A GLOBAL MIGRANT PRECARIAT
LABOUR, CITIZENSHIP AND SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Proceedings from the conference Primer Seminario Internacional de Estudios Críticos del Desarrollo. Crisis, Desarrollo y Trabajo, University of Zacatecas, 14-15 February, 2013

CARL ULRIK SCHIERUP AND ALEKSANDRA ÅLUND
REMESO, Linköping University, Sweden

Abstract
The paper pursues a critical understanding of the dual signification of ‘precarity’. The authors explore what ‘precarity’ as a concept may potentially offer studies of a changing contemporary political economy of migration. They discuss shifting trends in global migration and the rise of a neoliberal ‘regulatory state’, and put the question as to whether we may see tendencies towards convergence between ‘South’ and ‘North’, ‘East’ and ‘West’. Based on a review of current research advances they discuss, with reference to the classical work of Karl Polanyi, potentials for a contemporary ‘countermovement’ contesting precarity among migrants. Bringing forth controversies and dilemmas in need of analysis, theoretical elaboration and empirical inquiry the authors ask ‘what is the space for civil society in governance on migration?’

Keywords
Precarity, migration, neoliberalism, globalisation, civil society
A belief in spontaneous progress must make us blind to the role of government in economic life. This role consists often in altering the rate of change, speeding it up or slowing it down as the case may be; if we believe that rate to be unalterable – or even worse, if we deem it a sacrilege to interfere with it – then, of course, no room is left for intervention.

Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 1944

...we don't want to abolish flexibility even if we could. We want to impose social regulation on it.

Alex Foti, on P2P Foundation, 2012

Migration, Precarity and Global Governance

Recent decades have seen remoulded or new transnational migration systems emerging across the globe. Inter- and intra-regional migrations have been propelled by political and economic changes in Eastern Europe, the rapid growth of industrial and service economies such as China and India, and conflict- and climate driven refugee movements. Large scale irregular migration and temporary migrant labour schemes furnish economies in the European Union, North America, the Gulf states, in East and South-East Asia, Russia, as well as in formerly developmental states like, for example, Turkey, and Argentina, which have become nodes of growth in a changing global economy. Also in Africa new growth economies are on the rise – like, for example, in Nigeria or Kenya - for which transnational labour migrants and forcibly displaced from zones of complex emergency across the continent serve as a flexible, albeit unruly, reserve army of labour.

These developments are contingent on an unprecedented mobility of capital, transnationalisation of corporate business, restructuring of national and regional economies, the informalisation of labour markets, and fragmentarisation of the labour process. While workers everywhere are influenced by these processes, migrants and racialised minorities of migrant background make up a disproportional part of the growing social category whose opportunities and experience in the world of work are marked by ‘precarity’ in terms of informal labour, wage squeeze, temporariness, uncertainty and pernicious risk (e.g., Schierup, Hansen and Castles 2006; Waite 2008; Munck, Schierup and Delgado Wise 2012). That is the casualised workforce of the so-called ‘precariat’, ‘hirable on demand, available on call, exploitable at will, and firable at whim’ (Foti 2005). In terms of developing a social movement perspective in relation to this precaritised global labour force these processes are, in spite of vast differences in local situations, a challenge to trade unions and broader social justice and human rights movements across the world, beyond conventional understandings of North and South, West and East.

The political neologism of ‘precariat’ - an amalgam of ‘precarious’ and ‘proletariat’ - was coined by the alter globalisation movement and subsequently adopted by social science (op.cit., Wacquant 2007; Standing 2011). It is a term designating a certain historical moment. It is essentially designed to capture the emergence of contingent employment, social risk and fragmented life situations - without, security, protection and predictability - as a new global norm (e.g., Hall-Jones 2009; Berlant 2012); a condition of working and living of a broadening social range propelled by neoliberal globalisation. But ‘precariat’ and ‘precarity’ are, equally, operated and debated as self or other ascribed emblems of rebellion questioning premises of this very norm.¹

Disadvantaged groups among transnational migrants, denizens and denigrated ‘citizens’ of migrant background have been designated as the core of this global precariat (Standing 2012, and Standing op.cit.). Exclusivist migration policies, together with the ‘irregularization’ of citizenship (Nyers 2010), have globally forged a fragmented and disposable labour force in industry, entertainment, hospitality,

¹ E.g., erstwhile, in particular, for social movements in Southern Europe, later gaining significance for youth across Europe, and in 2011 with worldwide diffusion through the occupy movement, and currently being widely incorporated also in political and scientific debates on, but also carried on by, labour movements.
care-work, cleaning and domestic services, subjected to long hours of dangerous, demanding, demeaning and dirty work in permanent ‘fear of dismissal and, potentially, deportation’ (Kundnani 2007: 62). These workers are most often excessively vulnerable and many basic labour and human rights simply do not apply to them. It is a precarious workforce present globally; segmented and discriminated through ascription of race and ethnicity and gendered with respect to insertion into specific sections of local and national labour markets (e.g., Toksöz and Ünlütürk Ulutaş 2012; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Lugones 2003). This includes undocumented migrant workers, non-recognised asylum seekers in informal labour markets, temporary contract workers, as well as many among settled immigrants and their children, whose substantial rights and opportunities far from match the rights of citizenship they may formally own (Schierup, Hansen and Castles 2006). Together they form a composite ‘flexible’ global labour force, criss-crossed by ethnic and gendered divisions of labour; a global migrant precariat for whom human rights, in terms of access to an inclusive citizenship, represent as critical an issue as labour rights, conditions of work and terms of employment. Precarisation is reinforced through stringent securitization measures and criminalisation, throwing asylum seekers ‘out of the frying pan’ of a phony asylum process and ‘into the fire’ (Koser 1998) of ‘illegality’ and the most precarious occupational ghettos of informal labour markets.

The rationale for designating a migrant precariat as a particular, compound category within a wider emerging global precariat, addresses the critical consequences of the articulation of precarious work and precarious status of citizenship (Goldring and Landholt 2011) instituted, formally or informally, across discriminatory, and inherently racialising, regimes of border control, welfare regimes, labour market regulation and political representation. However, it would be mistaken to depict this disadvantaged multitude as passive victims. Current research documents a range of social struggles among migrants and ethnic minorities, contesting precarious conditions, the ruling out from human and citizenship rights, criminalisation of being, and restriction of movement. They, most often, take the form of local social struggles, which may not, arguably, be guided by any coherent program (e.g., Milkman 2011), but rather by everyday concerns of making a living (e.g., Chimienti 2011; Webster and Joynt 2011). Yet a myriad of seemingly uncoordinated ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin 2009) among those ‘without rights to have rights’ (Arendt 1958; Khosravi 2011), may bear seeds for systemic change in the evolution of citizenship (cf., Balibar 2010). We see also, parallel to informal livelihood strategies and localized struggles, manifestly political movements, on global, regional, national and local level, generating strategies and discourses of contestation that emphasize demands for universal human rights; moral-political claims for a just global migration regime that would embed market forces in protective international institutions.

Contemporary social movements engaged with migration, labour rights, citizenship and human rights, global and regional coalitions of migrant organisations, communities of faith, trade unions, and migrant advocacy NGOs and INGOs, represent themselves as incubators for the production of alternative knowledge and political platforms (e.g., PGA 2010; Fekete 2009; Institute 2010). They push collective claims for deliberation in the context of an incipient global governance regime on migration (e.g., Betts 2010); that is global fora for policy development and coordination, including nation states and multi-lateral financial, trade, labour market, aid, and human rights organisations, as well as specialised global organisations on migration and asylum (Likić and Schierup 2012). There are thus indications that a new global social movement is afoot, speaking for or with the migrant precariat in terms of social justice and human rights; an important part of the wider alter-globalisation movement, developing in tandem with and at the same time contesting neo-liberal globalisation (cf., Walton and Udayagiri 2003). It has, during the 2000s, become an increasingly articulated critical voice contesting political and economic forces of precarisation.

Will this multitude, this popular coalition building, or this composite movement be able to articulate an alternative program for action with both local and global impact in the context of an

---

2 Important organisations, among many other, are Migrant Rights International, World Social Forum on Migrations, Peoples Global Action for Migration, Development and Human Rights, Respect (on Migrant Domestic Workers Rights) and PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants).
emerging global governance regime for migration? Or - spoken through the metaphor of anthropologist and economic historian, Karl Polanyi (1957 (1944)) - a contemporary ‘countermovement’? This problematic links up, theoretically, with the extensive contemporary debate in the social sciences on The Great Transformation, and in particular the relevance of its analysis of the economic meltdown of the global economy and the great social counter-movements of the 1930s for studies on the relationship between market, state and society under the conditions of gloablity and social crisis of our times.

Our endeavour in this paper is of exploratory character or, more specifically, bent on exploring aspects of an ongoing ‘ontology building exercise … in which descriptions of the world are given unfamiliar vocabularies to unsettle discourses that otherwise risk sedimenting into something uncritical’. We pursue this aim with respect to the concept of ‘precarity’, condensing the essence of the Polanyian metaphor of the ‘double movement’ of ‘commodification’ versus ‘self-protection of society’. This implies, in terms of ‘precarity’, more specifically, ‘both a condition and a possible rallying point for resistance’ (Waite 2009); as a ‘condition’ epitomising the downside of the much hailed ‘flexibility’ produced by a ‘political economy of insecurity’, since the mid 1970s in the wake of a ‘neo-liberal utopia’ uncomprising gambling on the free market (Bech 2000: 4); as ‘resistance’, a rallying point for social justice and solidarity movements generating strategies and discourses of contestation in the name of ‘universal citizenship’ or ‘human rights’, most emphatically encapsulated in the motto of the World Social Forum, ‘Another World is Possible’.

Pursuing a grounded understanding of this dual signification of ‘precarity’ we set out to explore, which critical surplus value ‘precarity’ as a concept may potentially bring to studies of a changing contemporary political economy of migration. We discuss shifting trends in global migration on the background of processes of commodification and recommodation and the rise of a neoliberal ‘regulatory state’, and we raise the question whether we may see tendencies towards convergence between ‘South’ and ‘North’, ‘East’ and ‘West’. We finish the paper in taking up aspects of the other side of the Polanyian problematic; perspectives for a contemporary countermovement for or with the migrant precariat. Through a review of current research advances we ask ‘what space there is for civil society’ in the governance on migration? We address potentials of social movements for contestation of precarity among alienaged migrants and new ethnic minorities. We bring forth controversies and dilemmas in need of further analysis, theoretical elaboration and empirical inquiry.

From ‘Fordism’ to ‘embodied neoliberalism’

As a social science concept ‘precarity’, as well as its derivation ‘precariat’, is associated with Pierre Bourdieu’s (1963) portrayal of a nascent colonial working class in Algeria in the 1950s in terms of precarité. Bourdieu referred, more specifically, to the racialised class divide that separated casual or contingent workers (travailleurs intermittents) from permanently employed workers.

In the 1980s different linguistic and discursive versions of ‘precarité’ were taken into broader use in social science studies of informal and casual labour in France, Italy and Spain and, during the 2000s - in spite of critique for wanting in analytical clarity (c.f., Barbier 2004) - across Europe and the World. In English derivations like ‘precariousness’, ‘precarious employment’ and ‘precarious workers’ have, during the 2000s, become important in critical studies on migration and work (e.g., Anderson 2010), and ‘precarity’ - the direct transposition of Bourdieu’s original term into English European newspeak – together with ‘precariat’, are on the rise as new paradigmatic concepts. An important background is that the ‘social exclusion’ paradigm, which has been dominant in the EU since the early 1990s, and eventually broadly across the world, is starting to being seen as not very realistic in its prevalent discursive and institutional incarnations (Schierup, Krifors and Slavnic 2013). This happens on the background of current neoliberal austerity measures for restructuring of labour


5 Especially after the publication of Guy Standing’s (2011) book, The Precariat, which provoked extensive discussion on scientific and political blogs, as well as journals and newspapers across the world.
markets and citizenship, depriving citizens of essential social, political and civic rights (e.g., Sassen 2006), combined with growing scepticism as to the power and institutional tools of ‘social inclusion’ as antidote to ‘exclusion’. It has to do with, in sum, increasing doubt in the institutional remedies for the cure of ‘social anomy’ accorded to the guardianship of a still officially existing, but actually increasingly fading, welfare state (see further, Schierup, Hansen and Castles 2006).

In effect, a broader area of critical ‘precarity research’ is emerging within international labour studies, boosted by perspectives on globalisation. A Fordist mode of labour force management in the heyday of modern welfare state - at least as a social norm and backed by elaborate positive regulation - included the whole life cycle of the worker in its long term business calculations (including costs for education, health, pension, and old age care, and other components of social reproduction). This was likewise the case for smaller formal sectors in developmental and developing states. Emerging neoliberal labour force management have, in contrast, been characterized in terms of a generalised mode of hyper-exploitation, which, ‘by operating only on the present, simultaneously exploits the future’ (Tsianos 2007: 19; see also, Papadopoulos 2005). Thus, precarity signifies a generalised market driven expansion of insecure and contingent employment relations organised beyond the confines of welfare systems, such as pension schemes, health insurance, unemployment benefits, and maternity leave. In a historical situation of transition, precarity becomes, in effect – in ‘North’ and ‘South’ alike - tinged ‘by the widening gaps between official norms’ that continue to centre ‘social inclusion around work ethic and economic activity and material realities where jobs… are no longer conducive even to the satisfaction of basic needs and necessities’ (Barchiesi 2012b: 230; cf., Slavnic 2010).

An embodied imperative of precarity is, what is more, an incremental forced mobility, regionally, globally and nationally, and flexibly across jobs, occupations and sectors. ‘The embodied experience of precarity is’, in effect, ‘the attempt to live with incessant neoliberal imperatives to transform the self’, writes Tsianos (2007: 192). The worker shaped by an ‘embodied neoliberalism’ is subject to constant demands to embody ‘flexibility, ‘availability’, ‘multitasking’, ‘multilocality’ and compressed ‘mobility’ across time and space lines (ibid.), with migrants and diasporic networkers as quintessential incarnations. The precaritised worker is vulnerable, hyperactive and restless, exposed to constant anxiety and affective exhaustion due to ‘emotional exploitation, with emotional intelligence as an important element for the control of employability and multiple dependencies’ in social situations marked by uncertainty and flux, and connected with livelihood strategies breaching conventional divides between work and employment, community and multiplex social networks. But in contrast with the Fordist worker, locked up in the factory in constant fear of loosing (mostly) his lifetime contract, the precaritised worker is, at the same time, a cunning ‘deceitful, persistent, opportunistic, imaginative’ trickster responding to an enforced ‘imperative to be cynical, energetic, attractive, pragmatic’ (ibid.).

From ‘social exclusion’ to ‘flexploitation’

The wider context of precarity is the current financialisation of global capitalism (Harvey 2010) operating in tandem with changing organisation of production of goods and services and the deterritorialisation, division and management of labour processes that used to be concentrated in larger localised units and monitored by labour unions. With precarity comes shrinking of labour rights and informalisation and precarisation of work through temporary contracts, offshoring, outsourcing, sub-contracting, renewed sweatshop production and home-working (e.g., Mitter 1986; Schierup 2007). Thus, corporate practices of, what merits, the term ‘bloody sub-contracting’, following the crisis of and transition from industrial Fordism from the late 1970s, have organised ‘networked’ labour markets

---

7 Schierup (2007 #54), relating to Liepitz’ (1987 #220) discussion of ‘bloody Taylorism’ in the capitalist periphery of the 1980s, alluding, in turn, to Karl Marx’ casting of ‘primitive accumulation’ as capitalism’s bloody ‘prehistoric state’.

---
in production and services (Castells 1996). This has effected the break up of established labour-capital compacts and instituted new forms of flexible, casual and temporary employment marked by unpredictability and ‘toxic risk’ (e.g., Woolfson and Likic-Brboric 2008). Current feminisation of labour has, to a large degree, taken precarised forms (e.g., Anderson 2010). The international transfer of care identified as a new international division of reproductive labour (Parreñas 2005) refers to exploitative relations between women in the global market, which involves multifaceted and intimate processes of precarisation of work, citizenship and daily life (Andall 2000; Lutz 2002).

Like social exclusion – a central political term for EU management of labour and social welfare, adopted by social science and eventually obtaining worldwide diffusion - the meaning of precarity is, indeed, up for contention, especially as its use expands into widening scientific and political realms. In prevalent EU policy discourse ‘precarity’ may be brought to signify nothing more than ‘factors associated with higher risks of social exclusion’ (Directory General for Employment 2011). Yet, the content that ‘precarity’ conveys in a range of contemporary critical studies is not ‘poverty’ as such, nor ‘social exclusion’. It is not about anomalies to be cured through social engineering, but refers to insecurity and contingency of a ‘subordinated inclusion’ (Mulinari and Neergaard 2004) systemically generated by advanced regimes of flexible labour force management with global impact. ‘Precarity’, summarises Ricceri (2011: 68) succinctly, is a ‘constitutive element of the new global disorder, to which it is very functional’ (Ricceri 2011: 68).

Thus conceived, processes of precarisation are contingent on new modes of so-called ‘flexible’ labour force management (e.g., Bezuidenhout and Kenny 2000; Standing 2003, 2011). But, in contrast to positively sounding managerial discourses on ‘flexible labour’, precarity has a critical connotation referring to austere living and working conditions under neoliberalism; work and life, not only, ‘without guarantees’, but ‘without predictables’ (Berlant 2012). It denotes a working life increasingly subject to a corporate instrumentalisation of risk, tellingly dubbed ‘flexploitation’ (Bourdieu 1999; cf., Jessop 2002). In effect, ‘precarity’ is brought to serve as a critical deconstruction of the language of ‘flexibility’. This means, more specifically - as brought out by Bezuidenhout and Kenny (2000) in their review of the political economy of flexibility in the South African labour debate - how ‘policy makers and intellectuals who mobilise class and class-fractional interests to direct policy, change position through “talking the talk”’ of the language of flexibility and how this through its ‘permutations has entered social reality as a material force directing the redrafting of a newly imagined “restrictive’ labour legislation”’. Or as expressed by Bourdieu (1999: 84): ‘insecurity is the product not of an economic inevitability, identified with the much heralded ”globalization,” but of a political will’. It is a creation of a political economy merging new forms of globalised labour force management with a fragmentation, depreciation and profound remoulding of established frameworks of citizenship, and with the management of global migration as a privileged tool.

A growing body of research has pointed to migration as an important element in this broader process of erosion of social and labour rights propelling a sweeping ‘recommodification’ of the labour force (e.g., Schierup, Hansen and Castles 2006; Bommes and Kolb 2006: 109; Castles 2011). Related to this, studies have pointed to the proliferation of new modes of ‘niched’ and enclavised labour markets driven by the ways in which transnational, and often circular or irregular, migration is instrumentalised in the regulation and remaking of economies, labour markets and contemporary societies across the globe (e.g., Veiga 1999; Raes et al. 2002; Galabuzi 2006; Bauder 2006; Toksöz and Ünlütürk Ulutu ş 2012). This contemporary state of migration and labour force management is succinctly summarised by Bridget Andersson (2010: 300):

---

8 The Informational City (Castells op.cit.) is a great piece of work that we do favour over Castells’ later three band magnum opus on the rise of the network society.

9 This is, truly, also a perspective carried forth by certain discourses on social exclusion, beyond an overall integrationist hegemony. An example is the work of David Byrne (2005), who maintains that social exclusion is a central contemporary form of exploitation, and therefore the struggle to combat ‘social exclusion’ can be nothing but a struggle against exploitation. The real question is, he argues, how to create a social order that excludes exclusion (op.cit.: 85).

10 For example,
As well as a tap regulating the flow of labour, immigration controls function as a mould, helping to form types of labour with particular relations to employers and the labour market. In particular, the construction of institutionalised uncertainty, together with less formalised migratory processes, help produce ‘precarious workers’ over whom employers and labour users have particular mechanisms of control.

Migration, regulation and changing modes of labour force management

The wider world historical context for burgeoning contemporary processes of flexploitation cum precarisation is the generation of a global, multiple million strong, ‘surplus population’ during the past three and a half decades. This is, more specifically, a globally mobile reserve army of labour set ‘free’ to the disposal of transnational corporations, sub-contractors and franchises through austerity programmes rolling back the social compacts of welfare and developmental states across the five continents, the collapse of actually existing socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the radical transformation of Chinese and Indian economies and societies (e.g., Delgado Wise 2012). Through international migration this global reserve army of labour flexibly feeds abundant and cheap labour to private as well as public employers in centres of corporate power across the globe. The problematic of disadvantage, risk, insecurity, unpredictability and poverty is, consequently, moved beyond the integrationist Durkheimian concern with ‘social cohesion’ in prevalent discourses on ‘social exclusion-inclusion’ (Levitas 1998) and into the Marxian terrain of exploitation, with the surplus population and the industrial reserve army as disciplinary vehicles for regulation and the instigation of ‘morality’ (Schierup, Krifors and Slavnic 2013; cf., Harvey 2010). Taken in broad terms, we may thus speak of precarity and precarisation as novel ways ‘of keeping the reserve army of labour in labour - thereby maximising both productive activity and placing downward pressure on wages’ (Moase 2012).

Understanding labour migrants in terms of a reserve army of labour is, as such, nothing new, but a tenant for a historical-structural approach to labour migration in the 1970s in its confrontation with neo-classical orthodoxy (e.g., Abreu 2010); in research on the ‘guest workers’ systems of the global North (e.g., Nikolinakos 1973; Castles and Kosack 1973; Schierup, Krifors and Slavnic 2013) as well as on colonial migrant labour systems (Meillassoux 1981 (1975)) and South African Apartheid (e.g., Wolpe 1972). Michael Piore (1979), for one, argued that international migration is driven by the demand for a cheap and disposable reserve army of labour in advanced capitalist economies. He saw migration as staffing, in particular, the secondary segment of ‘dual labour markets’.

There is a vast literature demonstrating that Piore’s segmentation theory is still relevant and needs to be developed and extended. In Labor Movement. How Migration Regulates Labor Markets? Harald Bauder (2006) builds on, but goes beyond Piore, arguing that there is a reciprocal relation between labour market segmentation and international migration. Rather than being plainly a ‘reserve army’ recruited to fill empty spaces in dual labour markets, he approaches – with reference to neo-Marxist regulation theory - migration as a factor for corporate strategies to actively shape, regulate and restructure asymmetrically niched labour markets.

Along similar lines Slavnic (2010) analyses the informalisation of labour as a strategic instrument for restructuring, tightly connected with irregular migration as a stealthy regulatory instrument. According to this argument, deepened informalisation, with irregular migration as one of its most conspicuous current manifestations, is contingent on an insidious structural discrepancy between old (Fordist/welfare state) modes of regulation and new (neoliberal) regimes of accumulation. Established national regulatory frameworks become politically unacceptable to dominant power-blocks, which see them as inadequate for embedding changing modes of neoliberal accumulation. This implicates that all relevant actors develop their own coping strategies, which, in various ways, move beyond existing regulatory frameworks that have habitually defined distinctions between formal and informal economic activities. Thus, informalisation of labour, the proliferation of grey ethnic labour market niches and irregular migration can be seen as products of evasive strategies managing a transition where the normative and legal regulatory regime is out of pace with new modes of capital accumulation and powerful political coalitions’ demands for ‘flexibility’ in terms of wage shrinking, diminishing labour and social rights, contingent employment, and de-unionisation.
Consequently, the expansion of informal economy - understood as ‘the unregulated production and/or distribution of otherwise licit goods and services’ (Castells and Portes 1989) - is intimately intertwined with the formal economy and restructuring strategies of corporate actors; public as well as private. Corporate downsizing, outsourcing and sub-contracting, together with state driven strategies of crisis management, carry with them dynamic forces of informalisation from above (Slavnic op.cit.). This includes - through mechanisms of outsourcing, sub-contracting and bogus ‘self employment’ – the active shaping of informal employment, informal businesses and the making of marginalised actors, who share a lack of legal recognition and protection, extreme vulnerability and dependence on institutional arrangements generating new specific forms of an informal political economy (ILO 2002). However, as these marginalised actors develop livelihood strategies beyond the reach of formal regulatory frameworks to cope with their own vulnerable situation, they contribute actively and creatively to the reproduction of irregularity through informalisation from below (Slavnic, op.cit.).

These are important questions to develop in a comparative perspective, concerning contemporary migration systems in the global North as well as in the global South. Yet, it is important to see informalisation and the rise of irregular migration as only one facet of precarity. We need, thus, to analyse different contemporary modes of migration management in the wider perspective of new emerging formal regulatory systems.

Neoliberal hegemony certainly means abandoning or evading regulations and positive protective and redistributive state intervention prevalent in formerly advanced welfare states as well as former developmental states like, for example, Argentina, Mexico or Chile; not to speak of past state-bureaucratic planning and redistribution in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. But it does not mean diminishing regulation as such. What is often colloquially called ‘de-regulation’ is actually a combination of de-regulation and re-regulation, that is, the successive replacing of old rules by new ones (Slavnic, op.cit.). Furthermore, this does not mean less, but rather more, regulation (op. cit. and, e.g., Standing 2011). Indeed, following Majone (1997), what we experience is an emerging regulatory state, replacing a so-called ‘positive’, redistributive state. That is a state characterized by constantly growing negative regulatory capacities; regulations replacing taxing and redistribution and effectively eliminating institutional and social obstacles to the commodification, or re-commodification, of labour, money and nature (e.g., Papadopoulos 2005; Burawoy 2006). At the same time, the responsibility for re-regulation is being delegated to executive bodies, increasingly independent from democratic institutions (Majone op.cit.: 159 Sassen 2006).

Applying this general argument to the development of contemporary migration systems, we hypothesise a long term global tendency towards the replacement of irregular migration by formally regulated, so-called, ‘managed migration’. While we see the former as a prevalent mode of precarity and a prevailing vehicle for ‘flexibilisation’ in a post post-Fordist situation of transition, we envisage the latter as typical form of migrant precarisation and essential mode of labour flexibilisation generated by the neoliberal regulatory state. This refers, for example, to the formalised, and mostly rigidly regulated, temporary and circular migrant workers schemes that are presently being installed all across the EU and tendentially its close ‘neighbourhood’ (e.g. Turkey and other potential accession countries) under the trade mark of ‘managed migration’. This is an institutional alternative to mass irregularity gaining global political clout; in NAFTA, the Gulf states, Australia, East and South-East Asia and, conceivably, increasingly in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as well. Governments meet employers’ demands for cheap and ‘flexible’ labour, while seeking at the same time to appease the anti-immigration populists, through these new employment practices, which claim to avoid the ‘errors’ of earlier migration policies that allowed migrants to settle and achieve gradual incorporation into a status of denizenship or citizenship. They a matched by selective schemes for sifting off certain categories of resource endowed or professionally specialised ‘migrant workers, judged valuable for purposes of permanent settlement.

The worldwide growth of schemes for temporary migration is one of the most complex issues for migration research to study, and one of the most serious current challenges for trade unions and migrant rights organisations (e.g., PGA 2010). Seen in the wider context of neoliberal globalisation
temporary and circular migration, together with a range of other contemporary attempts at re-regulating migration (e.g. the EU service directive), constitute an integrated part of neoliberal re-regulation practices driving commodification or recommodification of labour. We see them developing in tandem with the restructuring of contemporary labour markets at large, and with constitution and reproduction of the regulatory state - alias the ‘post-national workfare state’ (Jessop 2002) embedded in regional communities like the EU, NAFTA and SADC.

In contrast to the extensive post Second World War central European ‘guest-worker’ systems, which left remarkable legal-institutional openings or informal loop-holes for migrants to access citizenship (e.g., Guiraudon 2000), most of the world’s present-day temporary worker systems are likely to be more rigorously monitored (e.g., Barrientos 2007), and thereby also to be more effectively ‘Apartheidising’ economies and societies; i.e., keeping migrants isolated from, at any time, ‘normal’ frameworks of citizenship in their so-called ‘hostlands’ (e.g., Schierup and Ålund 2011b). Moreover, supposedly, win-win-win policies - combining migration and labour force management with development partnerships between receiving and sending countries (e.g., Triandafyllidou 2013 [forthcoming]) - may per design contribute to restrict acts of citizenship and incorporation in the ‘hostlands’ of toil, and chain them to continuous social reproduction in their native ‘homelands’.

Temporary workers are also - with their inherently short time sojourn perspective, and usually being bound to a single employer – notoriously difficult to organise, whether by trade unions or by civil rights movements, conceivably more so than many ‘irregulars’ with, after all, often more long term trajectories in terms of sojourn and incorporation.

On this background prevalent strategies of ‘managed migration’ are apt to put even more pressure on others among the most vulnerable in the labour market. In spite of prevalent policies gravitating towards formal schemes of ‘managed migration’, ‘undocumented’ migrant workers and refouled asylum seekers are likely to still belong among the ‘most needed’ in political economies of flexploitation, but conceivably with their defamed ‘status’ as the politically ‘least wanted’ becoming further exacerbated through public vilification combined with competition from flexible and institutionally restrained temporaries (e.g. Schierup, Hansen and Castles 2006, Ch. 7). Moreover, flexploitation through extended schemes of temporary migration, may function to press disadvantaged segments among permanently settled migrants and ethnic minorities, ‘enjoying’ full (formal) citizenship, further into clandestine realms of racially or ethnically segmented labour markets.

There are thus reasons to restate the argument by Mingione (Mingione 1996) that different modes of exclusion – alias precarisation - can never be understood in isolation. They should be investigated in mutual articulation within a wider conflict laden social order, within which latent competition and tensions between different groups among the most vulnerable may be systematically manipulated by employers and their organisations, so as to push precarious working conditions and the denigration of social citizenship (cf., Fox Piven and Cloward 1993).

The work-citizenship nexus

Prevalent brands of regulation theory typically assume a macro-perspective on how economies operate, but neglect pertinent issues of migration, citizenship and ethnic relations. In spite of increasing scholarly attention to the subject, the development of a comparative political economy that integrates theories and studies of citizenship, ethnicity and racialisation with studies of labour market regulation and politics of ‘flexibility’ remains a task (Schierup, Hansen and Castles 2006).

An important perspective forwarding a synthetic theoretical and analytical understanding was put forth by Lazaridis and Psimennos (2000). Deliberating on ‘flexibilisation’ they bring out multiplex connections between, on the one hand, ‘deregulation and loss of workers’ ability to intervene in their economic space’ and, on the other hand, ‘between the flexibilization of the work place and the employment of immigrant workers’. The general function of flexibilisation, they argue, is to reduce production costs, to break up the collective identity of workers and to increase surveillance by

---

11 See, for example, the critical reception of regulation theory by Bauder (2006).
employers’ *(op.cit.:174).* Yet, immigrant workers are particularly ‘flexible’ because their precarious position is related not plainly to the labour deregulation process, but to the wider political economy which connects production techniques to politics and policies of labour control, and job-related to non-work practices of migrant workers. Hereby, the ‘duality of flexibility’ is extended to areas like welfare benefits, citizenship status, political participation, and daily livelihoods of migrant communities under conditions of clandestinity. Drawing conclusions therefrom leads to a definition and understanding of ‘precarity’ that extends usual perceptions of ‘precarious’ or ‘precarisation’ in terms of conditions bound to and be explored within realms of labour markets and working life.

Another important contribution was made by Bauder (2006). Citizenship, migration and regulation of labour markets are inseparable, he maintains. Multiple grades of inclusion/exclusion into/from frameworks of citizenship are operated as a legal, discursive and political mechanism sorting migrant workers and ethnically stigmatized ‘citizens’ into different hierarchically organized categories and groups, distributed across segments of ethnically divided labour markets. Castles (2011) argues, moreover, that individuals’ specific status and conditions of work and living appear to be less dependent on human capital endowment – one of the key axioms of neo-liberal economics - than on the discriminatory impact of ethnicity, gender and class in allocating positions. This is matched and instrumentalised, he contends, by emerging national, regional and global hierarchies of citizenship *(op.cit.)*. Van Parijs (1992) goes as far as to conclude that citizenship status has exerted a quantitatively more powerful influence on the distribution of material welfare than skills.

This all goes together with the development of immigration policies towards increasingly tighter discursive and institutional definitions of nationality and citizenship’ *(Cohen 2006)* with boundaries between the citizen and the noncitizen becoming increasingly blurred and a generalised ‘state of exception’ *(Agamben 2005).* Or rather, while irregularising citizenship may earlier have been part of a politics of exception, it is now observed to be part and parcel of the ‘normal’ working of most states *(Nyers 2006).* A concurrent transfer of policies and practices of migration control from border guards towards institutional agencies, situated on the inner territories of regional political blocks *(Jordan, Stráth and Triandafyllidou 2003)*, lends extended range and meaning to the well worn phrase of *Policing the Crisis* *(Hall et al. 1978).*

The result is not, however, hermetically sealed borders as implicated by the conventional meaning of the popular ‘Fortress Europe’ metaphor. It is rather an articulation of measures of securitization, criminalisation and deportation - instigating fear, submission and ‘invisibility’ - with ‘imperceptible politics’ that sluice (irregular) migrants and refugees across porous borders into occupational ghettos of informal labour markets. Labour migrants and refugees, in turn, develop their own strategies for penetrating permeable borders, with transition countries and detention centres as regulatory waiting rooms *(see further, Tsianos 2007),* and with transnational migrant networks and diasporic communities as facilitators. Thus perceived, current regimes of migration control in regional communities, such as the EU, NAFTA, SACD or CIS, are inseparable constituents of ‘informalisation from above’ as well as ‘from below’.

More generally, the discursive and political-institutional outcome of the remoulding of policies and practices of citizenship is a salient distinction between, what Nyers (2006) calls, the ‘essential citizen’ as opposed to the (suspect) ‘accidental citizen’ exposed to surveillance and securitization. This adds dimensions to the vulnerable condition of, not only irregular labour migrants and refouled asylum seekers, but also, what we may call ‘the non-substantial citizen’ *(Slavnic 2011).* With this we refer to citizens of migrant background and their children, endowed with all formal rights of citizenship, but deprived of substantial opportunities to exercise these rights due to exposure to stigmatising and discriminatory institutional practices drawing on discourses of origin, place, ethnicity and ‘race’ *(e.g., Wacquant 2007; Schierup and Álund 2011a).*

Aiming to render transparent the variable derivation, positionality and opportunity structure of a multitude of vulnerable groups of migrants Goldring and Landholt (2011) suggests the concept of

---

12 Referring to the distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘substantial’ citizenship *(e.g., Castles 1997; Bertossi 2003).*
The term ‘occupational ghetto’ was developed by Feuchtwang (1982). We have used in widely in our own earlier research (e.g., Schierup 1993; Schierup, Hansen and Castles 2006).

13 The term ‘occupational ghetto’ was developed by Feuchtwang (1982). We have used in widely in our own earlier research (e.g., Schierup 1993; Schierup, Hansen and Castles 2006).
Alternatively a plain replicate of a past European condition, would be anachronistic, depriving the concept of its potential for exploration of dialectically linked convergence and divergence embedded in a particular shared conditions of contemporary globality. Consequently, ‘precarity’ should not be about history plainly repeating itself in ‘a circular movement of domination and resistance’ (Barchiesi 2012a). We may speak, argues Herrman (2011: 34), of precarity in global terms of a specific contemporary form of the reserve army of labour, with growing realms of labour market status change forged in terms of claims of the ‘extreme individualism of classical economics and its translation into a libertarian political culture … implemented and defined as new principal norm of the entire social fabric’ (op.cit.: 33); or - as succinctly summarised by Barchiesi (2011: 10) in his book on post-colonial, post-Apartheid South Africa’s ‘precarious liberation’ – with the prevalent work-citizenship nexus ‘shifting the driving force of emancipation from structural change to the abstract deracialized citizen’. This implicates a converging development – albeit on a different scale and in widely varying particular forms in South and North – or for that matter East and West - given the subscription of global and local political class alliances to a common neoliberal hegemony.

Consequently - notwithstanding that the colonial and postcolonial historical predicament together with present conditions of imperial domination, continue to mean a critical watershed as to the character of economy, state and society in South and North (e.g., Burawoy and von Holdt 2012) - we find it theoretically sound to argue that the present conjuncture posits both an opening and a need for approaching the problem of ‘flexible labour’ from a perspective of ‘incorporating comparison’ (McMichael 1990: 671); that is, seeing process-instances in North and South as increasingly comparable, since connected through globalising processes of precarisation.14 From this perspective we may set out locating the extent to which, and ways in which, particular regional trajectories of neoliberalism may be simultaneously shaped by and shaping globalising processes in an international system still structured in asymmetrical dominance; along intersecting lines of class, nation, race and gender, and with migration as mediating practice and regulatory tool. Uneven divisions of labour, wealth and development continue to crisscross the world, globally as well as within regions and nations. But at the same time a need is posited for reviewing theories of political economy that have been critically opposing neo-classical economic orthodoxy.

General lines for the makeover of critical theory on the global political economy of migrant labour were suggested by Portes and Walton (1991: 190) in Labor, Class and the International System:

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. Labor in the core is not located in a nested hierarchy in which it gains from peripheral exploitation what it loses to domestic upper classes. Rather core and periphery hierarchies interpenetrate sharing some (increasingly) common positions and attendant fortunes.

Pursuing similar lines of reasoning Tobias (2012) contends, in a review of contemporary African migration regimes, that most studies of refugees and migrants, which build on economic models emphasising the imbalance of power between North and South (e.g., dependency theory, core-periphery, world systems theory, and current critical globalisation studies), have been one-sidedly concentrated on northern treatment of southern migrants. Given the particular character of class dominance and labour force management in neoliberalism, and its current global impact on societies in the South as well as the North, it is, however, urgent to reassess this ‘prevailing, nearly exclusive emphasis in many globalization studies on the dehumanizing policies and exploitation of southern migrants by states in the global north, as such an emphasis risks obscuring the emergence of more complex patterns of migration and anti-migrant practices in the developing world’ (op.cit.: 2).

Politics and policies of migration and asylum in the South, Tobias argues – with particular empirical reference to migrant and refugee receiving sub-Saharan states and new growth economies like Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Botswana and South Africa - increasingly emulate discriminatory

---

14 A major colloquium, held in Johannesburg (Burawoy and von Holdt 2012) on the relevance of the concept of precarity for social studies in the South, indicated a striking need for systematic comparison between conditions in North and South.
Northern regimes, targeted at treatment of migrant workers and cross border refugees as a flexible, vulnerable, publicly vilified, but economically essential, reserve army and labour force. Similar to contradictory legal-institutional policies and practices through which high and medium-income states in the EU and elsewhere are ‘profiting from irregular migration while denouncing it’\textsuperscript{16}, fear, uncertainty and vulnerability produced by similar ‘strategic inconsistency’\textsuperscript{16} in policies and practices of states belonging to regional associations like ECOWAS, SADC and NEPAD, ensure migrants’ and refugees’ status as a flexible reserve army and labour force for new types of low-wage and short-term contract labour markets in Africa (\textit{op.cit.}: 7).\textsuperscript{17} This brings with it differential modes of precarity delimited by racialised boundaries and conflicts, ‘leaving refugees and migrants vulnerable to violence, harassment, and economic exploitation’ (\textit{op.cit.}: 1. Cf., Trimikliniotis, Gordon and Zondo 2008; Desai and Walsh 2010).

Not that discriminatory and racialising migration management in regions of the global South, and not least Africa, is new, as such. Colonial, neo-colonial and Apartheid’s post-colonial labour force management has, historically, been instrumental in organising internal and cross-border migration systems, aiming at ‘enforcing unstable and precarious occupations and denying citizenship rights to the urban working class’ (Barchiesi and Bramble 2003: 1). This was typically combined with the reaping of a free rent based on continuous partial reproduction of the migrant labour force in subsistence economies of rural hinterlands (e.g., Meillassoux 1981 (1975)), with the extensive bureaucratically monitored Southern African migrant labour system, subject to Apartheid, as exemplary case (e.g.Wolpe 1972; Barchiesi 2011).

But current sub-Saharan migration regimes do not, plainly, replicate colonial systems. They are critically different, as well, from later, comparatively generous, post national liberation migration regimes, principles of which were laid down in conventions and governmental practices of many African states in the 1960s and 1970s. What distinguishes current regional and local African migration regimes, and which makes them comparable to those currently prevalent in the North is that, owing to contemporary African elites’ adoption and broad implementation of similar neoliberal policies, African societies have become subject to incentives and constraints similar to those that operate in the North (\textit{op.cit.}: 1). Contingent thereupon African political and business elites have instrumentalised and profited from national and regional migration policies as tools for their class-bound political and economic projects and careers in societies subject to pervasive neo-liberal austerity policies, privatisation of commons, de-unionisation, social fragmentation and rapidly increasing social inequality of a novel globalised quality. The conclusion to draw, maintains Tobias (\textit{op.cit.}: 1), is that ‘[in]sofar as neoliberal globalization continues to exacerbate inequality within the developing world, the harsh measures taken by governments of developing countries against their refugee and migrant populations are likely to increase’.

Examples of migration, neoliberal makeover and precarisation, taken from other regional political economies across the world, could be added to Tobias’ account of the current transformation of sub-Saharan Africa. One conspicuous, but so far hardly researched, case pertains to Russia or, more specifically, southern labour migrants in the northern heartlands of what used to be the Soviet Union; or, in Western Cold War language, apex of the so-called ‘Eastern Block’. Here they make up an important segment of a wider contingent labour force marked by differential forms of precarious employment characteristic for post-communist Russia (Bobkov, Chernykh and Aliev 2011). Estimates vary, but a numerous reserve army of such, often criminalised and harassed, newly fabricated, ‘aliens’ (formerly addressed as ‘fellow citizens’ or ‘comrades’) from former southern republics of the Soviet Union conceivably matches 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). Their irregular status can be understood as connected with Russia’s choice to emulate migration control policies of the European Union (acc. to

\textsuperscript{15} Tobias(2012: 6), quoting Guilfoyle (2010: 1).


\textsuperscript{17} For example, Liberians in the informal economy of Ghana, among the members of ECOWAS (Tobias 2012: 7).
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 society marked by a barely credible growth of inequality wrought by speculative businesses of ruthless oligarchs, neo-liberal austerity policies, *laissez-faire* and state corruption. Böhm and Fernandez (2005: 786) describe the life and toil of this new migrant precariat from the south of the east in occupational ghettos of metropolitan Moscow in terms of ‘Vellkome 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 meltdown of real existing socialism and the rise of real-existing neo-liberal 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 countermovement of the precariat?

With the turn of the third millennium dramatic appearances of economic and social crisis, reminiscent of the 1930s, have made their imprint in terms of an academic re-affirmation of the work of Karl Polanyi.\(^{18}\) Thus, globalisation of our times has been theorised as a *third great transformation* (Burawoy 2006: 356 ff; Munck 2010). So conceived, it represents a hitherto unprecedented wave of market driven ‘commodification’ or ‘re-commodification’ of labour (e.g., Pierson 2001); sweeping away the labour rights and social rights won by social movements and guaranteed by states during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Harvey 2005), and generating precarity of work and citizenship in its wake. This historical reversal, argues Saskia Sassen in *Territory, Authority, and Rights* (2006), has a wider bearing in terms of a general undermining of civil, political and social rights of citizenship in pace with a transfer of authority to regional or global frameworks of governance, with the institutional power and apparatuses of nation states, being increasingly concentrated to an executive function. This has, as theorized by, among other, Delanty (2000) and Holmes (2000), been followed by fragmenting identity politics, populist political discourses and upheavals propelling processes of ‘apartheisation’ (Balibar 2004; Galabuzi 2006) with particular bearing on the denigration of a multifarious migrant precariat.

There are indeed reasons for drawing parallels between the crisis of today and that of the 1930s. It should not demand an excess of imagination to recognise similarities between the historical calamity of a fragmenting Gold Standard, preceding the Second World War and, for example, that of the fixed exchange rate built into the political economy of today’s Eurozone;\(^{19}\) an ostensibly identical regional facsimile of past economic orthodoxy, supposed to ‘stabilise’, but currently wreaking havoc to economies and peoples of Southern and Eastern Europe; a political economy of dispossession spawning neo-Fascist home guards, harassing migrants and ethnic minorities; a polarised accumulation of wealth driving the parallel rise of new multicultural civil disobedience movements contending financialisation of the economy, technocratic austerity politics and the incremental precarisation of work, citizenship and daily life. These are conspicuous scenarios in the historical nest of two world wars, but with replicants across the globe.

Not surprisingly, together with Polanyian concepts such as ‘commodification’ and ‘institutional embeddedness’, so also the celebrated metaphor of the ‘countermovement’ has been brought to new life in research on precarity in the present conjuncture. Bleak dystopian scenarios have interrogated whether, or to which extent, the rise of new times’ radical populist movements, appearing in neo-conservative robes of faith and of nostalgia for a better past, could be compared to the vast ‘countermovement’, sweeping across pre-Second World War Europe, incarnated in the state-totalitarian reactions against liberalism represented by Nazism and Fascism (Schierup 1999). Another,

---

\(^{18}\) See, for example, the extensive review by Dale (2010).

\(^{19}\) For authoritative discussions of the Gold Standard and the crisis of the 1930s see, for example, Bernanke (1991) and Clavin (2000). For differing views concerning similarities between today’s crisis and the crisis of the 1930s, see Cohen-Setton (2012).
moderately utopian, representation of the Polanyian metaphor has portrayed a broad activist ‘civil society’ of the alter–globalisation movement as the last ditch against the ‘economic tsunami’ of new times, devastating human labour, money and nature through commodification of a hitherto unknown scale and range (Burawoy 2006). This pays credit to the well worn dictum on the theatre of history ostensibly repeating itself, but never with identical casting or dressed in the same robes. A new stage carries new actors. The prime driver for the ‘counter movement’, concerned with the ‘reembeddening’ of the liberal market after The Second World War, was the national welfare state. But, although the theories guiding deregulation and globalization since the beginning of the 1980s may appear to be direct descendants of the laissez faire ideas that guided globalization a century ago the kind of social policies that emerged from the great depression of the 1930s have largely been discredited (Piore 2008).

As the crisis lingers on, voices of political concern sound from varied quarters. An early warning, paradoxically dispatched by one of our times’ archetypical managers of globalisation, was George Soros’ (Soros 1997) ‘The Capitalist Threat’, describing an unbridled financialisation of the world economy as a more serious peril to the foundations of an open democratic liberal society, and to capitalism itself, than authoritarian state socialism ever was. ‘Just as the crash was inevitable, so will be the pendulum swinging the other way’; so could, one decade later, business executive, Sir Martin Sorrel foretell a ‘countermovement’ rising from the current crisis, Sorrel is seconded by a more recent report from the World Economic Forum (2012) lamenting that ‘seeds of dystopia’ are threatening to ‘jeopardize the social contracts between states and citizens’. From the quarters of humanitarian INGOs the International Red Cross foresees that Europe must prepare itself for popular uprisings among its growing masses of impoverished precarians; a social countermovement comparable to that of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ shaking North Africa (Nielsen 2013). And from the political declaration of civil society delegates from across the world, gathered at the fifth annual summit of the Peoples’ Global Action for Migration, Development and Human Rights (PGA) in Mexico City, sounds a dictum echoing The Great Transformation: ‘We are human beings with rights to mobility, freedom of speech, decent work and social protection – not a commodity’ (PGA 2010).

The PGA declaration quoted was addressed to the so-called ‘Common Space’ – a recurrent slot reserved for dialogue between civil society, governments and international organisations, inserted into the wider agenda for yearly summits of the Global Forum for Migration and Development; a UN driven forum targeted at facilitating deliberations between governments across the world on standards for the governance on migration. On the one hand, this quote appears to prove the continued relevance of the question raised in The Great Transformation; on ‘society’ versus the market; on the exigency of a countermovement facing an infinite commodification of labour, money and nature. On the other hand the very fact that this question is once again raised with vigour, in politics as well as in the social sciences, appears to prove – as argued by Burawoy (2010) - that Polanyi was fundamentally wrong concerning his belief in the spontaneous ‘self defence of society’ and, more specifically, in his belief that the lesson taught to the world by the great crisis of the 1930s would guarantee that nothing like it would ever again happen. The ‘countermovement’ appears in Polanyi’s The Great Transformation as a preordained spontaneous reaction of ‘society’, but The Great Transformation is short of a solid analysis on imperatives of capital accumulation, relations of power, and class conflict and exploitation (Burawoy 2010), as well as concerning organisation and social basis of its actual agents (Webster, Lambert et al. 2008). This is a critique that appears to apply to much, both academic and political, debate on precarity and its contestation today. This pertains to, for example, much debated proposals for the institution of a universal citizens’ wage for the precariat (e.g., Wacquant 1996; Standing 2011) resting on a supposed enlightened understanding of the need to defend society from the imminent threat presented by this new ‘dangerous class’ among those political elites and corporations that have so systematically pushed precarity in the first place.22

20 Se also Soros (1998).
21 Sorrell (2009 #63, quoted from Dale 2010).
22 See, for example, the critique on Standing’s political programme by Barchiesi (2012a).
Yet – historically - benevolent reforms in terms of extension of rights of citizenship have seldom come about, simply ‘from above’, without agency of broad intra- and trans-class coalitions of popular movements. It is an issue for which, testing to try to toll the fortune, represents a truly uncertain exercise in the current conjuncture. Current research has stressed the risk that established union strategies will - if still predominantly building their strategies on conservative assumptions belonging to a past Fordist era - inexorably loose the new precariat (Choonara 2011; Standing 2011; Peterson, Wahlström and Wennerhag 2012), and in particular the multitude of migrants in situations of complex precarity in terms of work, citizenship and daily livelihoods (Muliniari and Neergaard 2005, 2004; Trimikliniotis, Gordon and Zondo 2008). Other studies have problematised the agency of the so-called ‘new social movements’ tending to slide from critical activism for social transformation towards an institutionalised neo-liberal version of a ‘civil society’; that is social movements blending into a turbulent market for NGOs and INGOs, mutually competing for sub-contracting commodified service functions, once solidly owned or governed by a now retiring redistributive state (Kaldor 2003; cf., Ålund and Reichel 2007).

Nevertheless, it is important to investigate contingencies for prospective alternative scenarios; that is to ask the question: What is the actual space for civil society in the governance on migration? There is, more specifically, a need for further development of theory and analytical perspectives on social movements and the elucidation of political opportunity structures, sources of legitimacy and access to vertical and horizontal alliances under the variable conditions of neoliberal globalisation (e.g., Tarrow 2002; Laubenthal 2007).

Some innovative approaches to migration, citizenship and labour studies bring to mind Berthold Brecht’s illustrious parable, ‘Upheavals take place in dead-end streets’ through a focus on a transformative potential for ‘grounding globalisation’ (Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout 2008) driven by civil society activism; bottom up, yet beyond the confines of market affirmative informalisation from below. Engin Isin (2009), for one, opens perspectives for transcending a debate focused on formalised rights, in 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 to, he claims, a ‘passive status’ of formal ownership of citizenship. Activist modes of citizenship give, arguably, new meaning to citizenship, putting in question citizenship as ‘an abstract category of government’ by adding ‘acts that make citizens’, with potential of transforming modes of being political (op cit: 382-3). Along similar lines, several studies on irregular migrants have raised a question of inconsistency between formal regulations of citizenship status and ‘de facto citizenship’ conditions embedded in community solidarity and concrete livelihood strategies of migrants. Basok (2008), for one, has illustrated this with the notion of ‘grassroots-citizenship’, referring to the effects of inclusionary down to earth strategies among civil society actors in the Americas. In a similar vein, Webster and Joynt (2011) advertise a need for increased attention of labour unions to informal community agency in a study on livelihoods among a composite migrant precariat in Johannesburg.

These and similar research perspectives emphasise the importance of social movements and NGOs taking learning from knowledge production ‘from the ground up’ (Choudry and Kapoor 2010) in local communities and informal networks of migrants (e.g., Desai and Walsh 2010; cf., Motta 2011). They bring research on contemporary precarians beyond a representation as a new, emotionally and politically labile, ‘dangerous class’, targeted for being socially included in, supposedly still existing, liberal societies through compensatory paternalist policies. They highlight the importance of a dialectic approach to research on the agency of the new ‘precariat’ beyond the popular image of vulnerable victims. They are taken to credit by researchers arguing for a necessary reorientation of trade unions in the direction of a ‘community unionism’, from the historical trajectory and political experience of which a supposedly conservative ‘bread and butter unionism’ of the North should learn,

---

23 Fuller German original: ‘Umwälzungen finden in Sackgassen statt. Die Zukunft gehört denen, die die Möglichkeiten erkennen, bevor sie offensichtlich werden’ (Brecht 2000).
lest not to deceive and lose new categories of precarious workers and, in particular, a multitude of new migrants and ethnic minorities, differentially inserted into fractured neo-liberal labour markets and societies (Munck 2011). That is, in effect, 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; se also, Neilson and Rossiter 2008); a vision of ‘grounding globalisation’ 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 of a ‘networked linkage between local places across geographic space in a struggle to build power through spatial scale’ (Lambert 2010; cf., Castells 1996),24 has not passed without criticism. A hopeful, but idealist vision, but losing sight of the imperatives of capital accumulation; ‘[a] manifesto for a new world’ having ‘little to do with labor in the age of insecurity’, disputes Burawoy (2010: 306) in a pessimistic tone, and 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 globalisation, bottom up, is indeed a utopia, contends Lambert (2010: 390), but a vision of a realizable utopia - and uncompromising pessimism 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.

A survey of current research on migration and globalisation does, for certain, expose a plurality of normative moral-political utopian discourse, focused on promises of ‘human rights’ for migrants in terms of a universalising of citizenship, cutting politics of belonging loose from its long term fettering to the confines of the nation state. Yasemin Soysal (1994), for one, was a pioneer, bringing forth that persistent claims for ‘post-national membership’, evoking international human rights conventions, would make new potential available to action groups and migrant organisations for transnationalising their claims for social, political and cultural rights? Similar perspectives, developed through theoretical constructs, such as ‘cosmopolitanism’ or ‘transnational citizenship’,25 have remoulded and extended the idea of ‘belonging’ in contemporary globality.

Human rights, Samuel Moyn contends (2010: 1), emerge in our times, as the ‘last utopia’ after the implosion of other grand narratives - liberal and socialist alike - 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’.

Initiatives for the contestation of precarity of life, citizenship and work are indeed invited by a series of UN human rights declarations all entailing indivisible and egalitarian values, and with several of them with particular address to rights of migrants (see further, Likic-Brboric and Schierup 2011).26 These, as well as certain regionally based declarations, all emphasise the necessity of developing transnational norms and regulations. Yet, an emerging global governance regime on migration, is marked by ongoing rivalry between and within multilateral organizations and governments and littered by a plethora of human rights conventions and declarations, which have failed to impact on national contexts (see further, Likic, op.cit.; Grugel, 2011 #54). This conspicuous discrepancy between moral rhetoric and political

24 Elaborated in detail in Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout (2011).
25 Se, for example, Benhabib (2007), Delanty (2000) and Bauböck (1994).
26 Such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), or the 1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrants and Members of their Families and the ILO ‘s ‘decent work agenda’ with a particular relevance for the problematic of precarity and migrants’ rights.
practice brings actuality to a poignant dilemma for social justice and solidarity movements flagging ‘human rights’, and a consequent necessity of transcending the common sense of an inherently fractured moralising discourse; a dilemma most cuttingly formulated by Moyn (op. cit.: 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.

A dead end street? Still, let us replicate this oracular parable out of Brecht’s political thinking: ‘Upheavals take place in dead end streets. The future belongs to those who recognise the possible, before it becomes obvious’. The discontent of poignant dilemmas can bring pessimism or cynicism, but also bring forward what there is in what seems to be.

What is then – in this ostensible dead end street - the space for civil society? For filling a floating signifier of ‘human rights’ with claims and political practice for deeply transformative change under conditions of neoliberal hegemony - alternatively to transcend the discourse altogether? For knitting networks of solidarity among a disjointed multitude of precarians across the globe? For a contemporary countermovement of alienated others, contesting precarity? Is a recasting of the script of The Great Transformation for globality of the 21st Century indeed a worthwhile exercise? And could it benefit a fuller understanding of precarity, its discontents and contestation? These remain critical issues for research, demanding both further development of theory and in depth empirical investigation.

In this endeavour - as indicated by Ari Sitas (2010: 47) in his exposé on The Mandela Decade - blending dystopian and utopian thinking may be methodologically sound. In the current crisis there is no lack of dystopian imaginations, from whatever political perspective there is. But this may be an essential starting point for any penetrating analysis. For ‘[d]ystopian thinking has both an analytical and a moral core… On the one hand, it magnifies social trends and tendencies and, on the other, it warns of anti-social outcomes’ (ibid.). But dystopian imaginations in heavy doses may, at the same time - including critical advocates of alternatives to the current order of globalisation - lead to despondent realism or sardonic cynicism. ‘Utopian thinking’ may in contrast wilfully ignore antithetical trends ‘to lift people over the hill to gaze at how the possible could become real’.

However, while attempting ‘to preserve a logic of emancipation intact’, utopian thinking may, at the same time, magnify ‘threats to the project and disintegration of the movements that have nurtured it’ (ibid.).

‘Precarity’ is – encapsulating in a nutshell constraints as well as prospects for contestation - key for investigating and critically questioning neoliberal globality’s dystopia of extreme libertarian individualism, social polarisation, toxic risk and hyper-exploitation, as well as for exploring the sustainability of utopian promises for a better future.

Biographical note
Carl-Ulrik Schierup is a professor at Linköping University and director of the Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity and Society (REMESO). He has published widely on issues of nationalism, racism, multiculturalism and the political economy of international migration.

Aleksandra Ålund is a professor in Ethnic Studies at the University of Linköping, the Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity and Society. Her academic work includes numerous articles and books on ethnic relations, multiculturalism, racism and discrimination, youth, gender, and social movements.

27 Our translation from German.
Acknowledgement.

References
Barrientos, Stephanie (2007) 'Migrant and contract labour in global production systems: Addressing decent work for the most vulnerable workers' Prepared for the Living on the Margins Conference, Stellenbosch, 26-28 March.
Berlant, Lauren (2012) 'Austerity, Precarity, Awkwardness'


Burawoy, Michael (2006) 'Public Sociology vs. the Market', Public address, Tsinghua University, Beijing


Byrne, David (2005) 'Social Exclusion', Maidenhead: Open university press

Böhm, Steffen and Carlos Fernández (2005) ‘Velkom tu Hell’: Precariat Moscow’ *Ephemera*


Castles, Stephen (2011) 'Migration, Crisis and the Global Labour Market', *Globalizations*, 8 (3)


Choona, Esme (2011) 'Is there a precariat?', *Socialist Review* (October 2011)

Choudry, Aziz and Dip Kapoor (eds. 2010) *Learning from the ground up, Global perspective on socioal movements and knowledge production*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan


Philadelphia: Open University Press

Delgado Wise, Raúl (2012) 'The migration and labour question today: new imperialism, unequal development and forced migration'

*Word Social Forum on Migrations* Manila, 26-30 November

Schierup & Ålund – A Global Migrant Precariat

Movements and Knowledge Production: Learning from the ground up, New York: Palgrave MacMillan


Foti, Alex (2005) 'MAYDAY MAYDAY: euro flex workers, time to get a move on!' EIPCP multilingual webjournal http://www.republicart.net, ISSN 1811 - 1696


Goldring, Luin and Patricia Landholt (2011) 'Caught in the Work-Citizenship Matrix: The Lasting Effects of Precarious Legal Status on Work for Toronto Immigrants', Globalizations, 8 (3)


Hall-Jones, P. (2009) 'Precariat meet’n’greet'

Hall, Stuart, et al. (1978) Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order, London: Macmillan


Institute, Transnational (2010) ‘Migrant Voices Reclaiming Migration, Development and Human Rights' Homepage of the Transnational Institute Transnational Institute,

Istin, Engin F. (2009) 'Citizenship in Flux: The Figure of the Activist Citizen', Subjectivity, 29: 367-88


Keyworth, Jonny (2012) The Sudan Uprisings – clues for an anti-capitalist agenda The Newwolf


Kumar, Krishan (1987) Utopian and Anti-Utopian Thinking in the 20th Century, Oxford: Blackwell


Likić, Branka and Carl-Ulrik Schierup (2011) 'Gobernanza global asimétrica y derechos laborales de los migrantes', in Delgado Wise, Raúl and Humberto Márquez (eds.) *Desarrollo Desigual y Migración Forzada: Una Mirada desde el Sur Global*, Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa


Nielsen, Brett and Ned Rossiter (2008) 'Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25 (7-8)

Nikolinakos, Marios (1973) *Politische ™konomie der Gastarbeiterfrage: Migration und Kapitalismus*: Rowohl


P2P_Foundation (2012)


Piore, Michael J. (1979) *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press


Raes, Stephan, et al. (2002) 'Stitched up: The rise and fall of the Turkish garment industry in Amsterdam', in Rath, Jan (ed.) *Unravelling the Rag Trade: Verso: 71–86


Schierup, Carl-Ulrik and Aleksandra Ålund (2011b) 'From Paradoxes of Multiculturalism to Paradoxes of Liberalism', *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 9 (2)


Slavnic, Zoran (2011) 'Personal communication',


Standing, Guy (2012) *Migrants and Denizens. Core of the Precariat*, Norrköping:


Toksöz, Gülay and Çağla Ünlütürk Ulutas (2012) 'Is Migration Feminized? A Gender- and Ethnicity-Based Review of the Literature on Irregular Migration to Turkey' University of Ankara, To be published soon


Waite, Louise (2008) 'A Place and Space for a Critical Geography of Precarity?', *Geography Compass*, 3 (1): 412-33

Waite, Louise (2009) 'A Place and Space for a Critical Geography of Precarity?', *Geography Compass*, 3 (1): 412-33


Waterman, Peter and Jane Wills (2001) *Place, Space And The New Labour Internationalisms*, Oxford: John Wiley And Sons Ltd


Schierup & Ålund – A Global Migrant Precariat