

JOURNAL FÜR ENTWICKLUNGSPOLITIK

vol. XXX 4–2014

CAPITALIST PERIPHERIES: PERSPECTIVES ON PRECARISATION FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND NORTH

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Herausgegeben von:
Mattersburger Kreis für Entwicklungspolitik
an den österreichischen Universitäten

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Precarity and Social Disintegration: A Relational Concept

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Precarity has become a major theme in the social science diagnoses of our times (Aulenbacher 2009; Bourdieu et al. 1997). The precarity debate, however, is marked by dissonances that go well beyond the common parameters of scientific controversy. Diverging emphases not only mark the precarity debate in the Global North and South, but also the discussions within the English-speaking world and beyond. Within the Anglo-Saxon academic world, studies have mainly focused on the flexibilisation of labour markets (Koch/Fritz 2013; Kalleberg 2011) and on Standing's thesis of the precariat as 'a class in the making' (Standing 2011; critically: Munck 2013). With the exception of some of Bourdieu's work (Bourdieu et al. 1997; Bourdieu 1998), the central European debate on precarity has hardly been taken notice of in the English-speaking world. This also holds true for Robert Castel's work (2000, 2005, 2011), which was an important stimulus for German research programmes on precarisation (Castel/Dörre 2009). Whilst in the North, the main concern is with wage labour becoming disembedded from its protective, social welfare shell (Brinkmann et al. 2006; Bourdieu et al. 1997), in the South there has been a strong interest in the social instability of precarious societies and forms of violent, 'unregulated' conflict (Lee/Kofman 2012; von Holdt 2012). Here, interests have been in precarity's root causes beyond the sphere of wage labour. Others, however, have formulated a more generalised criticism of precarity diagnoses and have rather emphasised increasing structural heterogeneity and fragmentation of labour markets (Burchardt et al. 2013) and class relations (Antunes 2013).

In what follows, we will introduce precarity as a sociological concept (1), offer a definition that captures precarity as a relational concept (2) and will refer to our own empirical studies in order to come up with an

extended typology of precarity (3). We will then recapture the state of the precarity debate in Germany and Central Europe (4), before offering some suggestions regarding the (comparative) precarity debate in North and South in the conclusion (5).

1. Precarity as a sociological concept

In the German language, the term ‘precarious’ literally means revocable, insecure or delicate. The origins of the term can be found in the Latin *precarium*, referring to a loan (of an object, of land or rights), the right to use of which could be revoked at any time. Precarity thus describes an insecure, unstable relationship that is subject to cancellation at short notice. The relationship is one of dependency: the recipient of a good becomes dependent on the donor. The opposite would be a stable, secure relationship, constituted by equal rights. In sociology, the term ‘precarity’ refers to insecure and unstable conditions of work, employment and life in general. The more recent precarity debate among scholars of the Global North has resulted from the emergence of low-paid, temporary and unprotected employment, which became more common even among academically qualified workers. For these groups, *lavoro precario* (Bologna 1977), an Italian term coined during the 1970s, was characteristic. In France, the implementation of the ‘*revenue minimum d’insertion*’, designed with the purpose of re-integrating the long-term unemployed (Schultheis/Herold 2010: 244; Barbier 2013: 17), made *precarité* an issue of public debate. Henceforth, sociologists used the term ‘precarity’ as a broad category in order to bundle a whole range of social phenomena together. André Gorz used the term with reference to ‘marginal workers’, external staff, and also the increasing numbers involved in domestic services (Gorz 1989: 100-102, 200), which expanded as work and employment became ‘flexibilised’. In the works of a group surrounding Pierre Bourdieu, the concept was used to analyse the ‘de-collectivisation’ of the industrial working class and processes of social exclusion, especially of the migrant population, in the French suburbs. In the German social sciences, precarity meanwhile remained marginal. Those who did address phenomena of precarity rather subsumed these under terms such as ‘atypical employment’ or ‘poverty’.

This has in fact only changed quite recently. Today, however, precarity, precarisation and precariat have become well-established categories in Germany, not only in professional sociology but also in everyday discourse.

Robert Castel's works on the transformation of Fordist societies based on wage labour were highly influential in Germany. To Castel, the remarkable integrative capacities of Fordist wage labour societies and full employment resulted from a double movement. For many decades, the secular trend towards a social generalisation of wage labour was accompanied by the embeddedness of the employment relationship in welfare state arrangements. This resulted in what has been retrospectively termed a socially protected normal or standard employment relationship (Mückenberger 2010: 403-420). To the vast majority of wage labourers, especially men, embedded wage labour brought about a relative decoupling of income and employment situations from market risks. Fordist capitalism in continental Europe was still marked by class-specific inequalities and by gendered, asymmetrical labour market integration. Male full employment was unimaginable without unpaid care work, provided mainly by women. Migrants (so-called 'guest workers') left the Southern periphery of Europe for the centre and took up badly paid and low status jobs. However, for the majority of workers, salaried employees and their families, the post-war era marked a transition from a wage labour contract to wage labour as a recognised social status, i.e. social citizenship. Wage labourers now disposed of 'social property' (Castel 2005: 41)² and rights built up for citizens (Standing 2011, 2014). Poverty and precarity did still exist, but were pushed to the margins of continental Europe's societies of full employment.

The recent precarity debate reflects the fact that the close linkage of wage labour and social property, so central to continental welfare states irrespective of their specific characteristics, has been successively disrupted since the 1970s (Albert 1992; Crouch/Streeck 1997; Hall/Soskice 2001). Under Fordism, even alienated wage labour had strong socially integrative effects as it came with rights to social integration and participation. In general, these rights have lost their protective function and post-Fordist societies based on wage labour are splitting into three zones (Castel 2000: 360), differentiated according to levels of security. The majority of employees are still in protected standard employment and remain fairly well integrated into social networks. Below this 'zone of integration' there

is an expanding 'zone of precarity'. Here we find a heterogeneous conglomeration of the vulnerable. These groups have to confront insecure employment and living conditions and frequently experience social network erosion. At the bottom of the hierarchy, there is a third zone, a 'zone of detachment'. In this zone, relative social isolation accompanies more or less permanent exclusion from labour markets.

Precarity thus is by no means a new phenomenon; however, its current central European forms are specific indeed. In the post-welfare states of the Global North, contemporary forms of precarity do not equal absolute misery and pauperisation. Rather, these forms are defined in relation to the status of social citizenship, which came to life during Fordist prosperity and remains constitutive of the conscience of mainstream society in the centre of continental Europe (Paugam 2009). Social insecurity is returning to the Global North and thus affects societies that, in an historical perspective, remain wealthy and secure (Castel 2005). We are thus not observing a return to the pauperism of early industrialisation. In addition, concepts of social exclusion, focussing on labour market exclusion, cannot fully capture the specific nature of today's precarity. Rather, Europe's post-welfare states are witnessing a transition from *marginal* forms of precarity towards *discriminatory* forms (Paugam 2008; Dörre 2009). Discriminatory precarity in post-welfare states successively captures previously secure social groups; it not only affects fringe groups of workers but also extends to the very core of employment.

2. Definitions of precarity

Many researchers have successfully used Castel's zone model as a heuristic template, and its analytical usefulness has been vindicated by empirical research on precarity in Germany and beyond (Baethge et al. 2005; Brinkmann et al. 2006; Bude/Willisch 2006; Schultheis/Schulz 2005; Holst et al. 2009; Busch et al. 2010; Pelizzari 2009; Scherschel et al. 2012; Castel/Dörre 2009). Whilst precarity research has flourished in recent years, there is broad scope when it comes to defining the term and to empirical operationalisation. Given this diversity, it is currently difficult to define something like a basic consensus in the field. However, two

manners of use of the term precarity can be distinguished. As a *time-diagnostic concept*, precarity addresses changes at the intersections of employment, everyday life, welfare state and democracy. It refers to an encompassing trepidation of society (Ehrenberg 2011) and remains rather vague. This vagueness has an advantage to it, however, as it helps us to see relations between singular phenomena (Dörre 2009). Only this notion allows us to understand precarity as a regime of power, control and disciplinatio that is affecting and changing societies as a whole. These time-diagnostic uses of the concept can be distinguished from rather narrow, *empirically oriented and workable notions*. Empirical research requires clearly defined terms that can be operationalised. For this purpose, a differentiation between precarious *employment* and precarious *work* needs to be made. Logically, this means that precarity can take on a broad variety of forms. One can also imagine the entanglement and mutual enforcement of these two dimensions.

Definitions of precarity can include not just structural criteria but also the subjective modes of processing insecure working and living conditions (Dörre 2005; Sander 2012). Structurally precarious employment is not necessarily subjectively conceived as such. If one integrates self-perception and ascription, precarity neither amounts to total labour market exclusion, nor to absolute poverty, to complete social isolation or political apathy. Rather, precarity is a relational category, always linked to societal definitions and standards of 'normality'. According to a preliminary definition by the Jena research group, employment is precarious if it does not permanently allow for subsistence above a certain cultural and socially defined level. Employment of this kind does indeed discriminate because it does not allow employees to realise their potential at work, it is not gainful employment, and is disregarded by society. It has a lasting discriminatory effect as it negatively affects social integration, opportunities for political participation and the capacity to plan one's life. Precarious work and its social constitution imply that those individuals or groups working and living in precarious employment fall below standard levels of protection and integration as commonly defined in welfare states. At the level of subjective experience, precarious forms of employment and/or work evoke feelings of meaninglessness and perceived disdain from others.

3. Precarity – an extended typology

We are using Castel's zone model as a heuristic template in order to develop an extended typology of precarity, which systematically includes subjective orientations and ways of processing insecurity. This typology has as its empirical base a qualitative study which led us to reconstruct nine typical processing modes of social (in-) security (chart 1). Empirically, this exploratory study consisted of 100 theme-centred interviews with workers in both open-ended and precarious employment, and with people who were out of work. Additionally, 36 interviews with experts in the field and two focus group interviews with temporary workers were conducted. Research was conducted across a broad range of sectors, including the automotive and financial industries and temp agencies. Our typology proves the relevance of Castel's zone model for the German 'labour-based society'; it does, however, generate differentiated results about the subjective processing of precarity.

The typology illustrates that perceived threats do not increase in a linear manner as one moves to the bottom of the hierarchy of types. What rather seems to be the case is that the anticipation of social decline is particularly present in those groups that still have something to lose, i.e. those who find themselves in the 'zone of integration'. Experiences of insecurity thus cannot be confined to the 'zone of precarity'. But then again, precarity is not, at least not to the same extent, 'everywhere' (Bourdieu 1998). The most important findings of our study may be summarised as follows:

Zone of integration
1. Secured integration ('the secured')
2. Atypical integration ('the unconventional' or 'self-managers')
3. Insecure integration ('the insecure')
4. Threatened integration (the 'threatened by social decline' type)
Zone of precarity
5. Precarious employment as an opportunity / temporary integration ('the hopeful')
6. Precarious employment as permanent arrangement ('the realists')
7. Attenuated precarity ('the satisfied')
Zone of detachment
8. Surmountable exclusion (those 'willing to change')
9. Controlled exclusion / simulated integration ('the left-behind')

Chart I: (Dis-) integration potentials of employment – a typology

Source: author's elaboration

(I) *Attitudes towards the future and life-planning*: In the 'zone of precarity' we encounter phenomena reminiscent of those analysed by Bourdieu (2000) in his early studies of the Kabyle sub-proletariat in Algeria. Then as today, precarious situations do not provide a base for long-term life planning. This is what sets the precarious groups apart from the proletariat in the old centres of capital accumulation. For the proletariat, stable employment and regular wages were the conditions on which a rational, calculating and future-oriented consciousness could develop something like a life plan as well as ideas of how to achieve the desired future. The proletariat had thus achieved some authority to dispose of their lives in the here and now and on this basis only it could envisage a (collective) appropriation of the future. The precariat, in contrast, were living below an economic and cultural threshold that, for Bourdieu, pre-conditioned the development of a rational approach towards time and the capacity to envisage societal alternatives. The fact that precarious employment does not provide a base for long-term life planning is the most important aspect when respondents evaluate employment conditions (type 5, 6). While the predominantly young respondents amongst those in type 5 still

articulate an aspiration for the ‘normalisation’ of one’s occupational biography, to the ‘realists’ (type 6), precarious employment represents a kind of access to a ‘labour-based society’ to which there is hardly any alternative. There appears to be a consolidation of precarious employment if one considers the sequence of occupations of these individuals. Older respondents in particular describe their working life as a permanent move between temporary jobs not adequate to their skill-levels and intermittent periods of unemployment. They seem to have accepted that any half-decent, but temporary, job is bound to be followed by spells of unemployment. And quite naturally, they have accumulated an arsenal of everyday techniques allowing them to survive in the midst of this volatility. They internalise experiences of insecurity, which strongly indicates that the ‘realists’ are coming to terms with the idea of living a life within the ‘zone of precarity’. The main goal of this group is to at least temporarily find regular work with somewhat decent pay in order to avoid plunging into the ‘zone of detachment’.

(2) *Changed meaning of employment:* In sum, the typology contains many indicators pointing to a profound shift in the meaning of employment. Not only for the precariously employed, but also for the ‘insecure’ (type 3) and those ‘threatened by social decline’ (type 4), who remain formally integrated via a standard form of employment, wage labour is losing its function as the main social ‘adhesive’, i.e. as a medium of integration. One consequence is a weaker inclination among employees to voice demands concerning the quality of work even though aspirations related to work content have by no means fully disappeared in the groups of the ‘hopeful’ and of those ‘threatened by social decline’. This is exemplified by the fact that precariously employed people, once they actually do make it into the core workforce, soon start to think about options for their ‘small ascent by further training’. But ultimately, qualitative demands with respect to work are at least temporarily put aside. The aspiration of temporary workers is to become part of a core workforce (Castel 2000). In this sense, the reproductive dimension, the aspiration for income and employment security, conditions the work consciousness of many of those who are precariously employed.

On the basis of our typology, we can grasp more precisely what constitutes a life in the ‘zone of vulnerability’. Characteristically – and here

there is a significant difference to the traditional sub-proletariat – there is precisely not the kind of total social uprooting and pauperisation. Rather, precariously employed people are in a peculiar sense in ‘abeyance’ (Kraemer/Speidel 2004: 119pp). On the one hand, these weakly resourced workers still envisage that they will catch up and keep in touch with the ‘zone of normality’ and must mobilise all available energy in order to perhaps attain that goal one day. On the other hand, permanent efforts are required just to ward off social decline and a plunge into the ‘zone of detachment’.

(3) *The disintegration paradox*: This is what constitutes the specific vulnerability of the precariously employed. For them, the old promises of welfare state capitalism, according to which a male standard employment relationship is the basis for a slow but steady increase in prosperity, have been revoked. Yet nonetheless, their lives are not ruled solely by experiences of disintegration. As paradoxical as it may sound, that peculiar ‘abeyance’, accompanied by severe effects of disintegration, is in fact a source of motivation for extraordinary efforts towards re-integration. These efforts demonstrate that the economic habitus has not yet been completely destroyed and the capacity to plan their own life with a view to the future is still present, at least as an aspiration. For this reason, the *primary* integration potentials (employment and income security, social recognition, identification with one’s work) can then be replaced by *secondary* integration potentials.

Secondary integration potentials imply that the prospect of socially protected wage labour structures the expectations of those aspiring to stable employment. This is the case when the precariously employed consider their employment as a jumpstarter to get back into the ‘zone of normality’ (type 5). In such cases, precarious employment is considered unavoidable. One has to endure such conditions temporarily in order to retain the prospect of secure employment. Thus rather ironically, the attractiveness of precarious work lies in the possibility of its supersession. Obviously, the strength of such expectations varies markedly according to gender, ethnicity, age and degree of qualification. Particularly younger, better qualified respondents (i.e. agency workers hoping to be recruited by the hiring company) speculate on the ‘adhesive effect’ of insecure employment. This finding does come with one important limitation, as it mainly depicts subjective orien-

tations of young German employees. As precarious employment becomes the new normal for social groups these ways of processing will evaporate. This becomes apparent in another type: We also speak of secondary integration when the fear of social decline motivates efforts for re-integration (type 6). This is the case with the precariously employed, who see a precarious employment relationship as the last remaining option for escaping permanent exclusion from the employment system altogether. In such cases, the anticipated exclusion effects of long-term unemployment subjectively hold greater weight than those discriminations that accompany precarious employment. And finally, secondary integration potentials also work through accepted gender or ethnically related inequalities and self-definitions. This can be observed when female part-time workers in retail consider themselves to be ‘additional-earners’, whose main identity is that of a traditional homemaker. The same is found with young migrants, who accept informal work because it seems more gainful to them than professional training (type 8, 9). What marks this group is that its members by no means consider themselves to be ‘excluded’ or ‘left behind’. Far more common here are such self-descriptions as ‘working unemployed’, stressing their ability to make ends meet even in the shadow economy. By reference to these ways of processing we can define the concept of discriminating precarity more precisely. Even in the heyday of the Fordist welfare state (and especially under the conservative welfare model) integration based on full employment was mediated by domination for large groups (e.g. wives of workers in standard employment) or was not realisable at all (for so-called ‘guest workers’). This can increase an individual’s readiness to accept precarious employment. Secondary integration thus refers to subjective adjustment to forms of secondary exploitation. Unlike primary capitalist exploitation, this frequently very brutal form of exploitation is not based on – even in its contractual fixation – an exchange of equivalents. Secondary exploitation implies fraud or even robbery of resources (Federici 2013) and is legitimised by discriminating social constructions of ethnicity and gender (Dörre 2012: 108-III).

(4) *Disciplination*: Of course, integration means something completely different in the ‘zone of vulnerability’ or the ‘zone of detachment’ than it does in the world of standard work relations. The primary integration potentials with respect to the world of work (satisfaction of reproductive

and qualitative work-related aspirations) are weakened; this loss can at most be partially counter-balanced by secondary integration potentials, but can never be fully compensated for. Proximity, in terms of the world of work, to the 'zone of precarity' has an impact on the integration potential of permanent employment. Members of the core workforce begin to get a vague idea of their own substitutability when they become aware of the work performance of external workers, the mere visibility and perception of a 'zone of precarity' alone has a disciplining effect.

In the world of work, fears of precarisation foster forms of integration that are based less on participation than on subtle force, i.e. mechanisms of disciplination and processes of social closure. In this sense, the emergence of a zone of insecure employment enforces the adjustment to a new mode of social control. The social cohesion provided by the standard employment relationship is eroding. The place of a mode of integration that – not exclusively, but largely – rested on the material and democratic participation of wage-earners is now being taken by forms of integration in which the subtle effect of competitive mechanisms of disciplination are increasingly important (Heitmeyer 1997: 27).

4. The state of the debate

Irrespective of future research, one can register the current state of social scientific debate on precarity in Germany and continental Europe. Precarity is increasingly becoming a 'normal' form of labour organisation with its specific characteristics and manifestations (Castel 2011: 136), also in Germany. Here we are witness to the emergence of a society of precarious full employment. While the number of economically active people in Germany rose to a record high of 42 million in 2013, the volume of hours worked and paid for has decreased significantly by more than 10 % since 1991 (Destatis 2013). Work volume is not only distributed among ever more wage-earners, but it is moreover distributed rather unevenly. Employment expansion is taking place, not exclusively but largely, via precarious jobs, performed mostly by women in personal service occupations (Holst/Dörre 2013). Even though not all non-standard employment relationships are precarious, their expansion to nearly 40% (Struck 2014: 129) of the total is a

strong indicator for precarisation. More than 50% of those in non-standard employment now find themselves in the low-wage sector, 24.3% of the economically active population (IAQ 2013; Bosch 2014). Women (30.8%) and non-German nationals (62.6%) have an above average risk of ending up in low-wage employment (Bosch 2014).

A historically new form of discriminatory precarity has thus taken hold in Germany, which operates as a mechanism of disciplination and control. The new form of precarisation establishes power asymmetries that penetrate the different segments of the 'wage labour society' and the relations of social reproduction. Discriminatory precarity originates from the construction of a special societal status. From the perspective of still-protected groups, as well as in the self-perception of those in insecure conditions, this special status constitutes the problem of a minority only.

In the interplay between attribution and self-perception, precarity constitutes a hierarchy, and those who live under the most difficult of conditions while commanding the fewest power resources, consider themselves to be part of minority groups. Their daily conduct of life deviates from the standard as defined by 'mainstream society'. While this special status is also constructed by gender, nationality and ethnicity, it is nevertheless something specific, and something that is politically constructed.³

Precarity in wealthy societies thus not only refers to specific social positions and is not just a temporary pathology. The regime of power and disciplination unfolds across labour-based societies and their labour market segments. It destroys social citizenship by producing status groups of precariously employed people and denying them fundamental participatory rights. Compared to workers in standard employment, these groups are less often unionised, they are hardly represented in the institutions of workplace co-determination, and as the conservative German welfare system is still based on the standard employment relationship, they do not command full social rights (Koch/Fritz 2013). Precarious groups have, at least in Germany, a below average turnout in elections and are underrepresented when it comes to other forms of political participation (Schäfer 2013; Dörre et al. 2013: 391-395). This partial deprivation of rights for these modern 'vagabonds' hollows out existing democratic institutions.

However, one must add that the hollowing out of social citizenship by means of precarisation is an uneven process. It is influenced by the persist-

ence of democratic institutions and encounters trade union and political opposition. For this reason, the destruction of social capitalism rather resembles what Luxemburg described as the ‘gnawing to pieces’, ‘assimilation’ and as a ‘crumbling’ of the old mode of production (Luxemburg 1975 [1913]: 364). In Germany, the process of creative destruction was pushed only to a point at which the relics of social citizenship constitute something like a second reality in the upper echelons of the labour-based society – an exterior, not yet fully subject to the principles of competition. The so-called German model, which again is the subject of so much discussion these days, is a hybrid. It is a regime structured by finance capitalism that has preserved the social aspect of social capitalism as a subdominant structure. This simultaneity of the unequal explains the authority-conserving effects of precarity. Secure core workforces, commanding organisational power and social and co-determination rights, do still exist. They represent a form of existence that many of the precariously employed are striving to achieve. Conversely, the ‘zone of precarity’ reaches deep into the core of the workforce. Those in open-ended employment constantly have the precarised groups in their sight, and this is a constant warning for them. For this reason, they begin to regard their employment condition as a privilege, which needs to be defended ‘tooth and nail’.

5. Conclusions: gaps and further research

Thus far, we have focused on precarity in the post-welfare societies of the Global North. Elsewhere (Dörre 2013), we have hinted at several controversies and gaps in theorising precarity (including gender dimensions, formal and informal precarity, precarity and capacity for collective action). The concept of discriminatory precarity, developed in Europe against the background of the demise of Fordism, can hardly claim to capture change in parts of the world where standard employment relationships have never really taken hold and encompassing welfare states did not exit (Neilson/Rossiter 2008).⁴

This aside, one needs to add that mature welfare states also always excluded certain social groups (women, migrants). Conversely, in state-socialist countries, or in South Africa for example, forms of open-ended

employment did exist and served as a positive point of reference for workers. Certainly, the central European discussion on precarity needs to be brought into much closer contact with perspectives beyond those of central Europe (see for example von Holdt 2012; Lee/Kofman 2012; Lindell 2010; Webster et al. 2008; Munck 2013; Arnold/Pickles 2011). Precarity can mean very different things even within Northern or Southern societies. At the same time one should not rule out processes of convergence within transnational production chains. This throws up further research questions, a few of which we will now outline.

(1) The first thematic field touches upon the connection between production models and care regimes. Germany's strength as an exporting nation of industrial goods is traditionally based on the abasement of paid and unpaid care work. Currently, there is increasing pressure on the provision of care services as a public good, because reproductions costs are to be reduced and state-financed demand for these services is insufficient. Political actors react to this situation by creating quasi-markets on which public and private providers of care compete, with wage costs being a main competitive factor. Work intensification, precarisation of employment, skills shortages and a re-allocation of care to private household ensue. Gaps in care and other services are partly filled by informally and precariously employed migrant workers, who often have to leave their children in their respective countries of origin. As transnational production systems become established, so do care chains, characterised by precarious forms of life. More research is required in order to establish how exactly regular employment and work in households intersect (Dörre et al. 2014).

(2) The economic crisis and the politics of austerity have led to a situation in some European societies where societal majorities now find themselves in precarious situations – similar to countries in the Global South. In Greece, unemployment rose from 7.7% in 2008 to 27.3% in 2013, with youth unemployment (persons below the age of 25) reaching 58.3% in 2013 (Eurostat 2014). Average incomes fell by 8% in the two years of 2010/11. Meanwhile, the share of jobs not subject to social insurance contributions has risen to 36%. Against the background of drastic pension cuts and growing numbers of homeless people, the number of suicides has reached record highs (Markantonatou 2014). In other words: Greece has, very much like other countries, turned into a *precarious society*. In these societies it is not

just wage labour that has become fragile but also those binding social norms that used to govern social coexistence. In these societies the frames of reference and the relations of precarity are shifting. The effects might best be explored from a comparative, North-South perspective.

(3) Possibly the most important issue for future research should be the capacity of precarious groups to develop structures of self-help as well as capacities to resist and protest collectively. The precarity discourse in developed capitalist countries still focuses on the destructive, disuniting effects of social insecurity. This, however, begins to change as precarious workers' involvement with trade unions and social movements as well as their participation in riots and other forms of social unrest have become visible (Schmalz/Dörre 2013). Here, a broad field of (comparative) study has opened up, especially since many countries from the Global South can point to extensive experience with precarious groups' social movements and political activism.

Whether or not precarity will function as a catalyst for powerful collective actors is a question that must remain unanswered for the time being. One thing, however, is certain: discriminatory precarity in wealthy societies is linked to phenomena of precarity in the Global South, where majorities of people have lived in precarious situations for a long time (Jütting/De Laiglesia 2009; ILO 2012; OECD 2012). In some countries of Eastern and Southern Europe, welfare states exist in rudimentary form only and precarity now impacts the majorities of the populace (Sola et al. 2013; Matković 2013; Van Lancker 2013; Lehndorff 2012). Above all, different types and shapes of precarity are being interrelated (Lee/Kofman 2012) by transnational production networks (Butollo/Lüthje 2013; Burchardt et al. 2013) and care chains (Hochschild 2001: 131). This is certainly not a comprehensive list but it indicates that, even though social conditions are different, at least on this level the precarious societies of the Global South are irreversibly linked to precarity in the wealthy countries of the Global North. Here, safeguarding the wealth of selected groups comes at a price. This price is being paid by the new 'vagabonds' of the 21st century, those plebeian masses (Therborn 2012) condemned to 'unworthy labour', the modern precarians of North and South.

- 1 Ingo Singe provided the translation of the original German version of this article and critical comments. I am also grateful for detailed and stimulating comments by two anonymous referees that helped to improve the manuscript.
- 2 “Social property could be described as the production of equivalent security services as could previously be acquired only through private property” (Castel 2005: 41p).
- 3 ‘Politically constructed’ here refers to the fact that the ‘Hartz IV’ reforms contributed to the creation of a status below the threshold of social respectability. The socially very heterogeneous group of benefit recipients was thus homogenised by force and this status increasingly becomes the low point of reference of precarity.
- 4 This is an oversimplification, as international research on welfare states has convincingly argued that this neglects the fact that some countries in Latin America and Asia did in fact develop welfare programmes as part of development strategies in the first half of the 20th century (see for example Bayón 2006; Wehr et al. 2012).

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Abstracts

This contribution conceptualises precarity as a relational category that must refer to definitions of social normality standards in order to be meaningful. Within the post-welfare states of the Global North, a new form of discriminatory precarity has taken hold. As a regime of disciplination and domination, this new form permeates all segments of societies based on wage labour. Building on Castels' zone model and empirical research, we develop an extended typology of wage labour's (dis-) integration potentials. This typology combines structural criteria with subjective ways of processing insecurity. Finally, we recapitulate the current precarity discourse in Central Europe and discuss potential research that could bring approaches in the Global North and South closer together.

Der Beitrag versteht Prekarität als relationale Kategorie, deren Aussagekraft wesentlich von der Definition gesellschaftlicher Normalitätsstandards abhängt. In den post-wohlfahrtsstaatlichen Kapitalismen des Globalen Nordens hat sich eine neue Form diskriminierender Prekarität herausgebildet, die als Disziplinierungs- und Herrschaftsregime alle Segmente der Arbeitsgesellschaft durchzieht. Aufbauend auf dem Zonenmodell Robert Castels und umfangreichen eigenen empirischen Erhebungen entwickelt der Beitrag eine erweiterte Typologie der (Des-)Integrationspotenziale von Erwerbsarbeit, die subjektive Verarbeitungsmuster von Unsicherheit einschließt. Schließlich werden der derzeitige Status der kontinentaleuropäischen Prekaritätsdiskussion dargelegt und mögliche Forschungszugänge für eine notwendige Annäherung der Prekarisierungsdiskurse im Globalen Norden und Süden erörtert.

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