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Re-imagineering the Common in Precarious Times

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores movements for social transformation in precarious times of austerity, dispossessed commons and narrow nationalism; movements counterpoised to an exhausted neoliberalism on the one hand, and a neoconservative xenophobic populism on the other. Applying 'rainbow coalition' as generic concept it points at contours of a globally extended countermovement for social transformation, traversing 'race', class and gender, driven by reimaginings of the commons and indicating how they could be repossessed and democratically ruled; that is 'reimagineered'). A multisited enquiry explores how actors express their claims as activist citizens under varying conditions and constellations, and if/how discourses and practices from different locations and at different scales inform each other. It interrogates whether there may be an actual equivalence of outlook, objective and strategy of ostensibly homologous contending movements which develop under varying local, national and regional circumstances in contemporary communities riveted by schisms of class, 'race'/ethnicity and gender, occupied by the 'migration' issue and challenged by popular demands for social sustainability. The paper contributes to social theory by linking questions posed by critics of 'post-politics' concerning contingences of pluralist democracy and revitalised politics of civil society, to precarity studies focused on globalisation and the changing conditions of citizenship, labour and livelihoods.

'Rainbow Coalition': A Politics of Possibility

In the year 2011 mass movements seconded by the mobilising power of social media erupted in both the global South and North. They resounded across 80 countries and more than 1000 cities, with the 'Arab Spring' and 'Occupy Wall Street' as the most illustrious instances (Roos and Oikonomakis 2014). For some, this global upheaval appeared to harbinger the coming of a deepened democracy and a brighter post-neoliberal future as presaged by the World Social Forum; for others, 'seeds of dystopia' jeopardising 'the social contracts between states and citizens', as read by a report from the World Economic Forum (2012). Still, 2011 will hardly be inscribed into the annals of social revolutions as a 1789, 1917 or 1949, but rather, as a 1848; a 'people's springtime' followed by a

conservative reaction (e.g. Sperber 2005). Anew, a hopeful democratic spring has meta-morphosed into a necropolitical winter, driven by neo-conservatism and a surge of right-wing xenophobic populism, and with hopes and struggles of a nascent movement for deepened democracy and retrieval of the commons under siege. 'What's next?' What's after 'the end of history', at a historical junction where 'the neoliberal market vision of the human future can no longer be positioned as an utopia, and in fact may now be widely recognized as profoundly dystopian' (Hosseini *et al.* 2017: 680)? This is a question that resounds with alarm in society as well as academia.

The 'end of history' alludes to the title of Fukuyama's (1992) illustrious study celebrat-ing the end of the Cold War. It represents a globalised liberal democracy and the free market as the apex of evolution. Revisiting it reminds us that in the beginning of the 1990s neoliberal globalisation could still be envisaged as a fortunate final stage of history. Yet, it came with the cost of a *commodification of the commons*, targeting all com-munal or common under the authority of states or civic communities, or as Bourdieu (1999a: 95) contends: 'an immense *political operation* … aimed at creating the conditions for realizing and operating … a *programme of methodical destruction of collectives*'. Under the banner of 'flexibility' *politics of precarity* (Schierup and Jørgensen 2016) has posited contingent employment and fragmented livelihood – without, security, protection and predictability – as a new global norm. A multifarious, allegedly 'dangerous', precariat in search of political identity has entered world history, seen to harbinger a potential populist 'inferno' (Standing 2011).

On the background of scenarios of a present, of environmental disasters, social polar-isation, retrograde democracy, radical nationalism and antagonistic struggles, Karl Pola-nyi's (2001 [1944]) work *The Great Transformation* has gained contemporary relevance in social science. Also in our current transformation, we can discern the contours of a global countermovement querying excessive commodification. Contestants appeal to a multi-ethnic precariat from divergent political positions and perspectives. A *reregulation of the world economy* is propagated among its original architects, chief beneficiaries and custodians, contending that neoliberalism may be 'oversold' (Ostry *et al.* 2016), or warning that a globalised financial capital poses a 'capitalist threat' to 'open democratic societies' and to the sustainability of capitalism itself (Soros 1997; Sachs 2013). It promises redemption through a 'transformation of our world' (United Nations 2016) in a dawning 'age of sustainable development'(Sachs 2015). In the meantime, the politics of austerity has provoked the surge of a *second perspective*. It is embedded in an *exclusionary neo-nation-alist movement and regime changer,* with self-understanding as challenging globalisation by a politics of fenced borders. *A third perspective*, however, promises deepened demo-cratic possibilities, social protection and emancipation from discriminatory domination embodied in contending movements of contemporary civil society: Vistas of a 'realizable utopia, a sense of commitment to enduring social and human values, which drives human agency giving rise to social movements' (Lambert 2014: 390).

An interrogation of this third perspective is in focus of this paper. We pursue it by positing 'rainbow coalition' ('RC') as a critical generic concept; for instance, a concept con-structed for extracting exemplary dimensions of a historical ideopolitical configuration (Santoro 2011) with the purpose of producing 'cumulative knowledge' (Wiseman 1987) on globally dispersed configurations of the present that exhibit an apparent resemblance. At its core is a transversally mediated *synthesis of regard for particular identities and*

universalising claims for social justice, traversing race, class and gender, which distinguished the original intersectional so-called 'RC'. Initiated shortly after the murder of Martin Luther King in 1967, it opened for a moment, with Chicago as its democratic laboratory, a visionary window of possibility for King's last dream of extending the civil rights movement to a wider social dimension, realised through *building inclusive commons* from the ground up (Williams 2013). Transposed into a generic concept 'RC' embodies *transformative movements of civil society* for democracy, equity and emancipation of a composite twenty-first century precariat, *rallying constituencies from across ethno-racially divided communities, focusing on 'commoning' and transcending ideologically forged gulfs between 'natives' and 'aliens'*: a 'rainbow that is also a bridge' (EZLN 1996). RC is, thus, constructed as an imagination for social transformation, antithetic to the ideology and politics of the extreme right, which has succeeded in mainstreaming a divisive racism into a 'pathological normalcy' (Mudde 2010) of the present. It is counterpoised, as well, to a reformed neoliberalism's mirage of sustainable development, eschewing deep-seated structural contradictions in our present transformation.

In our critical endeavour we feel deeply indebted to our dear colleague and friend, Stephen Castles whose work and perspective on multicultural citizenship (Castles 1987, 1999; Castles et al. 1988) was always a source of inspiration for our own enquiry into the potentials and paradoxes of multicultural politics and policies (Ålund and Schierup 1991; Schierup and Ålund 2011b). This pertains to Stephen's distinctive perspective, urging for a synthetic intersection of universalism and particularism, equity and democracy, identity and agency, nation and community, race and class (Castles 1994, 1995). Stephen's pioneering studies on class, race and migrant labour (Castles and Kosack 1973) impacted on our own early writings on migration, ethnicity-race and migrant labour in Scandinavia. In the 2000s our work have followed a common track with a critical bite concerning contingencies of an actually existing multiculturalism's immersion into unequal and racialized states of society, in Australia, Sweden, Europe and globally (Castles 2002; Schierup et al. 2006 #503; Castles and Schierup 2010; Schierup and Castles 2011; Schierup and Ålund 2011a; Ålund et al. 2017). A common source of inspiration in our studies on global migration, the precarisation of labour and citizenship and on discourses on human rights is Karl Polanyi's (2001 [1944]) work on *The Great Transformation* (Castles 2010; Schierup et al. 2015).

This is also from where we set off in the following. We attempt to 'upscale' (Munck 2007) Polanyi's perspective in terms of a globally extended *Politics of Precarity* (Schierup and Jørgensen 2016). In this endeavour we endorse Waite's (2009) theorisation of 'precarity' as a *dual signifier* of 'social condition' and as a 'rallying point for resistance'. A 'weight of the world', embodying a multidimensional 'social suffering' (Bourdieu 1999b), produced by a 'neoliberal utopia's' gamble on the free market (Beck 2000: 4) has, in turn, become baseline for a 'populist interpellation' (Seymour 2012), generating 'countermovements' in terms of discourses, strategies and practices for democracy, social justice and reclaiming the commons. We scrutinise dilemmas of civil society in an age of the precariat and posit the notion of *uncivil society* as a potential driver of counterhegemonic struggles. However, rather than claiming that instances of RCs constitute an already-existent countermovement, we need to engage with its activism as a politics of possibility. Thereby, we inscribe our approach into the methodological outlook of the 'sociology of emergence' articulated by de Sousa Santos (2004). We also endorse in our approach Coleman and

Collins' (2006) argument that the field of study should be seen and explored as constantly in a process of 'becoming'. This resonates with our understanding of *commons* as an imaginary coming into being; that is, reimagineered in terms of a social practice of *commoning*. These processes may take different forms, modalities and dynamics, as well as vary in degrees of intensity and occur on different scales.

Conditions and Contingencies of Precarity

Tsianos (2007: 192), for one, has analysed precarity as a *condition* of life and work encompassing imperatives of 'flexibility', 'availability', 'multilocality' and compressed 'mobility' across time and space. Goldring and Landholt (2011) designate unpredictability of dispossessed livelihoods in the nexus of precarious work and exclusionary citizenship, with 'the migrant' as quintessential incarnation. In reality, Casas-Cortes contends (2014) a condition of precarity extends through a wide cross-class and trans-cultural array of population groups, thus signifying a generalised, 'becoming migrant of labour'. In his book, *The Precariat Standing* (2011) understands precarity as novel state of society, connected with neoliberal globalisation, austerity policy and the financialisation of the economy, retreating welfare and service delivery systems, and a deficient system of education. Yet, sceptics argue that security of labour, livelihoods and citizenship are parentheses in the history of capitalism, distinctive for mid-twentieth century welfare states of the North, and that life and work in the South was always precarious (Munck 2013; Scully 2016). The state of the South (itself shaped by the domination of the North), is now seen to tell the North its fortune; or, as phrased by Beck (2000), harbingering a 'Brasilianization of the West'. Yet, contemporary studies also show that conditions of precarity in the global South, as well as their driving political forces, are shifting in character, compared to precarious conditions of the past; thus positing demands for 'flexibility' in terms of diminishing labour and social rights, excessive informalisation, contingent employment and de-unionisation (Schierup 2016). Studies of neoliberal transition in the former 'Second World' appear to confirm the emergence of comparable conditions of precarity (Bobkov *et al.* 2011; Round and Kuznetsova 2016). Thus, precarity comes in a range of shades and shapes, depending on globally differentiated 'varieties of capitalism' (Hall and Soskice 2001) and diverging regimes of citizenship (Schierup *et al.* 2006).

Essentially, the meaning precarity as a *social condition* conveys in a range of contemporary critical studies is *not* 'social exclusion' due to curable systemic malfunctions, but: a 'constitutive element of the new global disorder, *to which it is very functional*' (Ricceri 2011: 68). It has been interrogated as embodied in a globally-mobile reserve army of labour forged by austerity programmes which, from the end of the 1970s, have rolled back the social compacts of welfare and developmental states, and grown on the ruins of actually existing socialism. Poverty, insecurity and unpredictability is, consequently, moved beyond the integrationist Durkheimian concern with 'social cohesion' in prevalent discourses on 'social exclusion-inclusion' (Levitas 1998) and into a Marxian influenced terrain of 'flexploitation' (Bourdieu 1999a: 84), with the surplus population and the industrial reserve army seen as disciplinary vehicles for regulation and the instigation of morality (Harvey 2010). In this perspective, the functionality of precarity has been analysed in terms of keeping a cheap, multiplex and flexible 'reserve army of labour in labour' (Moase 2012).

The driving forces are succinctly encapsulated in Harvey's (2004) notion of 'accumulation by dispossession'. It implicates a dismantling of the commons at a planetary scale, involving the commodification of welfare services and livelihoods, together with the refraction of social and labour rights, instrumentalised through intersecting processes of financialisation, sub-contracting, outsourcing, informalisation and privatisation, gentrification and 'land-grabbing'. The contingent production of precarious conditions of work and citizenship arrives in tandem with a transformation of a 'redistributive state' into a neoliberal 'regulatory state' (Majone 1997). It is a state commanding the so-called detailed 'negative' regulatory capacities targeted at eliminating all institutional and social obstacles to the commodification of the human lifeworld. In this context of deep state transformation, a neoliberal 'governmentality' has undermined, argues Brown (2005: 45), 'the relative autonomy of institutions from one another and from the market – law, elections, the police, the public sphere'. It relates to 'an independence that formerly sustained an interval and a tension between a capitalist political economy and a liberal democratic political system'; or the very tension between market and state that lies at the heart of most readings of the Polanyi problem and the dynamics of the 'double movement' in The Great Transformation (GT).

Seen from this perspective, the state is 'not anymore … the mediator or "the shield" protecting society from the tensions between capital and labour – through … redistributive policies' (Sommer-Houdeville 2017: 162). It is a transformation of the state that undermines citizenship, the capacity to mobilise collective resistance and to form political constituencies (Sassen 2006). It holds implications for the role of civil society. In the global North as well as the South, renegotiated social contracts, signified by state marketisation and the expansion of 'participatory governance', are matched by growing prominence of a reconfigured, professionalised and NGOised civil society, with a preeminent role as service providers rather than as a mobilising force in politics (Wikström and Lundström 2002; Neocosmos 2011). Wider implications of this is that 'even in the presence of countermovements, neoliberalism mediates a divergence of state and civil society relationships creating uncertain futures for democratic possibilities' (Walton and Udayagiri 2003: 309). Thus, today's theories and practices of commodification can be conceived as more far-reaching in consequence than those that guided globalisation in Polanyi's time. It has been depicted in terms of a 'stealth revolution' (Brown 2015) which spells the end of liberal democracy by casting its very moral reason and institutional foundations in the moulds of an uncompromising market rationality; an 'undoing the demos' (*op.cit.*) engulfing also liberal democracy's imagined life-nerve: 'civil society' (Burawoy 2010).

An Époque of Contestation

This scenario of a flagging democracy indicates the *need to raise questions pointing beyond two still influential positions on civil society*. On the one hand, the Tocquevillian view of civil society as an area of liberty and organisational culture for building democracy, seen as a counterweight to and separated from state and market forces (Tocqueville 2010 [1835]). On the other hand, the Gramscian perspective stressing the fluidity of relations between civil society and the state, with civil society interpenetrating state institutions and enmeshed in struggles for hegemony (Gramsci 1971). With today's civil society turning, tendentially, into sub-contracted and NGOised professional service

providers, it may lose critical clout, seen from both Tocquevillian and Gramscian perspectives. In this hiatus it is essential to link questions posed by critics of 'post-politics', concerning contingences for a pluralist democracy and politics of civil society, to those of precarity studies, focused on the conditions of globalisation in terms of changing conditions of labour and citizenship, and embodied in *the precariat,* signifying a potentially game-changing political actor for the twenty-first century.

The neologism of 'the precariat' was coined at the turn of the millennium as idiom for self-identification by the alter-globalisation movement in Europe and has since diffused into politics and social science worldwide. In recent critical studies 'precarity' has been conceptualised as a 'toolbox' (Casas-Cortés 2014) of contestative movements for coping with insecurity and flux, and the idiom of 'the precariat' as harbingering a 'populist interpellation' (Seymour 2012) under the meme that 'another world is possible'. It is an encompassing perspective, relating to different social status groups across substantial arrays of the class structure, diverging from Standing's (2011) understanding of 'the precariat' as a potentially 'dangerous' new and separate 'social class' (Bak Jørgensen 2016).

While we do share Standing's view of the precariat as representing a 'danger', we posit the issue topsy-turvy. Socially insecure and identity-seeking precarious segments of today's populations are – truthfully – being mobilised by the extreme right, neo-conservative or neo-fascist gestations of a contemporary countermovement, ostensibly confronting neoliberal globalisation. It is, according to our reading of Standing, a 'danger' seen to call for enlightened paternalistic social policies by the same state and corporations whose politics of austerity produced the precariat in the first place. We focus, however, on and interrogate the contingencies of an alternative precariat movement which represents a conceivably more 'dangerous' prospect seen from the perspective of sustaining the present dominant hegemonies, in both the North and South, potentially uplifting radical alternatives from the margin to the centre. It concerns a multifarious activism of contestative movements with 'radical imaginaries' of a deepened non-racial democracy and harbouring transformative vistas of a 'Welt der Commons' (Helfrich and Bollier 2015). It has been been distinguished as a 'social practice of *commoning*' (Harvey 2012: 73); 'an unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood' (*ibid.*).

At the dawn of the new millennium it has come in many varieties and at varying scales – the neighbourhood, the city, the 'nation', the region and the globe (Schierup *et al.* 2015; Schierup and Jørgensen 2016). Contrary to being conceived as footloose and without sense of history and identity, the imaginaries of today's contentious movements have been depicted as, beyond nostalgia, drawing intellectual energy from past movements for democracy, recognition and the common good. Milkman (2016), for one, concludes that post-2008 movements in the United States – contesting a racialised and gendered precarity of work, livelihoods and citizenship – are fusing an intellectual heritage of the working class movements of the 1930s, centred on labour and class politics, with that of the 'new social movements' of the 1960s and 1970s focused on emancipation through the recognition of identity (cf. Fraser 2013). Thus, represented in terms of history-cognisant and intellectually-rooted insurgent movements, the 'danger' inherent in multifarious movements of a global precariat stands forth as contours of a contemporary 'epoch of contention' (Funke 2014) with potentially system-transformative dynamics.

Though drawing on the heritage of past movements, these 'new-new' movements (Feixa *et al.* 2009) do not attempt to replicate the past. The challenge of understanding their particular 'newness' has spawned a proliferating academic debate. We find Funke's (2014) inclusive theorising of social movements fruitful. He designates a spectrum of movements, initiated by the Zapatist surge in the 1980s and, including the movements of the 2000s, constituting a 'distinct and integrated arch of mobilisations'; a historically particular 'epoch of contention' (Funke 2014: 29). Although movements are diverse – and can be understood as distinct 'cycles of protest', their commonality rests, in keeping with this perspective, in the shared 'rhizomatic' meta-logic of their movement politics (Funke 2014: 29; cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1980), and their claims for fuller forms of democratic participation. This is a logic that enables multi-connectivity and heterogeneity of protest and mobilisation, which can accommodate diversity and a 'multiplicity of struggles and possible futures [of] loosely linked organizations, groups and movements' (Funke 2014: 29). While diverging from both the 'old' class-centred labour movement and parties, as well as the 'new' movements of the 1970s, the dominant rhizomatic logic of the current epoch of contention has been to amalgamate core characteristics of both (Funke 2014: 30; Funke and Wolfson 2017: 397ff). It is a theoretical baseline, from which the emergence and development of a multitude of diverse movements and networks can be studied from a perspective that emphasises linkages, cooperation and coalition dynamics. Through the implementation of 'movement relays' as a conceptual umbrella, 'movement-to-movement transmissions' can be captured in ways that avoid privileging structure over process and single movements over broader cycles of contention (*op.cit*). A pivotal issue around which transmission and coalition-making evolve is that of 'commoning as a transformative social paradigm' (Bollier 2015: 2); practices of 'mutual support, conflict, negotiation, communication and experimentation that are needed to create systems to manage shared resources'. It is through a critical investigation of these processes that we retrieve the formation and impact of 'RCs' in the third great transformation.

Commoning – Beyond Civil Society as We Know It

Although the terms of engagement vary, countless activist communities around the world are playing out a drama of resistance to the neoliberal economy and the creation of commons-based alternatives. The essential similarity between resistance and commoning are not always apparent because the conflicts occur at many levels (for instance, local, region, national, and transnational); in diverse resource-domains; and with self-descriptions that may or may not use the commons language. Yet, there is a shared dissent from the grand narrative of free-market ideology and its near-theological belief in 'self-made' individualism, expansive private property rights, constant economic growth, government deregulation, capital-driven tech.

In exploring the commons, through the critical theory of 'populist reason' (Laclau 2005) is essential, in conjunction with theories on the formation and dilemmas of multi-plex contemporary contestative movements (Ålund and Schierup 2018). What 'the common' stands for and what it could possibly be has been theorised by numerous studies in the 1990s and 2000s. Fraser (2011), for one, posits in her reception of GT a distinction between an 'oppressive protection', seen as embodied in étatist social policies

following the depression of the 1930s, and an 'emancipatory' social transformation potentially driven by a multiplex civil society today. We relate the concept of commons as located within a *civil society*.

The concept of *commons* is, as Bollier (2015: 1) writes, 'less a noun than a verb because it is primarily about the social practices of *commoning*'. Thus 'commoning' is defined as 'acts of mutual support, conflict, negotiation, communication and experimentation that are needed to create systems to manage shared resources' (Bollier 2015: 2), and condition social and environmental sustainability (relating to land, water, air, transport, public places, ideas, science, radio waves, housing, education, labour regulation, health, culture, etc.). At the heart of the practice of commoning rests the principle that the relation between social groups and social and physical aspects of the environment envisioned as a common 'shall be both collective and non-commodified – off-limits to the logic of market exchange and market valuations' (Harvey 2012: 73).

What 'the commons' and 'commoning' as social practice stand for, and what they could possibly be, has been theorised in numerous studies during the 1990s and 2000s, contending that 'state' and 'market' are not the only governance systems possible. Fraser (2013), for one, posits in her reception of *The Great Transformation*, a distinction between an often 'oppressive protection' embodied in étatist social policies and 'emancipation from domination' through movements of civil society; a 'triple movement' in an ambivalent relation to both corporate business and state. With a critical reception of this proposition, we posit the importance of transversal dialogue and coalition-building between a *civil society*, ever so often embedded as service providers in neoliberal governance (Wikström and Lundström 2002; Kaldor 2003; Veltmeyer 2009), and movements of a stigmatised, so-called *uncivil society*, emerging from the world's poor racialised 'favelas', 'townships', 'banlieus' and urban 'ghettoes' that lodge a growing proportion of migrants and their offspring.

In scholarship on 'civil society', 'uncivil society' figures typically as an antonym with pejorative undertones such as *'uncivilised'*, usually associated with intolerance, violence, political extremism, undemocratic values and anti-modernism. It figures as an 'evil twin' of a 'civil society' imbued with democratic and liberal values, celebrated by a trajectory of mainstream scholarship from Tocqueville to Putnam (Glasius 2010). In contrast, an alternative postcolonial scholarship defines 'uncivil society' in terms of an indispensable 'weapon of the weak' (paraphrasing Scott 1987); a 'politics of informal people' for survival. In effect, the poor may initiate 'molecular changes' (Bayat 1997: 57) by the inventive creation of informal commons, corporeal as well as digital (Chatterjee 2002; Trimikliniotis *et al.* 2016).

Yet, our use of the concept transcends a perspective that defines 'resistance' as 'defiance' (Hallward 2014), positing a rebellious 'insurgent citizenship' (Holston 2009) of 'accidental citizens' (Nyers 2006) with visions of a better future assembled under the aegis of, e.g. 'we are the poors' (Desai 2002). We pick up, operate and extend the notion of 'uncivil society', from where it has been developed by Neocosmos (2011) in his analysis of civil society, violence and xenophobia in South Africa. We suggest to probe its explanatory power in other sites and social situations across societies and communities bearing the brunt of precarisation. If the mode of rule in uncivil society is such, argues Neocosmos, that it enables the distortion or extinguishing of the very meaning of citizenship, it implicates that people in this domain are denied automatic access to 'the right to have rights' (cf. Arendt 1958). With their primary relation to the state situated in precarious spaces of 'uncivil society'

they 'face extraordinary obstacles when they wish to assert their rights directly as citizens and attempt a movement beyond their political place, for their political existence is outside the domain of rights' (Neocosmos 2011: 377): This outsider position results in the voices of the 'plebs' of our time being heard only as 'noise' (Dikeç 2007; building on Rancière 1999). If they shall be heard as citizens, beyond circumspect spheres of informal commoning, they may be forced to seek 'the mediation of trustees' – usually in the form of established NGOs speaking for them in state authorised spaces of civil society, involved in participatory governance – 'for it is only there that the rule of law operates reasonably consistently' (Neocosmos 2011: 376).

This argument demands integrating the idea of uncivil society into a wider theory of social movements and civil society in contemporary governance. This involves the critical scrutiny of the challenges and opportunities of alliance-building, and the dealings of 'movement relays' potentially bridging the uncivil-civil divide. It raises the issue of 'transversal politics' (Yuval-Davis 1999) – originally developed in feminist theory to encompass difference with equality and dialogue on equitable terms, transversing class, gender, 'race' and organisational positionalities – as the precondition for bringing about a deepened participatory and 'pluralist democracy' (Mouffe 2013); linking identity to social divisions and agency to political economy (Purcell 2013). We see an obvious necessity for an empirically-illuminated theorisation of a multifarious 'world encompassing many worlds' (Delgado Wise and Olivares 2017), in opposition to different versions of a new allegedly non-Western-centric 'cosmopolitanism' (e.g. Hosseini *et al.* 2017), as conception of the political contingent on 'ideas for a new world economy' (Bello 2005).

Blasting Open the Continuum of History

We see *moments of crisis* – that is moments of rupture in temporal continuity of hegemonic narratives and institutional practices – as social situations from where exemplary cases of contestative rainbow commoning can be distilled. We see them as situations of possibility in which radical imaginaries of social movements may represent 'dynamite' for 'blasting open the continuum of history' (Brown 2005: 11); for producing their own temporality, transforming the flow of events and the reproduction of society through interventions in time and space (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014: 149–208). Here, Bakhtin's (1981) concept of *chronotope* appears heuristically valuable, in the sense of indicating a point of intense time–space connection; a shared imagination of the time flow, localised in a specific social space. Or, as Haiven and Khasnabish put it: 'how individuals and groups develop and change, how the past informs the present and shapes the future, and what might ultimately be possible' (*ibid.*).

Let us illustrate the argument by relating in some detail to a social situation, the time and space ramifications of which we have been following in our current research (Schierup *et al.* 2014). It is embodied in riots, provoked by repellent police violence that raged across Stockholm's poor, disadvantaged multiethnic districts in May 2013. Their extended and vehement character, matched historically only by clashes of rioters and police in the nineteenth century (Berglund 2009), struck the Swedish political establishment with awe and took the international community with 'blazing surprise' (Editorial 2013). However, only three years later, in the spring of 2016, we found ourselves participating (as observers) at an event in the very same local Stockholm community of Husby, where the 2013 riots

Figure 1. Municipal housing project in rainbow colours. Logo of the *House of the People* founded in 2016 by a local civil society coalition in *Husby* - a poor multiethnic neighbourhood in metropolitan Stockholm.

started: the opening of a local 'House of the People' (named *Husby of the People*). 'House of the People' (*Folkets Hus*) alludes parabolically to past politics of commoning, embedded historically in Sweden's legendary labour movement. Yet, flying a logo (see Figure 1) recalling the Zapatist imagination of a 'rainbow that is also a bridge' (EZLN 1996) brands it as the child of a locally-grounded coalition spearheaded by Sweden's multitude of young, racialised, post-migrant subalterns – *The Megaphone* – emerging invigorated out of the time-hole blasted by the 2013 Stockholm rebellion (Léon-Rosales and Ålund 2017).

In 2013, it was still treated in mainstream media as an ephemeral exponent of an untrustworthy 'uncivil society's' insurgent commoning practices (e.g. direct action against gentrification and the sham renovations of public housing), and vilified for its efforts to publicly *explain* the wider structural-institutional *causes* and predicament of the riots. In 2016, the organisation had metamorphosed into a wider rhizomising network of transversal alliances for 'social justice' spearheaded by young post-migrant 'organic intellectuals' with their backgrounds mainly in the Middle East and Africa (Léon-Rosales and Ålund 2017; Schierup *et al.* 2017). It includes increasingly consolidated alliances with, and activists' representation within, national mainstream organisations of civil society with roots in the old labour and international humanitarian movements (e.g. The Red Cross and Save the Children), critical thinktanks, as well as incipient alliances with 'justice movements' of the precariat in other parts of Europe, the United States, Latin America and Africa. In this context, we understand 'the House of the People' as signifying what Miraftab (2004) calls an 'invented space', contraposed to subordinated 'participation' in so-called 'invited spaces' of neoliberal governance; in Sweden, as elsewhere, often reproducing rather than challenging conditions of precarity. It can be seen as the local hub for a multiplicity of innovative and self-governing commoning institutions. Yet, it all takes place under conditions of precarity. This relates to reliance on increasingly insecure public financing for non-commercial 'adult education' driven by voluntary associations, as well as demands for demonstrating 'entrepreneurship' on the part of any civil society organisation, dependence on commercially-run 'public' housing companies and, conceivably, demands *not* to venture beyond what is acceptable to allies among mainstream civil society organisations.

This is all set in the contingency of a wider social context shaped by politics of sustained austerity which is increasingly paired with a surging narrowly nationalist and racializing politics, in line with a general European and global drift. Comparable instances are the rise of Black Lives Matter, following the riots in Ferguson, Missouri, 2014, provoked by police

violence, political negligence and racialised precarisation; the ascent of Podemos after the police clamp downs on the M15 in Spain in 2011; the nascence of a fragile new generation of movements in Russia after Bolontaya; a recent turn of *Zapatismo* from a localised insurgency to a challenger in national power games, provoked by a new crisis of rupture and opportunity related to an increasingly hostile *Norte*. They are a few examples among numerous situations of crisis and reimagineering. They emerge as 'new sites and scales of struggle' (Isin and Nielsen 2008) in contentious situations of crisis; 'activist citizens' articulating their claims under varying conditions and in differential constellations, in a process were discourses and practices from different locations and at different scales inform each other through transversal dialogue and practices.

Uncivil Society: Moving Forward Asking Questions

Unlike the revolutionary movements of modernity, today's movements are seen as less teleological in terms of goal setting. This is expressed in the formula of the Zapatistas, '*preguntando caminamos*' (Holloway 2013); i.e. moving forward through questions rather than answers (Simon 2013). Given this, the criteria for the success and failure of social movements must be substantially revised (further in Haiven and Khasnabish 2014: 122–148). A political movement's coming to power (entering the formal party-political system) does not necessarily mean its success. The process and the emancipatory practice can be more important than immediate political implications. The strength of the forms of action developed is that they can be suspended and then renewed at any subsequent moment (Groys 2012). We are, as seen in this perspective, dealing with the formation of a new societal culture, rather than with consistent political tactics; a 'Not Yet' (the future) that has 'meaning (as possibility), but no predetermined direction, for it can end either in hope or disaster' (de Sousa Santos 2004: 26).

Indeed consecutive precariat mobilisations for democracy and the commons can be read as ending in 'disaster' (e.g. Occupy, The Arab Spring, the democratic mobilisations in Turkey sparked in Gezi Park, Syriza's left populist challenge to 'the Troika'); temporarily 'defeated by ideological and media forces, by the police, and by the ruling institutions' (Hardt 2017: 392). In effect, the public stigmatisation and institutional (often violent) repression from which these and other post-2008 insurgent movements have repeatedly suffered in the North as well as the South, suggests the value of the notion of 'uncivil society', into the theoretical and analytical framework of social movement studies. Such a move allows for a critical contextualisation and interrogation of the icon of 'civil society' as an ideological tenet and vehicle for market-driven governance in deeply unequal, segregated and racialised societies. Its relevance may appear obvious relating to 'townships', 'favelas' or 'shanty towns' of the South and the racialised urban 'ghettoes', '*banlieus*' or '*förorter*' of the North with numerous migrants and post-migrant generations among its most dispossessed, who inhabit culturally stigmatised, and economically and politically marginalised spaces. Here, the 'state of exception' – theorised by Agamben (2005) as an immanent condition of contemporary societies through which civil, political and social rights pertaining to citizenship can be arbitrarily truncated by governments – can be observed to rule in the most 'naked' forms. States of exception constitute a rule under which new activist political subjectivities and movements are shaped among the most disadvantaged. However, while the contingent irregularisation of citizenship

implicated by states of exception may earlier have been characteristic of exceptional politics in moments and spaces of acute crisis, it can now be observed to be part and parcel of the *'normal'* working of most states. On this background, we posit a more general value of 'uncivil society' as a discursive and political predicament; a state of estrangement conditioning the agency of precariat movements in general, and contestative RCs in particular, in a world where civil rights (of expression, assemblage, protest rallies, etc.) are becoming increasingly policed and institutionally truncated by executive instrumentalisation of governance.

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