempts were made to silence discussions of Brexit in the workplaces. This emphasised the conflict between business and care for employees, and the tendency to exclude care from business organisations (Antoni et al., 2020; Fotaki et al., 2020) as reflective of contemporary Western organisational morality (George, 2014; Jackall, 1988; Sanchez-Burks, 2002).

Against this backdrop, there was the regression of care to the individual and group micro-level, in the form of attempts by some co-workers and managers to respond to the ignored needs through both *caring voice* and *caring silence*. Here, there was sometimes evidence of care reaching through all of Tronto's (1993) phases, and of positive facets of silence (Bigo, 2018; Vu & Fan, 2022) which made space for listening and sheltering from violence. Yet these attempts took place alongside other, less caring responses, where individuals implemented organisational policies of silence on Brexit or voiced complaints about peer-care for EU migrants. We found resonance here with Antoni and colleagues' (2020) study of varying co-worker responses to the dilemma of care allocation, and Lawrence and Maitlis' (2012) observation of organisations relying on sacrifices of individuals to provide care. Overall, our data presented us with a rich tapestry of interplay between uncaring and caring through political silence and voice, and each situation or vignette we considered closely was a tangle of complex and contradictory practices. We unpack this web in our analysis below.

Findings

In this section, we unpack the multifaceted relationship between POS and (lack of) care we have identified through our analysis. Firstly, we convey our participants' increased vulnerability and need for care in the context of Brexit. Secondly, we discuss how, at the organisational level, all three restaurant chains in our study ignored this need for care, reacting to Brexit with policies of political silence. Thirdly, we analyse our participants' contrasting micro-level responses to this organisational silence on Brexit. On the one hand and particularly often among non-EU managers, we show how such responses consisted of implementing organisational policies through political silence and silencing, which was received by EU migrants as lack of care. On the other hand, we also discuss the individual and group responses embodying micro-practices of peer-care, which partially filled the organisational vacuum of care through both voice and silence. Finally, we consider how these contrasting micro-level responses intertwined in practice in relation to specific situations and actions, contributing to care ethical complexities and tensions of POS.

Brexit, Vulnerability, and the Need for Care

Our findings, in line with the literature on Brexit (Burrell & Schweyher, 2019; Holbolt, 2016; Kerr et al., 2022; Luthra, 2021; Tong & Zuo, 2019), convey a sense of new layers of vulnerability and, therefore, an urgent need for care as a result of Brexit among our participants. Unsurprisingly, that impact was most profound among the EU migrants in our study. In all spheres of their lives, it was as if the results and the aftermath of the EU Referendum carelessly drove through the delicate web of interdependencies with others, cutting through connections, destroying the sense of security, mutual expectations and obligations, and their plans and hopes for the future. Many described shock, fear, and anger, feeling like they no longer belonged in the UK, and overwhelming uncertainty and anxiety. Many also reported experiencing overt racism, xenophobia, and violence. Paulina's words capture some of this turmoil well:

> Brexit changed England. We arrived before the vote, and we got scared. My husband worked in a factory when we arrived and he was punched in face by another employee, because he was German. My husband said he was called 'Nazi', and to speak English (Paulina, Waitress, Eddie's).

Such experiences seemed to permeate the EU migrants' everyday lives. For example, Josef (Chef, Coral) talked about being scared to walk down the street because he knew 'as soon as he opened his mouth anyone could hear his accent even though he does speak English fluently' (fieldnotes, Coral). The interweaving of vulnerability and language–not only proficiency but even just an accent that could reveal them as migrants and provoke violence from others–echoes the role of language in reproducing the inequalities and the othering of migrants reported elsewhere (e.g. Doshi, 2021; Śliwa and Johansson, 2014). What is striking in our data, however, is the reported deepened sense of vulnerability as a result of Brexit, exacerbating the need for care among this already vulnerable group of restaurant workers.

Yet it was not just the EU migrant workers who were in more need of care due to Brexit, as the latter disrupted the status quo for others, too, in various ways. Greg (Manager, Coral), our sole non-EU migrant participant, felt personally less directly involved in the trauma of Brexit, but as a migrant and a manager of EU migrants, he was experiencing the disruption second-hand:

> Brexit has brought three years of uncertainty and that isn't stopping yet. I mean, what if people aren't allowed to remain in the UK? Some of my staff are terrified that they will have to leave and give up everything they have worked for. If they don't have to leave, some of them have actually questioned whether they do want to stay in a country where they are not welcome. Lives changed overnight and… people are genuinely fearful of what is to come.

Many of our British participants shared strong feelings of shock, disbelief, embarrassment, and shame:

> For me Brexit is embarrassing, shocking and shows how ignorant and close-minded we are. I never believed anyone would be that racist. That cruel to say pretty much 'up yours' to hardworking people… I don't want to be associated to that (Lyla, General Manager, Luke).

On the other hand, other British participants who had voted to leave the EU also reported feeling more vulnerable due to being Othered and excluded:

> What about the position of those who had a vote, asked to leave, won the vote and now are being made to look like racist, uneducated pigs… it feels like anyone who voted leave has been disregarded and effectively is an outcast (Declan, Waiter, Luke).

Given that the British leave voters in our study worked with many EU migrants, different Brexit-induced vulnerabilities, resentment, and potentially divergent needs for care on both sides created tensions and complexities in the workplace.
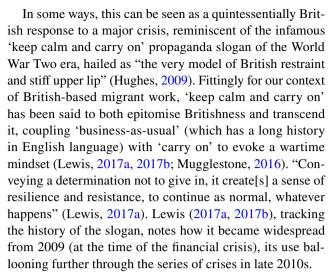
Keep Silent and Carry on: Organisational Policies of Political Silence

Against the background of emotional turmoil, upheaval, and physical and verbal violence described in the previous theme, the restaurant chains in our study have all adopted what research participants understood to be and we also interpret as *organisational policies of silence* on Brexit-related issues. Eddie's and Luke's policies were completely silent – they 'carried on as normal' because the withdrawal from the EU had not yet happened. We cannot even argue that this was a measured response to the migrant workers' or other workers' needs because there was no acknowledgement of such needs shown at the organisational level, and no attempts were made to ascertain whether such needs existed or what they involved, despite the high proportion of EU migrants employed by the chains.

At Coral, a bit more was done. A self-help mobile app was released, aimed at EU migrant employees who could access it on-demand. The app comprised 'frequently asked questions' (FAQs) with predefined answers. Despite the name, no consultation took place to ascertain what EU workers' questions might be. Rather, the FAQs were created by head office management (who did not work in the restaurants). The questions were functional, mainly about applying for British citizenship (e.g. how to apply for the citizenship, what are the requirements, how to access further information and external advice on the application process). By its very nature, the FAQs format foreclosed opportunities for genuine questions to be asked by EU migrants and for asking *them* questions (e.g. how can we best support you in these challenging times?).

One of the main vectors of these policies at the restaurant chains was therefore the silencing of Brexit discussion and, therefore, of the associated concerns and needs in the workplace. We were surprised by how much this followed the usual tendency of bracketing out care from the workplace (Antoni et al., 2020; Fotaki et al., 2020), as underpinned by Western capitalist organisational morality (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2015; George, 2014; Jackall, 1988). We were surprised because at the time of our study, endless heated discussions of Brexit seemed to be everywhere, from the UK Parliament to corner shops, school gates, and families, representing the highly politicised and divided state of the UK (Bristow & Robinson, 2018; Holbolt, 2016). If POS was the status quo in business, political voice typically excluded from the workplace along with other issues deemed too personal to be 'professional' (Sanchez-Burks, 2002), then surely the force majeure of Brexit, threatening the legal status of a significant proportion of employees, would break the dam of political silence? Yet at the organisational level in the restaurants in our study, the dam was still standing.

In some ways, this can be seen as a quintessentially British response to a major crisis, reminiscent of the infamous 'keep calm and carry on' propaganda slogan of the World War Two era, hailed as "the very model of British restraint and stiff upper lip" (Hughes, 2009). Fittingly for our context of British-based migrant work, 'keep calm and carry on' has been said to both epitomise Britishness and transcend it, coupling 'business-as-usual' (which has a long history in English language) with 'carry on' to evoke a wartime mindset (Lewis, 2017a, 2017b; Mugglestone, 2016). "Conveying a determination not to give in, it create[s] a sense of resilience and resistance, to continue as normal, whatever happens" (Lewis, 2017a). Lewis (2017a, 2017b), tracking the history of the slogan, notes how it became widespread from 2009 (at the time of the financial crisis), its use ballooning further through the series of crises in late 2010s.

Typically capitalist, typically British, or both, organisational attempts to 'keep silent and carry on' were interpreted widely by EU migrant workers and many other employees (including some managers) as lack of care. From the care ethics perspective, they were right to see them as such, as these organisational responses to Brexit fell at the very first hurdle of being *attentive* to and *caring about* the needs of others, which also precluded the subsequent phases of care (Tronto, 1993, 2013). In the next three subsections, we analyse the complexity of individuals' responses to this lack of care, starting with those that implemented and reproduced uncaring silence and silencing on Brexit and thus added to the EU migrants' suffering, then moving onto micro-practices of peer-care manifesting through both caring voice and silence, and finally looking at how such contrasting and contradictory responses were intertwined in practice, limiting the capacity of peer-care micro-practices to alleviate the EU migrants' needs for care.

Political Silence and Silencing, and the Lack of Care

Many restaurant managers in our study sought to implement the chains' organisational policies of political silence and/or otherwise silence discussion of Brexit-related issues in the workplace. It was striking that none of the managers who admitted to doing so were EU migrants. Greg, our sole non-EU migrant participant who was also a manager at Coral, was among the silencers. He spoke about implementing recommendations from the head office as closely as possible by discouraging Brexit talk among employees and directing EU migrant workers to Coral's app and the FAQs if they had worries. In the true spirit of 'keep silent and carry on', Greg presented this approach as "carrying on as normal" in the face of uncertainty and also as a means of, intriguingly, being inclusive (an ambition that, as we will show later, was not at all successful).

We noticed a tendency for managers to differentiate between political and other kinds of organisational voice and silence, suggesting that adding the political aspect to the integrated approach to organisational silence (Bigo, 2018; Vu & Fan, 2022) can help to expose additional layers of complexity and contradiction. Several managers pointed out that they cultivated openness and employee voice and participation in the workplace, but *not* with regard to Brexit, as in the example below:

> I try and cultivate an open and safe space, but I am also conscious that it can be very politically driven when Brexit comes up and [I] wouldn't want to encourage this in the restaurant, causing friction or even arguments. It is a hard balance for management. (Georgie, General Manager, Eddies)

The sentiment that Brexit issues were particularly hard to manage and therefore best approached through silence was common, especially in relation to the difficulty of weighing the balance of conflicting managerial priorities. This suggested to us that the workplace care allocation dilemma (Antoni et al., 2020) is both particularly acute and particularly likely to be silenced with regard to divisive political issues. Asim's (General Manager, Luke) words below make it very clear what was on the other side of the scales to providing Brexit-related care corresponded to the prevailing contemporary Western organisational morality (George, 2014; Jackall, 1988):

> As a manager and particularly the general manager there are expectations to hit targets, perform, and keep performing. This is what the role of the manager is. I appreciate Brexit is a cause for concern for many, but I have to weigh this up with the priorities of the restaurants' aims and objectives. It doesn't mean I don't care, but I can't spend all my time on the Brexit issue here.

We found the phrase 'it doesn't mean I don't care, but' (and variations thereof) in a number of managers' attempts to justify political silence and silencing in relation to Brexit. In line with care ethics literature (Antoni et al., 2020; Fotaki et al., 2020), we also found it rather telling in terms of signalling, at once, the conflict between managing organisational performance and caring for employees' Brexit-related concerns, the judgement that the former took priority over and side-lined the latter leading to political silence, and the implied acknowledgement that making that judgement may be perceived as lack of care.

We found that managers were right to worry about being perceived as uncaring. We repeat here the very poignant quote from Catalina (Waitress, Coral):

> Brexit is a sad time. I do not know if I can stay, this is a big change for me. Here, nothing is said about Brexit. I can ask my manager, I can search on the app, but it is not the same as caring about us.

For Catalina and many other EU migrants in our study, political organisational silence was not the same as caring, not the same as listening and responding to their Brexit-induced concerns and needs. Nor was trying to 'carry on as normal'–as Catalina put it elsewhere, "my employer should be helping me, not being normal. Brexit is not normal". Many EU migrant workers interpreted organisational silence on Brexit as forgetting them in favour of other managerial priorities and were quick to identify what was more important than caring for them–i.e. money. These views were also shared by EU migrants in managerial roles themselves. In Marius' (Head Chef, Eddies) words:

> I worked here when the Referendum happened, and I think Eddies need to communicate Brexit better. I think we are forgotten about... They do not care about us: it is money, money, money.

Moreover, many EU migrant workers also reported being *silenced* by POS and linked this explicitly to organisational lack of care, which exacerbated their Brexit-related distress:

> I feel no one speaks of Brexit, it is a distressing thing for me and my family… no speaking of it here. Am I safe in my job? Shall I go home? A lot of questions for me and no answers. My employer should be supporting me. I want to speak about my worries and fears here, but I am feeling I cannot do this. They do not care for me here, I work, I go home. Brexit does not matter. (Florin, Chef, Luke).

This evoked to us critical literature on organisational silencing (e.g. Brown & Coupland, 2005) and made us consider how intertwined organisational silence and silencing were together as lack of care, echoing and extending Simola (2005). Far from reducing anxiety or promoting inclusivity as apparently intended by managers adopting the silence approach and therefore repairing the troubled web of relationships, this intertwining produced the opposite effects:

> Being silent creates an atmosphere like eggshells… If people are fearful of speaking, how do we get to know each other and work together? We work on eggshells, it feels weird, silence is deafening to me… it makes me not belong here. (Jedrik, Chef, Eddie's, quoted in fieldnotes).

Moreover, British participants who had voted to leave the EU seemed to be experiencing the same intertwining, though from a different position:

Leave voters also feel like that too, we are not allowed to say we voted leave. No one really cares about us anymore, we are almost the villains. (Steve, Waiter, Eddies)

To sum up, even though the organisational policies of political silence were aimed, at the surface, at avoiding conflict and mitigating the divisive effects of Brexit in the workplace, many of our participants saw through to the deeper managerial motivations of prioritising profits and preserving business-as-usual over care for employees. Whatever their Brexit politics–whether they were anti-Brexit EU migrants or Leave voters, they felt silenced and uncared for. Furthermore, despite the policies of silencing Brexit discussion being aimed at making business-as-usual easier, the managers in our study still found the situation hard to manage.

Practices of Peer-Care Through Political Voice and Silence

Our analysis so far has painted a bleak picture. Without wishing to renege on this bleakness, in this subsection, we bring some balance to the argument by discussing the practices of care that did spring up in the restaurants in our study because of or despite the organisational policies of political silence.

We found that far from being passive victims (Agustín, 2003; Doshi, 2021; Segarra & Prasad, 2020) of POS and lack of caring, the EU migrant workers in our study responded to the Brexit upheaval with their own practices of care. The peer-care aspect of these practices, recalling individuals' attempts to care for co-workers in Antoni and colleagues' (2020) study, is striking. Sometimes, they were more organised and formal, such as when, for example, EU migrant workers initiated a support group for employees at Eddies. This grew and became known as 'the Brexit Group;' a forum for employees to meet, voice and share Brexit-related experiences and worries, and help each other. At other times, peer-care practices took a more subtle form. Here they were often simply about companionship, talking and laughing together, and in such small ways breaking the silence on Brexit in the workplace. Such micro-practices of care can be seen as constituting micro-practices of resistance to being politically silenced. Whilst they could be dismissed as 'decaf' (Contu, 2008), they were important to our EU migrant participants. In Tronto's (2013) terms, they can be understood as caring repair work through the nurturing of solidarity and trust–Tronto's fifth phase that completes caring practice. EU migrant participants often talked about the togetherness of being with other Europeans at work, and the comfort this brought in the context of Brexit. This included EU migrant managers:

I think because lots of Europeans work here, we support each other. You know, we are all in the same situation and I think we take comfort in that a little bit (Adrianna, Assistant General Manager, Coral).

The comfort of peer-care through solidarity was all the more important because it contrasted so sharply with the painful experiences of Othering and violence outside work:

Outside of my work some people shout, "go home", "fuck off, you Pole" to me and I ignore them. I do not feel included by British people mostly. At work it is different, it is lovely here, my accent is not laughed at, my Polish look doesn't matter. Sometimes I walk down the street and they know I am Polish; we have a look. "You're a Pole", they shout, "don't steal our jobs". I can't help that. At work I feel safe, welcomed. We are together here, we are European, and I forget Brexit. (Maja, Kitchen Staff, Coral)

'Forgetting Brexit' was a phrase that was used by several of our EU migrant participants and some British participants too in connection with describing their workplaces as a respite and a safe haven among the Brexit-related abuse, violence, and anxiety in everyday life outside work. For example, Andrea below echoes Maja:

Working here is magic, this place forgets Brexit for me. I am not worried at work. I step outdoors and I feel sick here [points to his stomach], I put my head down and walk. Work is sanctuary, outside people are horrible on bus, so I walk home. Looks they give, laughing at us. I feel safe at work here' (Andrea, Waiter, Coral).

The connection between forgetting Brexit and the workplace as a place of safety led us to consider how in these instances where political silence was underpinned by peer-care rather than inattentiveness (Tronto, 1993) it played a positive, therapeutic role in peer-caring practices, recalling literature from health and social care (Bassett et al., 2018; Capretto, 2014). The presence or absence of care acted as a switch in the quality and meaning of silence, pushing its ambiguity and 'vagueness' (Vu & Fan, 2022) one way or another. In the caring examples above, workplace silence on Brexit was *sheltering*, protecting EU migrants from violent voices. Several participants talked about how working together in silence brought comfort, which the first author also observed and felt on a number of occasions.

To a certain extent peer-care practices thus changed the impact of the organisational policies of political silence on EU migrant workers, taking advantage of the 'silent realm' (Bigo, 2018) of POS, in which solidarity and togetherness could act therapeutically like 'magic'. On the other hand,

however, by partially filling the vacuum of care created by the organisational policies of political silence, peer-care practices relying on both voice and silence arguably legitimised and reinforced the organisational policies and the organisational refusal of caring responsibility (Tronto, 1993) that the policies represented. This shifting of responsibility and regression of care from employers to employees recalls the similar dynamics in relations to discourses of employee resilience and wellbeing (Smith & Ulus, 2020) where organisations come to rely on the time and sacrifices of organisational members for the provision of care (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012).

Two more points stood out in our data with regard to Brexit-related peer-care practices. Firstly, such practices were not limited to EU migrant workers caring for each other, but also involved British and non-EU colleagues. Secondly, EU migrant and some British managers talked about the importance of caring for employees in the context of Brexit and resisting the organisational policies of political silence:

> Sometimes I have to make sure I am being a manager, but I think part of my role is to show people I have time for them and that I care about them. Especially with Brexit, I cannot ignore this as an Italian (Lucia, General Manager, Coral).
>
> I have worked in different chains over my life, and I tell you every one of them worried about the bottom line, how much profit is being made, and it's different here. I mean I am no fool; I know that the bigger boys in Head Office are probably thinking it and watching but I don't want to feel it… I don't want my staff to feel that they are only good for making money for [Eddies]. They are a value and credit to the company (Georgie, General Manager, Eddies).

These 'I am a manager, but I care' examples represent an interesting reversal of the 'it's not that I don't care, but I am a manager' rhetoric we discussed in the previous subsection. Yet although such managerial care practices do make a difference, their transformational potential is limited because they operate within a fundamentally uncaring context.

Complexities of Political Silence, Voice, and (Lack of) Care

In the two previous subsections, we have presented two contrasting responses by individuals to the organisational policies of political silence. On the one hand, there were attempts to implement the policies and silence discussion of Brexit-related concerns in the workplace, 'keeping silent and carrying on' with business and its prevailing organisational morality (George, 2014; Jackall, 1988; Sanchez-Burks,

2002) as if unaffected by the crisis. These responses were inattentive (Tronto, 1993, 2013) to the needs of EU migrant workers. They thus represented *uncaring silence* and were interpreted as such by EU migrant workers and other employees. On the other hand, practices of peer-care (Antoni et al., 2020; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012) sprung up to part-fill the vacuum of care produced by the organisational policies of political silence. These peer-care practices relied on a mixture of *caring voice* and *caring silence* producing more positive effects (Bassett et al., 2018; Capretto, 2014) and constituting some resistance to the organisational silent lack of care. In this final subsection, we discuss how in practice the two kinds of responses were intertwined together in a complex integrated web, incorporating multiple tensions and dilemmas, and limiting each other. This was particularly evident at the micro-level of specific situations where individual and group attempts to care for EU migrant employees were stunted by the broader uncaring, profit-oriented organisational morality (Fotaki et al., 2020).

One example is the attempted banishment of the Brexit support group we mentioned earlier. Organised by EU migrant employees at one of Eddies restaurant locations. The group enabled employees to listen to and voice Brexit-related concerns and support each other (embodying all phases of Tronto's (2013) caring practice and particularly the building of solidarity and trust). A striking example of peer-care, the group, however, proved controversial, provoking a backlash in the workplace. Ironically, an outwardly supportive General Manager, Georgie was the manager we quoted in the previous subsection as surfacing the care allocation dilemma (Antoni et al., 2020), speaking against profit concerns driving out care for employees, and insisting she did things differently in her restaurant. However, although Georgie recognised the importance of the Brexit Group as a 'form of bonding' and togetherness, so encouraged it to meet, she also saw its 'potential to cause friction' (i.e. disrupt business-as-usual) and isolate other staff, including some Leave voters who felt excluded or even offended by its existence. So, Georgie insisted that the Brexit Group meet outside of the workplace and out of work hours, as a personal rather than professional undertaking. However, other employees explained to the researcher that the group still met at work despite attempted banishment from the workplace.

Moreover, Georgie refused to join the group's activities (despite apparently always being invited). She was concerned that her participation as General Manager would show too much management support for the group and thus deepen Brexit divisions and cause disruption in the restaurant. Thus, despite Georgie's protestations against the prioritisation of business objectives, the concern for sustaining business-as-usual curtailed her involvement in opportunities to engage in caring practice (through attentiveness, responsibility,

care-giving, care-receiving, and building trust and solidarity (Tronto, 1993)). Although, as a manager, she was somewhat *attentive* to EU migrant workers' need for voicing their political concerns and for Brexit-related care, she drew a line at the extent of her attentiveness (by refusing to listen further through the Brexit Group). She also limited her acceptance of her *responsibility* for those needs, as it suited her if Brexit-related care were left in the hands of the EU migrant workers themselves and attempted to bracket it out of the restaurant. This banishment limited the political voice of the Brexit Group in the workplace and denied it legitimacy, which meant no organisational resources were spent on supporting the EU migrants who took part. Rather, this additional burden was placed firmly on their own shoulders, relying on their sacrifices (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012) at a time when they were already struggling.

Another example of how caring and uncaring individual and group responses to POS are intertwined and limit each other in the uncaring, profit-oriented organisational context, as well as the broader xenophobic context of Brexit Britain, is the treatment of xenophobic customers. In our study, situations sometimes arose where the *sheltering silence*, created through peer-care and acting therapeutically (Bassett et al., 2018; Capretto, 2014) in protecting EU migrants from violent voices, was broken by customers being verbally abusive to migrant staff and demanding to be served by British workers. This threw the dilemma of care allocation (Antoni et al., 2020; Held, 2006; Tronto, 1993) into stark relief, in that caring for migrant workers required silencing those xenophobic voices but as they were customers' voices it was seen as bad for business. The approach taken at Coral was to give xenophobic customers the choice of being served by migrant workers or leave. This was presented by Alessandro, the General Manager (himself an EU migrant) as uncompromisingly protecting staff by silencing violent voices:

> We accept the nasty comments on the street, this is government bad handling. In here I do not accept this behaviour. I protect my people [staff] from it. I remember a previous employee here, she is Spanish, and a customer wanted to be waited by English. My answer, 'No!' She can serve, it's her table, or they leave.

Yet when the first author observed this approach in practice, as a xenophobic encounter occurred whilst she was at the restaurant, it became clear that this solution was, after all, a compromise. Although it did challenge xenophobia on one level, it also gave abusive customers the option to stay, whereby they and EU migrant workers became locked together in a kind of reverse 'service captivity' (Rayburn et al., 2020; Wilson-Nash, 2022). This meant that EU migrant workers had to endure serving only partially silenced hostile individuals, whose custom was prioritised over migrants' wellbeing. In the situation observed by the first author, a customer complained to Greg (Manager) about their waiter (Andrea) being foreign, and Greg implemented Alessandro's zero-tolerance approach, attempting to silence the customer's xenophobia by giving them the ultimatum of being served by Andrea or leaving. The customer chose to stay, yet when Andrea took the order and the first author asked him if he was ok, it became clear that Andrea was upset and angry:

> Since Brexit this is worse for me. Why do I serve these shitty people? I am not welcome here long-term and that makes me angry. Ignorant people! They should leave, but customer is always right. So, I am foreign! (Andrea, Waiter, Coral, quoted in fieldnotes)

From Andrea's perspective, the truly caring solution would have been not an ultimatum but a direct request for the offending customers to leave, physically removing xenophobia from the restaurant and from the EU workers. This position was echoed by several other EU participants in our study. In the ultimatum scenario, the extent of care was curtailed for the sake of profits, and xenophobia was tolerated as long as it was quiet. The customers' continuing presence in the restaurant was Othering, and meant their xenophobia could not be fully silenced, as even their silent presence was xenophobic. Following Andrea to the table as he served drinks, the first author witnessed the customers silently shaking their heads at Andrea. Silence, as well as voice, could be violent and oppressive (Bigo, 2018; Vu & Fan, 2022), or, as Andrea put it, 'even looks can speak words.'

Back in the staff dining area, a touching scene of peer-care followed, as other staff gathered around Andrea to voice solidarity:

> Other employees come over and tap Andrea on the shoulder. 'Don't worry, man, they are wankers', says Alberto (Chef). Andrea smiles and nods and says: 'it's OK, my friends remind me I am not foreign, we understand here'. Andrea explains... by saying: 'customers are always right, but not', laughing (fieldnotes, Coral).

That 'customers are always right, but not' expresses the unresolved tension between profits and care (Antoni et al., 2020; Fotaki et al., 2020), but in a hopeful way that highlights the therapeutic potential of peer-care as micro-resistance. It is therefore evocative of the 'I am a manager, but I care' tension, similarly unresolved, and similarly defiant. Yet, as we have shown, this defiance is ultimately limited by the broader uncaring context of POS, with which it is connected in an ongoing dialectic (Vu & Fan, 2022).

Discussion

In this paper, we set out to explore the experiences of EU migrants working in UK restaurants in Brexit Britain, and the implications for understanding the (un)ethical aspects of the business of (im)migration. We approached this task by bringing together two conceptual lenses: care ethics (Antoni et al., 2020; Fotaki et al., 2020; Tronto, 1993, 2013) and the integrated approach to organisational silence (Bigo, 2018; Vu & Fan, 2022), letting them illuminate each other and our empirical context. We now outline the answers to our research questions, our conceptual and empirical contributions, and their implications.

In terms of our research questions, firstly, at a time of great upheaval and vulnerability, the EU migrants in our study did not feel cared for by their organisations. Many of them felt cared for by their peers, which sustained them during the times of heightened vulnerability and uncertainty, but it was not, overall, quite enough to address their needs for care. Peer-care practices were limited by the effects of other, uncaring practices, including at the organisational and managerial levels, and they also burdened the EU migrants with additional caring responsibility in already challenging times. Secondly, the relationship between POS and (lack of) care for EU migrant workers was complex and contradictory, yet this complexity was characterised by distinctive patterns. It was layered, with more uncaring silence and silencing at organisational level, and a more mixed picture at the level of individual responses. Furthermore, within this complexity, the presence or absence of care made a difference in terms of whether POS was experienced in positive or negative terms.

At organisational level and also when managers implemented organisational policies of political silence, inattentive (Tronto, 1993), uncaring POS was experienced by EU migrants as oppressive silence and silencing (Brown & Coupland, 2005; Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Hurd, 2021). By contrast, caring, solidarity, and trust-building (Tronto, 2013) POS at peer-level was experienced as therapeutic (Bassett et al., 2018; Capretto, 2014), sheltering EU migrants from violent voices. In this, POS acted as a conduit of care or lack of care, engendering, reflecting, and amplifying the latter. Thirdly, the ethical implications for the business of (im)migration are manifold as our findings highlight the gulf between the EU migrants' need for care and their employers' willingness or ability to provide competent care as reflected in POS.

In addressing our research questions, we make several conceptual and empirical contributions. Firstly, we contribute to the growing care ethics research in MOS (Antoni et al., 2020; Elley-Brown & Pringle, 2021; Fotaki et al., 2020; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Tomkins & Bristow, 2021) by examining the role of POS in care ethical

practice. Care ethical explorations of organisational silence have been limited, with Simola (2005) as one exception adopting a critical approach that sees silencing as a process of oppression and voice as a means of resistance (in line with, e.g. Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Hurd, 2021). Extending the integrated approach to organisational silence with its attention to multiple coexisting, complex and contradictory meanings of organisational silence (Bigo, 2018; Vu & Fan, 2022) helps to understand how the latter can act as a conduit for both care and lack of care, embodying and enabling caring and uncaring simultaneously in an ongoing tension. Through our concept of POS, we also bring macro-political issues under the lens of organisational care ethics, extending the latter's explanatory power to the ethical questions of how extra-organisational politics play out intra-organisationally through silence and voice. In this, we contribute to the literature examining the organisational and individual responses to the dilemma of care allocation (Antoni et al., 2020), showing how the latter can be experienced particularly acutely with regard to divisive political issues such as Brexit, how organisations and managers can be more keen to silence Brexit-related needs than other needs to suppress the dilemma, yet also how such attempts are ultimately futile at bracketing out divisive macro-politics from the workplace. The latter permeate organisations micro-politically, whereby uncaring political silence adversely impacts rank-and-file employees and managers, regardless of their political orientation. These dynamics also outline how POS facilitates the regression of care in organisations, with uncaring political silence at organisational and managerial levels signalling the passing of caring responsibility to the affected individuals and their co-workers (Antoni et al., 2020; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012).

Secondly, we contribute to the emergent literature on the integrated approach to organisational silence (Bigo, 2018; Vu & Fan, 2022), responding to Vu and Fan's (2022) call for further development through exploring the dynamics of the ongoing interplay between constructive and oppressive aspects of silence. We do so by developing the concept of POS, adding the macro-political aspect to the understandings of organisational silence as complex and contradictory and probing it through the care ethical perspective. These macro-political and care ethical additions enable us to add nuance, such as that silence on political issues can be treated differently from other kinds of silence in organisations. We show that the complexity and dynamics of POS have distinctive patterns, the presence or absence of care making a difference to how silence is experienced. We add to the understandings of organisational silence at the organisational and managerial levels, where studies have been limited (Vu & Fan, 2018), explaining the propensity to POS in terms of the deep-seated conflict between care and business (Antoni et al., 2020; Fotaki et al., 2020). We also show how the

conflicting individual responses to POS interweave caring and uncaring silence and voice, how both caring silence and caring voice help to sustain EU migrants against Brexit violence, but also how ultimately their positive impact is limited by uncaring POS at organisational and individual levels. Evaluating these different manifestations against Tronto's (1993, 2013) standard of care ethical practice, we show that, whilst individually they vary in their ethicality, the overall configuration of POS fails to live up to it.

Thirdly, we contribute to the emerging literature on 'org-studying the consequences of Brexit' (Kerr & Śliwa, 2020), showing in particular how deeply the EU migrants and their co-workers and managers in our study were affected by the Brexit vote and the ensuing uncertainty, and how inadequate the organisational responses were in terms of caring for their needs. These findings are particularly important as, despite the ongoing disruption of Brexit, few organisational studies explore the consequences of Brexit from the perspectives of EU migrant workers, especially empirically (Luthra, 2021). Conceptually, none to our knowledge do so through the care ethics lens.

Our study makes an inroad into addressing these empirical and theoretical gaps. Furthermore, we do so in relation to the 'extreme case' of the restaurant industry, known for its exploitative, chaotic, and emotionally intensive nature (Burrow et al., 2022; Gill & Burrow, 2018), examining the business-ethical dimensions of a context in which EU migrant workers are triply vulnerable (by dint of being restaurant workers, migrants, and post-Brexit EU citizens working and living in the UK). This allows us, lastly but most importantly, to also contribute to the ethical consideration of the business of (im)migration. In particular, we emphasise its exploitative nature and uncaring context, in which businesses that depend on migrants fail to respond to their need at a time of great vulnerability. Yet as well as exploring the challenges that this creates for migrants and their co-workers and managers, we also highlight their agency to negotiate, resist and reinforce these challenges (Distinto et al., 2022; Doshi, 2021; Segarra & Prasad, 2020) through practices of peer-care.

Laudable as such peer-care practices are, however, in the uncaring world their capacity is restrained, and they may only act as 'a wholly insufficient sticking plaster' over the deficit of care (Chatzidakis et al., 2020: 4). In this sense, our empirical story has a poignant postscript. By the time of writing this paper, the UK restaurant industry has been affected by severe staff shortages as many EU migrant workers left the UK. In the three restaurant chains in our study, three of nine branches have been closed. Although the Covid-19 pandemic undoubtedly contributed to these developments, the impact of Brexit has also played a part (Maciuca, 2021; Zayed, 2019). Furthermore, we would warrant a guess that the lack of care for EU migrant workers was a common denominator in both Brexit and the pandemic.

This leads us to consider the implications of our study. The latter suggests that although opting for POS in times of macro-political upheaval may be seen as a tempting option that fits well the prevailing organisational morality (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2015; George, 2014; Jackall, 1988) and its focus on staying 'professional' (Sanchez-Burks, 2002), and with cultural and sociohistorical norms (such as 'keep calm and carry on' in the UK (Lewis, 2017a, 2017b; Mugglestone, 2016)), this strategy is ultimately futile and potentially deeply uncaring. Whilst we would argue that caring POS is possible, even in situations as divisive as Brexit, such silence needs both caring intent and caring action and therefore to be of a completely different quality (incorporating attentiveness to the needs of others, acceptance of responsibility, competence in care-giving, responsiveness from care receivers, and the building of solidarity and trust) (Tronto, 1993, 2013) than what we have observed in our study at the organisational and managerial levels. Only such *caring* silence, we contend, could live up to the ethically transformative potential of which Bigo (2018) and Vu and Fan (2022) write.

With the capacity of *uncaring* POS to add to the suffering of those already vulnerable and affected by adverse politics and on whom organisations deeply depend, such as EU migrants working in British restaurants, and the potential consequences of organisational failure, it is high time to rebel against the carelessness of the world (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). Such capacity to rebel against carelessness also has implications for the role organisations can play in extra-organisational politics (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Chatterji & Toffel, 2019; Frynas & Stephens, 2015; Maak et al., 2016; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011), for how can they take an informed stand on macro-political issues if they continue to silence such issues intra-organisationally?

Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored the experiences of EU migrants working in UK restaurants in the aftermath of the Brexit vote through a care ethics lens. We have brought this together with the integrative approach to organisational silence to consider the ethical consequences of the organisational policies of political silence adopted by the restaurant chains in our qualitative empirical study. We have developed the concept of POS and probed its ethical dimensions, showing how at the organisational level it fell short of constituting a practice of caring for migrant workers in politically divisive and hostile times. We have argued that organisational policies of political silence emphasise the exploitative nature of the business of (im)migration, which prioritises concern

for profits over care for the needs of others. We have shown how organisations refuse caring responsibility for migrant workers, leaving care to the migrants themselves and their co-workers and managers. We have also argued that whilst peer-care practices partially fill this politically silent care-vacuum, this leaves individuals to negotiate difficult tensions without institutional support at a time of increased uncertainty, complexity, hostility, violence, and vulnerability.

Taking inspiration from (Chatzidakis et al., 2020), we conclude this paper with a call for a care manifesto for the business of (im)migration. Playing on the wording of the term 'political corporate social responsibility,' which has a rather different (but, we contend, related) focus (Frynas & Stephens, 2015), we argue that such a care manifesto would need to include *caring political responsibility* towards migrant workers, exercised through caring political organisational voice as well as silence. It would also require organisations to recognise migrant workers who move across borders to settle and work as "humans that matter" (Fotaki et al., 2020: 98).

Declarations

Conflicts of interest There is no conflict of interest to declare.

Research Involving Human & Animal Participants Research involved human participants and was approved by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC/3211/Reeves).

Informed Consent Informed consent was sought and received from all interviewees through a process approved by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC/3211/Reeves).

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