

# Migration, Precarization and the Democratic Deficit in Global Governance

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## ABSTRACT

This article attempts to provide a critical understanding of the dual signification of “precarity”. It explores what “precarity” as a concept may potentially offer to studies of the changing contemporary political economy of migration. It discusses shifting trends in global migration and point to tendencies for a possible convergence between “South” and “North”, “East” and “West”. Based on a review of current advances in research, it discusses, with reference to the classical work of Karl Polanyi, the potential for a contemporary “countermovement” which would challenge the precarity of migrants. Bringing forward the issue of the “space for civil society” the article addresses a still lingering democratic deficit in the global governance of migration.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The article is relevant to policymakers, trade unions and civil society organizations. It contributes to the understanding of policy making processes in emerging multilevel global governance and focuses on issues of precarization, migration, and the implementation and accountability of human, migrant and labour rights.

## INTRODUCTION

Migrants make up a disproportionate part of the social category whose experience in the world of work is marked by “precarity” in terms of informal labour, wage squeeze, temporariness, uncertainty and pernicious risk. They belong to the most disadvantaged among a globally growing workforce of casual labour which has come to be called the “precarariat”. This, in spite of vast differences in local situations, is currently one of the greatest social and political challenges: to governments, to multilateral organizations, to trade unions and to broader social justice and human rights movements across the world. It is a predicament of the present that takes us well beyond the conventional understanding of North and South, West and East.

“Precarity” (has currently gained importance in critical labour and citizenship studies in general, and in studies on migration, in particular. Its coining is ascribed to Bourdieu (1963). It epitomizes the nexus of precarious labour and truncated citizenship (e.g. Vosko, 2009; Anderson, 2010; Goldring, 2011). Yet the meaning that precarity conveys in a range of contemporary critical studies is *not* “social exclusion”, seen as due to redeemable institutional shortcomings, but a “constitutive element of the new global disorder, to which it is very functional”. (Ricceri, 2011: 68). As such it

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represents an institutionally embedded hegemonic norm embodying market driven imperatives of “flexibility”, “availability”, “multilocality” and compressed “mobility” across time and space, with “the migrant” as its quintessential incarnation (Tsianos, 2007: 192). But “precarity” – together with its offshoot, the “precariat”<sup>1</sup> – is, equally, adopted as a self-ascribed emblem by contemporary social movements questioning the premises of this very norm. Talking the talk of “precarity” has become regular parlance in political and scientific debates on and through labour and social justice movements concerned with the rights of migrants. There are indications that a global movement is afoot, speaking with or on behalf of millions of migrant “precarians”. This is part of the wider alter-globalization movement, which is developing in tandem with and at the same time contesting neoliberal globalization by emphasizing instead “human rights” and the participatory role of civil society in a democratized global governance of migration (Likić-Brborić and Schierup, 2012, [2010]).

It implies an understanding of “precarity” as representing “both a condition and a possible rallying point for resistance” (Waite, 2008: 412); as a “condition” epitomizing the downside of a “neoliberal utopia’s” uncompromising gamble on the free market (Bech, 2000: 4) and as “resistance”, a watchword for social justice movements generating strategies and discourses of contestation in the name of “human rights” or “universal citizenship”. The duality of “precarity” is accordingly related both to structural forces for the precarization of labour and to issues of social movement, identity and resistance. Its duality of signification harnesses, arguably (Schierup and Ålund, 2013), Polanyi’s (1944) theory of the “double movement” in *The Great Transformation*, with a critical understanding of the present condition of globalization and its contestation, whether through policy regulation “from above” or civil society intervention “from below”.

This article pursues an understanding of this dual significance, emphasizing not only the continued relevance of Polanyi’s theory of “the double movement” for an analysis of the great transformation of our times, but also the need for its critical reappraisal. We discuss changing trends in global migration with the gravity shifting from irregular migration as a prevalent form of hyper-mobile precarious migrant labour to that embodied in schemes of “managed migration”. We point at tendencies towards convergence between “South” and “North”, “East” and “West”, and address the critical lack of democratic legitimacy in the global governance of migration. We link to expectations that engagements of civil society organizations would improve the democratization of global governance in terms of both enhanced participation and accountability (Bexell et al., 2010). We ask “what space could there be for civil society?” at a point where we have long been waiting to see a democratic global governance regime on migration. There are some signs that this is actually in the making. But we are not yet convinced.

## CHANGING MODES OF LABOUR FORCE MANAGEMENT

The financialization of global capitalism, operating in tandem with corporate stratagems of offshoring, outsourcing, sub-contracting, renewed sweatshop production and home-working, has resulted in shrinking labour rights and increasing informalization of labour (e.g. Harvey, 2010). In the wider context, precarization of work and citizenship has generated a globally mobile reserve army of labour forged by austerity programmes which rolled back the social compacts of welfare and developmental states and grew on the ruins of actually existing socialism in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China. A precarious workforce is segmented and discriminated against on the grounds of race, ethnicity, gender, and suitability for specific niches of local and national labour markets (Anderson, 2010; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Toksöz and Ünlütürk, Ulutaş, 2012; Lutz, 2008). Broadly speaking, we may thus call precarity a mode of keeping the “reserve army of labour in labour” (Moase, 2012) – thereby both maximizing productive activity and placing downward

pressure on wages. It functions as a vehicle for labour market regulation (Bauder, 2006) and the instigation of morality (Harvey, 2005).

The informalization of labour, the proliferation of “grey” ethnic labour market niches and irregular migration are critical components in managing this transition (Slavnic, 2010). Clandestine strategies of evasion and circumvention, disrespecting and undermining labour rights and social rights are at play. This covert political economy, preying on accumulation through “dispossession” (Harvey, 2005), is contingent on a historical conjuncture, which has prevailed in advanced welfare states of the North as well as in developmental states of the South from the end of the 1970s. We speak of transitory social formations in which the normative and legal regulatory regimes of labour and welfare and established modes of citizenship are out of sync with prevailing modes of capital accumulation and hegemonic political coalitions’ demands for “flexibility” in terms of wage-shrinking, diminishing labour and social rights, contingent employment and de-unionization. Yet informalization, together with a progressive deregulation of labour markets and welfare regimes, does *not* act as a harbinger of diminishing regulation as such. What is conventionally called “de-regulation” is actually a combination of de-regulation and re-regulation, meaning in effect, *not less*, but *more* regulation (Slavnic, 2010; Standing, 2011). Replacing a so called “positive” redistributive state, a burgeoning “regulatory state” (Majone, 1997) commands growing and detailed negative regulatory capacities; that is a re-regulation of work and frameworks of citizenship, targeted at eliminating institutional and social obstacles to the commodification, or re-commodification, of labour, money and nature. See Standing (2007) for a principled argument concerning the proliferation of negative regulation relating to “re-commodification” and the extended reproduction of precarious labour.

In line with this we see a long-term global trend towards the increasing prevalence of formally regulated, so-called “managed migration”, with irregular migration increasingly criminalized. From this perspective we see irregular migration as one among many practices functioning as spearheads for “flexibilization” in a *state of transition*; that is with a *de facto* informal labour market regulatory mode ruling (Segatti 2011:56) in historical situations where legal-institutional regulations (whether belonging to waning welfare states in the global “north” or developmental states in the “south”) have, so far, *not* been replaced by a comprehensively formalized market accustomed regime. Correspondingly we may see “managed migration” as the manifestation of formalized rules and regulations belonging to a hegemonic neoliberal state. These regulations may, conceivably, be more effective in disciplining the transnational mobility of people (Geiger and Pécoud, 2013) than the Central European temporary “guest workers” schemes ever were (Schierup, Hansen and Castles, 2006).

This refers, in particular, to stringently monitored temporary and circular migrant workers’ schemes currently being proffered as institutional alternatives to mass irregularity in the regional contexts of NAFTA, the EU, ASEAN and SADC. Governments meet employers’ demands for cheap and “flexible” labour while seeking at the same time to appease xenophobic populism by encouraging employment practices which it is claimed avoid the “errors” of earlier policies of temporary migration which allowed migrants to settle and to achieve gradual incorporation into citizenship. Supposedly, win-win-win policies – integrating advanced migration and labour force management with development partnerships between receiving and sending countries – often, by their very nature, contribute to restricting incorporation in the “hostlands” of toil through discriminatory regimes of citizenship devised to consign lifelong social reproduction to native “homelands” (cf. Triandafyllidou, 2013). These policies are mostly matched by complementary schemes for sifting out designated categories of entrepreneurs or highly qualified migrant workers enjoying more liberal terms concerning access to long-term settlement and citizenship.

Most temporary workers are bound to a single employer. Deterred from organizing, they represent one of the most complex current challenges for trade unions and migrant organizations (Barrientos, 2007). Against this background there are reasons to restate the argument by Mingione

(1996) that different modes of exclusion – *alias* precarization – cannot be understood in isolation, but need to be investigated within the wider conflict-laden social order. Schemes of temporary migration propel competition within precaritized and ethnically niched labour markets. “Undocumented” migrant workers and *rejected* asylum seekers submerged in the informal economy are likely still to belong among the economy’s most desirable. But, contrasted with the formalized status of temporary migrant workers, their defamed status as the politically least wanted becomes further exacerbated through criminalization, securitization and public vilification, legitimized through discourses on “illegality”. Disadvantaged segments among permanently settled migrants and ethnic minorities belong to those most directly exposed to competition from new precaritized categories of migrants, which may drive them (further) into clandestine realms of racially or ethnically segmented labour markets (Schierup et al., 2006).

### A COMMON GLOBAL CONDITION

The international system continues to be structured in asymmetrical dominance between states and regions and along intersecting lines of class, nation, race and gender, with migration as the mediating practice and regulatory tool. Yet changes in the relationship between regional economies in what we today tend to call “North” and “South” and their mutual interpenetration, suggest, as argued by Portes and Walton (1991: 190), an understanding of class formation and conditions of labour as becoming increasingly comparable across the global political economy:

Class formation on a global level... means that geographically dispersed labor is not only part of the same stratification system, but increasingly occupies common locations within that system apart from its residence in the core, semiperiphery or periphery... [C]ore and periphery hierarchies interpenetrate sharing some (increasingly) common positions and attendant fortunes. (Portes and Walton, 1991: 190)

Given that we accept this presupposition, it is important to reassess a prevailing emphasis in globalization studies on “the dehumanizing policies and exploitation of southern migrants by states in the global north”, in order not to obscure the emergence of similar patterns of migration and migration policies in the South (Tobias, 2012: 2). Such examples can be found in migrant and refugee receiving sub-Saharan states and growth economies like Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Botswana and South Africa. What makes African migration regimes comparable to those currently prevalent in the North, argues Tobias, is that their ruling coalitions adopt and broadly implement similar neoliberal policies by subjecting African societies to incentives and constraints similar to those that operate in the North. They tend increasingly to emulate discriminatory Northern regimes, treating migrant workers and cross border refugees as a publicly vilified but economically essential reserve army of labour. Fear, uncertainty and vulnerability produced by similar “strategic inconsistency” in policies and practices of states belonging to regional communities like ECOWAS, SADC and NEPAD, ensure that migrants and refugees function as flexible labour for new types of informal or temporary contract labour markets in Africa (Tobias, 2012; Satgar, 2012). This brings with it differential modes of precarity delimited by racial boundaries and conflicts, leaving refugees and migrants vulnerable to violence, harassment, and economic exploitation (Tobias, 2012: 1).

Examples of migration, neoliberal makeover and precarization in other regional political economies abound. One hitherto little researched case pertains to the irregular labour migrants making up a substantial segment of a larger precaritized labour force in post-communist Russia. A numerous reserve army of newly fabricated “aliens” from former southern republics of the Soviet Union (previously addressed as “fellow citizens” or “comrades”, now often criminalized and harassed) match, according to some estimates, the number of irregular Hispanic migrant workers in the United States

or the total number of irregular migrant workers in the whole of the European Union (Andrienko and Guriev, 2005; Bobkov, Chernykh and Aliev, 2011). The irregular status of these “aliens” can be understood as connected with Russia’s choice of emulating the migration control policies of the European Union (Andrienko and Guriev, 2005), combined with a voracious demand for cheap precarious labour in sprawling metropolitan economies. Migrants are inserted through clandestine practices into a labour market and a society characterized by the incremental growth of inequality, wrought by speculative businesses of ruthless oligarchs, neoliberal austerity policies, *laissez-faire* and state corruption. Böhm and Fernandez (2005: 786), describing the life and toil of this new migrant precariat from the south of the former “Eastern Block” in occupational ghettos of metropolitan Moscow, say “Vellcome tu hell”:

Moscow, the former capital of the “second world” has become one of these urban conglomerates where the “first world” meets its dirty underbelly. This vast city has one of the highest concentrations of luxury hotels and cars anywhere in the world. The extremely rich, who have built their wealth on the debris of the melt-down of real existing socialism and the rise of real-existing neoliberal capitalism, come together with migrants from within Russia as well as many ex-Soviet republics in one place. Of course, this “meeting” is often no more than a virtual one, as the migrants – who are mostly illegal – work and live in parts of the city that will never be seen by the rich.

### A “REALIZABLE UTOPIA”?

“We are human beings with rights to mobility, freedom of speech, decent work and social protection – not a commodity” (PGA, 2010). This pledge is cited from the political declaration of civil society delegates from across the five continents gathered at the fifth annual summit of the Peoples’ Global Action for Migration, Development and Human Rights (PGA) in Mexico City, 2010. It reads like a *dictum* echoing *The Great Transformation*, which denounced the commodification of human labour, and expounded the doctrine of maintaining the inexorableness of a countermovement of “society”.

Their appeal was addressed to the so-called “Common Space”, a slot reserved for dialogue between civil society, governments and international organizations, inserted into the wider agenda of yearly summits of the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD); a UN initiated and state led forum for deliberation between governments on global standards for governance of migration. It proves the continued relevance of the question raised in *The Great Transformation*; “society” or the market? But the very fact that this question is once again raised in politics and in the social sciences demonstrates also – as argued by Burawoy (2010) – that Polanyi was wrong concerning his strong belief that the lesson taught to the world by the depression of the 1930s and its violent aftermath would guarantee that nothing like it would ever again happen.

The “countermovement” appears in Polanyi’s *Great Transformation* as a preordained spontaneous reaction of “society”, but the book is short of analysis of the imperatives of capital accumulation, relations of power, class conflict and exploitation (Burawoy, 2010), as well as concerning its organization and the social basis of its actual agents (Webster et al., 2008). Historically, reforms in terms of the extension of rights of citizenship have hardly come about “from above” without the agency of broad intra- and trans-class popular alliances with trade unions as spearhead. Currently it is conjectured, however, that established unions will – if still building their strategies on conservative assumptions belonging to a past Fordist era – lose the new precariat (Trimikliniotis, Gordon and Zondo, 2008; Peterson, Wahlström and Wennerhag, 2012).

Recent research documents social struggles among migrants and ethnic minorities who contest the precarity of their employment and work. They challenge their lack of human and citizenship

rights and their criminalization which restrict their movement and create formal or informal barriers to substantial access to organizing themselves. Mostly these are local social struggles, which may not, arguably, be guided by any coherent program (Milkman, 2011) but rather by everyday concerns about making a living (Chimienti, 2011; Webster and Joynt, 2011). Yet a myriad of seemingly uncoordinated “acts of citizenship”, may, argues Isin (2009), bear seeds of systemic change. He opens perspectives for transcending a debate focused on formalized rights by contending that irregular migrants in France – through unauthorized acts of claiming citizenship – represent “activist citizens”; a category different from that of “active citizens”, conventionally related he claims, to a “passive status” of formally owning citizenship. Activist modes of citizenship give, arguably, new meaning to citizenship, questioning it as “an abstract category of government” by adding “acts that make citizens”, with potential for transforming modes of being political. Along similar lines, several studies on irregular migrants have raised the question of inconsistency between formal regulations of citizenship status and “*de facto citizenship*” conditions embedded in community solidarity and livelihood strategies of migrants. Basok (2008), for one, illustrates this with the notion of “*grassroots-citizenship*”, referring to civil society actors in the Americas. In a similar vein, Webster and Joynt (2011), in a study on livelihoods among a composite migrant precariat in Johannesburg, advertize a need for labour unions to pay increased attention to informal community agencies.

These and similar perspectives emphasize the importance of social movements and NGOs/IN-GOs taking learning from knowledge production “from the ground up” (Choundry and Kapoor, 2010) in local communities and informal networks of migrants (Desai and Walsh, 2010). They bring research on contemporary precarians beyond representation as a new, emotionally and politically labile “dangerous class”, which is targeted for being included in supposedly still existing, liberal societies through compensatory paternalist policies. They highlight an approach to agency of the new “precariat” beyond the popular image of vulnerable victims. They are credited by researchers who point towards a “community unionism” in the South, from the historical trajectory and political experience of which the supposedly conservative and bureaucratic unionism” of the North could learn. Otherwise they might lose precarious workers and, in particular, a multitude of new migrants and ethnic minorities, differentially inserted into fractured neoliberal labour markets and societies (Munck, 2011). That is a vision of a global countermovement driven by a reformed union internationalism, sensitive to a multitude of everyday livelihood strategies of migrants; a “networked international of labour’s others” (Waterman, 2007); a vision of “grounding globalization” through “linking workplace issues to the community... a critical source of power [that] takes participation beyond representative democracy to new forms of participation that embrace an active civil society” (Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout, 2008: 220).

This vision, according to Lambert (2010), of a “networked linkage *between local places* across geographic space in a struggle to build power through spatial scale” has not passed without criticism. It is a hopeful idealist vision, contends Burawoy (2010: 306), but one which loses sight of the imperatives of capital accumulation. It is, he argues, “[a] manifesto for a new world” having “little to do with labor in the age of insecurity” He concludes that:

optimism today has to be countered by an uncompromising pessimism, not an alarmism but a careful and detailed analysis of the way capitalism combines the commodification of nature, money and labor, and thereby destroys the very ground upon which a “counter-movement” could be built.” (2010: 312)

Grounding globalization, bottom up, is indeed a utopia, admits Lambert (2010: 390), but it is a vision of a realizable utopia. Uncompromising pessimism, he argues, will stop any struggle to construct a countermovement in its tracks:

[F]or it is only optimism of the will, a vision of a realizable utopia, a sense of commitment to enduring social and human values, which drives human agency giving rise to social movements. Agency may appear to be undermined by commodification, but... this negation of basic humanity charges moral outrage, which can under certain conditions, produce movements.

Critical academic thinking does render a plurality of normative moral-political utopian discourses on the rights of a common humanity; for cutting loose politics of citizenship and belonging from the confines of the nation state and conceivably offering potential to action groups and migrant organizations for transnationalizing claims (Soysal, 1994; Benhabib, 2007). It contributes, as summarized by Moyn (2010 : 1), to a compelling positioning of human rights as a “last utopia” after the implosion of other grand narratives; a “moral transcendence” of politics drawing “on the image of a place that has not yet been called into being” and promising “to penetrate the impregnability of state borders, slowly replacing them with the authority of international law”.

UN human rights declarations – entailing indivisible values of equity and emphasizing the necessity of developing transnational norms and regulations – in truth invites the contestation of precarity of life, citizenship and work with several of them particularly addressing the civil, political, social and labour rights of migrants (Likić-Brborić and Schierup, 2012 [2010]). Such promises – together with a multitude of informal livelihood strategies and localized struggles – have energized manifestly political movements: movements generating strategies and discourses of contestation, and pursuing moral-political claims for a just global migration regime that would embed market forces in protective international institutions. Coalitions of migrant organizations, communities of faith, trade unions and migrant advocacy NGOs and INGOs are all incubators of the production of knowledge and builders of political platforms.<sup>2</sup> They endeavour to push claims for deliberation in the context of an incipient global governance regime for migration (e.g. Betts, 2010; Piper and Grugel, 2014 [forthcoming]); that is global fora for policy development and coordination, including governments, multi-lateral financial, trade, labour market, aid and human rights organizations, as well as specialized global organizations on migration and asylum.

Yet an ostensibly emerging global governance regime for migration is marked by ongoing rivalry between and within multilateral organizations and governments and littered by conventions and declarations, which have mostly failed to impact on real politics and policies in national contexts. The deliberative process of global governance of migration reflects an already diagnosed democratic deficit in global policy making (Bexell, Tallberg and Uhlin, 2010). The participation of transnational actors such as NGOs, social movements, public-private partnerships and transnational corporations (TNCs) in various global governance policy frameworks has demonstrated serious downsides in terms of representation, participation and accountability, especially for the realization of global social justice and sustainable development. For example, the GFMD has, on the one hand, besides the participation of more than 150 governments, accepted the inclusion of various think-tanks and CSOs and their ideas and perspectives into policy dialogue on migration and development (Omelaniuk, 2012). Yet it has also been criticized for recent corporate capture and a substantial lack of inclusion of human, labour and migrant rights claims. In spite of strong advocacy for the social protection of migrants in circular and temporary migration schemes, the main challenge remains to design policy tools to address social and individual costs of migration and protect low-skilled migrant workers from the worst forms of exploitation in a mostly unregulated recruitment business.

This apparent stalemate in the extension of a UN “human rights” paradigm brings out a deep seated structural-institutional cleavage (Likić-Brborić and Schierup, 2012, [2010]). It rests on a protracted conflict between, on the one side, a UN driven agenda spearheaded by the ILO, with a marked emphasis on universal social and labour rights, mostly supported by international trade unions and transnational migrant organizations and, on the other side, a business and trade focused framework for migration and development, originally spawned by the Washington Consensus,

currently headed by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the complex legal framing of different categories of labour mobility: labour migration of employees, of entrepreneurs and labour migration according to the GATS regulations for trade in services (Engblom, 2011). This process has been generally supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and with corporate social responsibility as its hallmark (Likić-Brborić and Schierup, 2012, [2010]). While the ILO agenda can take credit for some concrete political advances – so far most notably the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers – it is the WTO-GATS agenda, with only a thin commitment to human rights from which substantial and universal labour rights and social rights are excluded, which is stepping up as dominant in the global governance of migration.

This lays open a dilemma for social movements flagging “human rights” but seeking justice through de-commodifying universal social and labour rights. This dilemma has, in general terms, been cuttily formulated by Moyn (2010: 226-7):

If “human rights” stand for an exploding variety of rival political schemes... they still trade on the moral transcendence of politics that their original breakthrough involved. And so it may not be too late to wonder whether the concept of human rights, and the movement around it, should restrict themselves to offering minimal constraints on responsible politics, not a new form of maximal politics of their own. If human rights call to mind a few core values that demand protection they cannot be all things to all people... the last utopia cannot be a moral one. And so whether human rights deserve to define the utopianism of the future is still very far from being decided.

## WHAT SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?

Statements by spokespersons of international civil society organizations following the UN High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development (HLD) that took place in New York in October 2013 were clearly ambivalent about the status of civil society. On the one hand, civil society statements expressed a moderately optimistic assessment of governments’ seeming recognition of the centrality of human rights in the national, regional and global management of migration. On the other hand there were worries over the apparent ease with which, contrary to their previous behaviour, governments seem now to have appropriated the very language of human rights, for long spoken by transnational civil society. The rhetoric is without guarantees of binding commitments,<sup>3</sup> or – as alleged in an open letter addressed to the UN Secretary General by major international trade union confederations – consistently fails to engage civil society in any genuine democratic and institutionally grounded dialogue on norms and policies.<sup>4</sup>

Experience of marginality in fora deliberating the governance of migration may well increase the enduring tension between “two tactics” of civil society (Rother 2013). A prevalent “inside-outside” strategy promoting a rights-based migration regime has built on global grassroots mobilization, but with the rationale of instituting a civil society agenda within major intergovernmental fora; a “war of position” for global times (Gramsci, 1997).<sup>5</sup> A rival tactic – reminiscent of a contemporary “war of movement” – puts its money on global alliance-making, bottom up, with insistent claims from the “outside” matched by a distanced scepticism rejecting a disciplining of civil society within intergovernmental fora.<sup>6</sup>

Phrased more generally, this illustrates the ambivalent double bind of civil society as a “vehicle of domination” as well as a “terrain of contestation” (Burawoy, 2003). It emphasizes the need to investigate what is in what seems to be – in terms of prevailing structures of economic, political and cultural power – at a conjunction where “human rights”, alongside functionalist concepts of “exclusion/inclusion”, are losing credibility in societies exposed to the transformative forces of neo-liberal globalization. A critical conceptualization of “precarity” turns the problem topsy-turvy by



virtue of seeing contemporary conditions of extreme risk, vulnerability, the negation of social protection and actually existing divisions of class, citizenship, gender and race as systemically embedded in the presiding political rule and prevailing modes of capital accumulation. This demands a profound critical revision of the concept of social exclusion, originally a political term established in EU rhetoric, and from there diffused world-wide in social science (Schierup, Krifors and Slavnic, 2013). It points to the limitations of an ostensibly hegemonic moral discourse on “human rights”.

Contemporary forms of precarity are, as we have argued, related to a global trend from covert politics instrumentalising irregular migration as a driver for the informalisation of labour towards a neo-regulatory forging of formal regimes of so-called “managed migration”. A pending convergence between global “North” and “South” in terms of the precarization of work and livelihoods and with migration as a dynamic driver, takes hold in tandem with a shared, but thin, discourse on “human rights”. Hanging on to a hegemonic trade and business friendly framework for the global governance of migration it hardly addresses the critical problem of democratic deficit and lack of accountability in the emerging multilevel governance regime.

Neoliberal marketization, and the current economic and social crisis reminiscent of the 1930s, has made its imprint in terms of a re-affirmation of the work of Polanyi. Thus, the globalization of our times has been theorized as *a third great transformation* (Burawoy, 2006). Its political economy of “dispossession” sweeps away rights won by social movements and guaranteed by states. The undermining of rights of citizenship takes place in tandem with a transfer of authority to regional or global frameworks of governance, and with institutions of nation states gravitating towards executive functions (Sassen, 2006). Drawing parallels between the crisis of today and that of the 1930s exposes similarities between the breakdown of the Gold Standard which preceded the Second World War and, for example, that of the fixed exchange rate built into the political economy of today’s Eurozone (Cohen-Setton, 2012). It looks like a facsimile of past economic orthodoxy, supposed to “stabilize” but currently wreaking havoc among the economies and peoples of Southern and Eastern Europe; spawning neo-Fascist home guards and the harassment of migrants and minorities, but also the parallel rise of trans-ethnic civil disobedience movements contesting austerity. These are contemporary scenarios in the historical nest of two world wars, but replicated across the globe, in the South as well as in the North.

At this juncture, the Polanyian concept of “countermovement” has been brought to new life. “Seeds of dystopia” are threatening to “jeopardize the social contracts between states and citizens” reads a report from the World Economic Forum (2012). The International Red Cross warns that Europe must prepare itself for popular uprisings among its growing masses of impoverished precarians, comparable to the “Arab Spring” shaking North Africa (Nielsen, 2013). We experience a conjunction marked by popular contention about the outcome of three and a half decades of neoliberal globalization: Los Indignados, the Occupy movement, anti-austerity demonstrations in Greece, Turkey and Brazil, urban riots in France, the UK and Sweden, Marikana and its aftermath in South Africa, a myriad of strikes among precarious migrant workers in China and counter-hegemonic neo-populist movements in Latin America, just to mention a few examples. It includes, as highlighted in the preceding, a perhaps less spectacular but resilient and long term “war of position” (Gramsci, 1997) by a global movement seeking justice for migrant workers, their families and communities.

Will this movement succeed in filling a floating signifier of “human rights” with winning claims for transformative change – alternatively for bringing their struggles beyond moral discourse altogether? In the present crisis, neoliberal orthodoxy is still dominant, but hardly hegemonic. It is, indeed, still far from obvious what may, at the end of the day, be the “society” entailed by any prospective countermovement in the present great transformation. An orthodox reading of Polanyi would suggest two, at least ostensibly contradictory, scenarios as outcomes of the current moment of crisis and uncertainty: one depicts the reaction of “society” in terms of responsibility from

above, today in terms of the protective international networks of the IMF, the World Bank and other UN organizations, conceivably contained within the limits of the current world order; the other envisages the cataclysm of a new globalized Fascism, with “nation”, “race” and “immigration” as neuralgic focal points. Yet, seeing civil society through a critical Gramscian reading of Polanyi – at the same time, as a legitimizer *and* a contestant of a global neoliberal hegemony – could still point beyond a dichotomic analytical impasse towards perspectives for an inclusive democratizing countermovement from below. In terms of our specific problem, this calls for detailed empirical investigations focused on the often divergent discourses, tactics and alliance-making of labour unions, migrant organizations, NGOs/INGOs, and multiple local and global solidarity movements, their intersecting practices in a multitude of dialogical spaces and their differential impact on institution-making sites and social transformation. It is a challenging task for multilevel interdisciplinary research on precarity and its contestation in the North as well as the South, especially at a time when the role of the national state is questioned both as a scale of polity and in terms of the tension between government and governance.

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## NOTES

1. The term “precariat” was first invented as a “catch-all” political banner by the alternative European May Day movement in the beginning of the 2000s (Foti, 2005), and is now a widely used and hotly debated social science term (Standing, 2011; Standing, 2014; Breman, 2013).
2. Among many others, the *Global Coalition on Migration, Migrant Rights International, World Social Forum on Migrations, Peoples Global Action for Migration, Development and Human Rights, Migrant Forum in Asia, Pan-Africa Network in Defense of Migrants Rights, Respect* (on Migrant Domestic Workers Rights) and *PICUM* (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants).
3. See for example, William Gois, Migrant Forum in Asia, in his concluding statement at the seventh global summit of The Peoples’ Global Action on Migration, Development and Human Rights, organized in New York, October 2013, as a parallel civil society event to the HDL.
4. Open letter concerning Trade Union and Civil Society Inclusion at the High-level Dialogue on Migration and Development New York, October 3–4, 2013, addressed to Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon by The International Trade Union Confederation, Public Services International, Education International and Building and Woodworkers International.
5. One example is the recurrent, above mentioned, PGA event with its origins in The World Social Forum and the Forum’s offshoot, The World Social Forum on Migrations (WSFM) (see further, Rother, 2013).
6. Represented by e.g. the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR) (Rother, 2013).

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