Article

Precariat – What it Is and Isn't – Towards an Understanding of What it *Does*

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Abstract
Guy Standing's description of the precariat in his 2011 book has revitalized the debate on what the precariat is, and what it is not. Although the book faced criticism from labour studies, Marxist approaches and others, it opened up a new discussion of precarity under neoliberal capitalism. This article draws on understandings that link the notion of the precariat (and processes of precarization) to practices and investigates links between immigration and precarity. It argues that the analysis of what precarity is should be supplemented by an inquiry into what it *does*. Precarity is here understood as a mode for analysing economy and for rethinking heterogeneous identities and group formations. The article uses two cases, Lampedusa in Hamburg 2013–2015 and the "Freedom Not Frontex" action in June 2014, to illustrate how processes of precarization play out in everyday life situations and the economic, legal and social system for immigrants.

Keywords
agency, immigration, neoliberalism, political subjectivities, precarity, resistance

Introduction

> "This message is from me to all brother and sister who are like me, to be strong and not give up until your get your rights. Nobody is stronger than others". (Statement by El Mouthena, from Refugeeprotest, 2014)

Guy Standing's description of the precariat (2011; and in a follow-up in 2014) has revitalized the debate on what the precariat is, and recently, what it is not. Standing's grand characteristic of the precariat (as constituting a new [dangerous] class) met harsh critique in parts of academia and leftist venues (e.g. Breman, 2013; Frase, 2013; Seymour, 2012). However, the rejection of the precariat as a new or separate class was articulated before Standing's book *The Precariat* was published in 2011 (e.g. Neilson and Rossiter, 2005, 2008; Robinson, 2011; Tsianos, 2007). By the mid-2000s, researchers investigating the EuroMayDay campaigns questioned the idea that the activists protesting against precarization (and later austerity) could be seen as constituting one unified social actor,

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and even less a new class (Doerr, 2010). The problem, as Neilson and Rossiter (2008) defined it, was that too much was being put into the concept thereby depriving it of analytical power. With a concept taken from Laclau, it has become an empty signifier. This article draws on understandings linking the notion of the precariat (and processes of precarization) to practice. Precariat and precarity are here understood as having a performative component and as an everyday phenomenon. Following Shukaitis (2013), the article asks what it *does*, rather than what it *is*: "What does precarity add to political analysis and strategy"? Second, the article contends that precarity *does* refer to a structural condition but one that characterizes the economic condition and workplace as well as the social space. It characterizes not only employment conditions but the social system as such. Precarity is hence understood as a mode for analysing economy and for rethinking heterogeneous identities and group formations under neoliberal capitalism. Precarity is not understood as constituting a class (in a structural sense), but drawing on experiences from political activist perspectives precarity becomes a point of departure for creating a common space for social struggles and for producing new political subjectivities.

The role of migrants in the advanced capitalist economies defined by neoliberalism and increased flexibilization, globalization and mobility has gained attention in political economy, labour market studies, in sociological and ethnographic perspectives and more recently in (critical) border studies. The migrant is often described as the emblem of the precariat – the precarious figure per se. Standing also situates migrants as a central group in the growing precariat but does not prescribe the group much potential for agency. Change is not bound to come from this part of the precariat. In contrast, Hardt and Negri (2004) have characterized migrants as a special category within the multitude that embodies revolutionary potential. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri (2000) described the conditions existing with the forms of global sovereignty formed by global neoliberalism. Multitude is the lived experiences and alternative to this characterized by an embedded urge for resistance against exploitation and repression and the struggle for a democratic society. They argue that:

> […] most migrations are driven by the need to escape conditions of violence, starvation, or depravation, but together with that negative condition there is also the positive desire for wealth, peace, and freedom. This combined act of refusal and expression of desire is enormously powerful. (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 133)

Mezzadra (2007) has argued that migrant struggles prefigure the struggles of the precariat because migration tests the limits of capitalist control (and the degree to which states can manage migration), and because the precariousness of migrant labour can spread to the entire workforce. Not as a "virus" through a causal effect but in terms of similarity of conditions and as the effect of a general political-economic strategy of accumulation in neoliberal capitalism. A similar analysis was made by parts of the precarity movement itself. The Frassanito-network, which also sees the migrant as sharing all the forms of precarization and depreciation, claims that:

> To talk about migrants [*sic*] labor means to talk about a general tendency of labor to mobility, to diversity, to deep changes, which is already affecting although with different degrees of intensity all workers. Because of the possible extension of these conditions we speak of a political centrality of migrants [*sic*] work. (2005: IV)

The migrant becomes a central figure in both the understanding of precarity and processes of precarization and in the strategies and struggles developing from this condition. As the Frassanito-network claims, migrant labour is a political category as it draws attention to, and forestalls, the general conditions of contemporary labour: "contemporary labour is becoming

migrant" (No Border, 2004). They do so because migrant labour embodies the experiences of precarity and because the mobility which is the key characteristic of migration is also the response to borders and identities. Thereby migrant struggles not only prefigure the struggles of the precariat as Mezzadra claims, migrants in this reading instinctively react against neoliberalism and can inspire other actors and activists to do the same (see Sivetidis, 2006 for a longer discussion). Linking migrant struggles with other types of social struggles taking place under the heading of the "precariat" therefore offers a reservoir of actions and strategies which can be employed to struggle for social change more broadly. The interlink between migration and precarity hence offers a productive point of departure for analysing social and economic conditions and attempts to create a common ground for struggle, agency and contestation beyond the individual migrant.

The article progresses as follows. A theoretical discussion of the related concepts of precarity (condition), precariat (identity) and precarization (process) is followed by a section on reactions to and from the precariat and a discussion of the potential of precarity as a tool for resistance and a possible catalyst for transformation. The article finally introduces two cases to illustrate how the processes of precarization play out in everyday life situations and the economic, legal and social system and how precarity can become a point of mobilization: Lampedusa in Hamburg 2013–2015 and the "Freedom Not Frontex" action in June 2014. The Lampedusa case concerns Sub-Saharan African migrants who were forced to flee Libya after NATO's intervention and via Lampedusa and Italy ended up in Hamburg. The "Freedom Not Frontex" action also revolves around migration, but the angle is criticism of borders, asylum systems and the EU policy framework and practices of resistance.

Conditions

The neologism "the precariat" is an amalgam of "precarity" and "proletariat". It was adopted by French labour activists (as a rhetorical and mobilizing tool) in the 1980s, Italian trade unionists and Spanish social movements in the 1990s, and the Global Justice Movement in the early 2000s. The movement fighting for rights for irregular migrants adopted it in the mid-1990s, and the link to migration and self-agency has characterized the understanding and political use of the concept. The origin of the term (precarité) can be traced back to the 1960s when Bourdieu used it to describe the colonial working class and later a new mode of dominance resulting from a (neoliberal) restructuring of global economy. The concepts "precariat", "precarity" and "precarization" have been outlined in different ways. In this article, precarity designates a condition, precariat the identity formation, and precarization the processual aspects.[1] Broadly speaking, the interrelated concepts refer to decades of neoliberal policy hegemony resulting in flexibilization of the labour markets, insecurity, uncertainty and risks across social strata. The implications include a shrinking of work rights and informalization through outsourcing, temporary jobs, sub-contracting and related processes. In that sense it is not dysfunctional or a "strange creature" in the global economy, but rather, as Schierup, Ålund and Likić-Brborić (2014) argue (following Ricceri, 2011), a constitutive element of global disorder to which it is very functional. While global neoliberal economy has glorified one sub-group of the precariat and blurred the retrenchment of social and work rights in narratives of the "creative class" (e.g. Richard Florida) it also produces "human trash", the "wasted lives" (Bauman, 2004), which is the major part of the precariat. The term was "popularized" with Standing's book from 2011, which offers two definitions of the precariat. The first definition relies on the amalgam and its embedded implications: the precariat as a distinctive socio-economic group. The second definition draws on an explicit Marxist perspective: "the precariat is a *class-in-the-making*, if not yet a *class-for-itself*" (Standing, 2011: 7; emphasis in original). In other words,

it can be regarded as a class-in-becoming. This distinction becomes central when we look at the composition of the precariat. According to Standing, it consists of an ever-growing number of people across the world, living and working precariously, usually in a series of short-term jobs, without recourse to stable occupational identities or careers, stable social protection or relevant protective regulations. These insecure workers have no collective bargaining power and are being abandoned by the traditional working class organizations, most notably the trade unions. Retrenchment of securities (related to labour market, employment, job, work, skill production, income and representation) is a main dynamic of the process of precarization. Migrants make up a large share of the world's precariat. The claim that the precariat is a distinct and separate group also indicates that there are other groups (or at least one) that do not share these features and that these groups have different interests. Standing's analysis contrasts "the precariat" and "the salariat", which is basically defined through privileges, for example, secure employment, sick pay, paid holidays and pension schemes, often employed by the state in the public administration and the civil service.

The distinction between precariat and salariat has met heavy criticism. Leftist writers and academics refute the crude distinction between precarious and non-precarious workers and dispute that there is such a thing as a permanent divide between the two. The recession and policy austerity interventions have clearly shown that budget cuts also affect public administration, education systems and other public sectors. As Choonara writes: "all workers can find themselves in a more or less precarious position" (2011: n.p.) and Seymour takes it to the edge: "[w]e are all the precariat" – including all who are "not a member of the 'power bloc', a capitalist class in its fractions" (Seymour, 2012: n.p.; also Shukaitis, 2013). In a recent essay, Seymour revisits the relationship between class and precarity:

> So, what does it mean to be working class today? Who can speak for "the class"? In a way it may actually be the most marginal and precarious workers, the disposable young, de-skilled and casual labourers, migrant workers and others at the bottom of the pile. For precarity is something that isn't reserved for a small, specialised group of people – "the precariat" or whoever. It spreads. It affects us all. The whip of insecurity disciplines even those who were recently comfortable. (2014: n.p.)

Nevertheless, broadening the base of the precariat, as a response to Standing's flawed diagnosis, might produce a problem for the precariat as an analytical concept. Its effects are claimed to be too diverse in the above reading (e.g. Robinson, 2011). How can we analyse the emerging political and social subjectivities as one unified social actor (let alone as a class) (Tsianos, 2007)? This critique or problematization is similar to the critique of Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; Shukaitis; 2012). To overcome this challenge I here follow Casas-Cortés (2009, 2014), who argues that the concept of the precariat must be translated into practice and that the concept is better seen as an analytical tool *and* as a strategic point of departure for political subjectivities (I will elaborate below). It can be a basis for analysing the conditions of the neoliberal economy as well as a tool for reconceptualizing new heterogeneities across the social and political spheres.

A possible problem in Standing's historical outline of the development of the precariat is the claim that it describes a "new" tendency:

> Precarity is usually defined in contrast to the previous period, Fordism. Precarity is, in a common definition, "the labor conditions that arose after the transition from life-long, stable jobs common in industrial capitalist and welfare-state economies, to temporary, insecure, low-paying jobs emerging with the globalization of the service and financial economy. (Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias, 2007: 115)

Unemployment, underemployment, insecurity and precariousness are hardly new conditions for the working class, however. A number of scholars regard the Fordist security and union protectionism, *not* precarity, as the historical exception (Frase, 2013; Neilson and Rossiter, 2005, 2008).[2] Fordism was not all-inclusive but based on distinction of insiders (skilled workers) and outsiders (atomized workers) (Nielson and Rossiter, 2005, 2008). The precarization taking place today is not an exception but part of a process of normalization in neoliberalism (Lorey, 2011). What *is* new then? The realization by some groups (middle-class, highly educated, non-migrants) that they also belong to groups in both real and potentially precarious positions is perhaps a more recent phenomenon. Part of the Occupy movement's success in mobilizing illustrates this perfectly. So does the anti-austerity movements like the Spanish 15-M whose membership is far broader than the normal mixture of experienced social movement activists and students (personal communication with organizing member of the "Real Democracy Now" movement, Ignaicio Sierra, April 2014; see also contributions on Spain in Cox and Fominaya, 2013). Moreover, precarization is spreading to an increasing range of social sectors, and in a longer historical perspective we could argue that neoliberalism has spurred a new phase of precarization, but that precarity as such is nothing new.

If there is a new tendency it might be increased representation of a "migrant precariat" (Schierup et al., 2014; Schierup et al. 2015). Although young people living in, for instance, Greece and Spain, which struggle with historically high levels of (especially) youth unemployment, could argue that their conditions and life possibilities have worsened, immigrants still constitute a central part of the precariat (as Standing also argues). Bommes and Geddes (2000) concluded that immigrants as a group have become "the new undeserving poor" in the European welfare states. However, immigrants have also been depicted as instrumental in processes of precarization. They fit the imperative of flexibility perfectly (Schierup et al., 2014; Tsianos, 2007); they have long been seen as a reserve army of labour and linked to processes of exploitation; they are scapegoated as carriers of precarity, embodying and importing precarity into secluded social spheres (Robinson, 2011). This is an example of what Mayo (2007) in Gramscian terms has described as a "misplaced alliance"; an alliance between national capital and labour against competition from the "outside", for instance, in campaigns like "British jobs for British workers" and potential support for neo-fascist articulations (Agustín and Jørgensen, forthcoming). This may obscure the fact that national "workers" and immigrants share a fate of oppression and subalternity. In other words, migration is not a cause but an *effect* of precarity (Robinson, 2011). The transformation of citizenship and the precarization creates social and political stratification and leaves migrants in what Balibar (2003) has termed a "new Apartheid in Europe". The logic of this European Apartheid, to stick with the term, is part of a broader erosion of social and work rights and the institutionalization of precarity (Schierup et al., 2006). It reinforces distinctions between "good" and "bad" immigrants. As argued elsewhere (Jørgensen, 2012), states become more eager to receive migrants who make an economic contribution to society while confining marginalized and vulnerable outsiders to "impoverished and excluded communities of fate" (Jordan and Düvell, 2003), paraphrasing Bauman's "wasted lives" mentioned above.

Reactions: Disengagement with Established Politics

> The demands of the competitive market are remorseless: reduce the cost of labour; privatise everything; remove protection from working people, and maintain a pool of unemployed to discipline those lucky enough to have a job. Trade unions are to be obstructed while the wealthy are courted in the hope that they will find a pliant, flexible workforce that is easy to exploit. […] None of this is new. But where is our political representation? […] Can the Labour party be reclaimed? Or, rather, made anew into one that will represent the interests of the people? History suggests it cannot. […] The Labour party is part of the

problem, not the solution. The Greens have many admirable policies, but we look in vain for a thoroughgoing analysis for fundamental change. We need a new voice, a new movement – a new party. (Loach et al., 2013: n.p.)

This excerpt is from an opinion piece by British filmmaker Ken Loach, academic and writer Kate Hudson and anti-war activist Gilbert Achcar, in which they analyse the consequences of neoliberalism and precarity and repeat some post-political lines of thinking (Bardiou, Rancière and Žižek). Traditional parties cannot and will not solve the problems at hand. The authors deviate from post-political perspectives as they actually point to a solution, namely mobilizing for a new type of political party based on a popular mobilization of the indignant and precarious groups in British society.[3] One that does not stand on the back of social movements but somehow resembles them. If we look at the reactions to the austerity measures across the globe in the context of this article, especially within a European context, it is fair to say that representative/electoral democracy has failed in the sense that people, as the commoners, no longer feel represented by the established political system.[4,5] Liberal market democracies have not prevented new asymmetrical cleavages, inequalities and modes of exclusion and marginalization. In post-political and/or post-democratic society, consensus politics reduces politics to social administration, illustrated by Third Way politics and marketization of citizenship or by David Cameron's austerity defence for budget cuts in 2013: "There is no alternative" (David Cameron, speech given in Keighley, West Yorkshire, 7 March 2013). Cameron here borrows the phrase directly from Margaret Thatcher's legitimation of the tax policy and ideological defence of (economic) neoliberalism. The "TINA" logic is also today part of the consensus politics. However, as Mouffe (2000) has argued, consensus only represents the dominant hegemony. Consensus *is* being disturbed and challenged, however, and the precariat plays a part in this struggle. The European "spring" (symbolized by the populist mobilizations in Greece and Spain and the rise of the Syriza and Podemos parties) has shown strong mobilization against austerity, precarity and for "real" democracy.[6] Re-envisioning politics through the precariat can thus challenge the post-political society. This might not happen through the established political parties due to disengagement with traditional party politics[7] but via new mobilization channelled through the "newest social movements" (Day, 2005). Class issues are traditionally regarded as the domain of trade unions and established politics. Some constituencies, for instance, the unemployed, may lack the material and symbolic resources to mobilize broadly. However, studies of French mobilization of the unemployed show the opposite. Collective organizations of the unemployed "[s]ucceeded in modifying, or at least for a certain period, the unemployed's own perception about their own mobilization potential. They encouraged the unemployed to express collective claims and convinced thousands of them to mobilize" (Royall, 1998: 362, quoted in della Porta, 2010: 44). This was possible because the protesters addressed issues of social recognition by acting within an institutionalized field with welfare institutions that focused on issues of unemployment (della Porta, 2010: 45). I take up this discussion of the reaction to established politics to connect to the investigation of precarity as a point for mobilization. If neither the established political parties nor the social partners (unions, etc.) are agents of social and political transformation, who are the new actors in this game? Union and media activist as well as EuroMayDay organizer, Alex Foti (like Hardt and Negri and Harvey), sees change coming exactly from the precariat: "The precariat is to postindustrialism as the proletariat was to industrialism: the non-pacified social subject" (2005: n.p.). Standing's 2014 book, *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens*, arguably opens up for a similar reading – or at least for an emphasis on the urge for resistance identified in parts of the precariat. This leads us to the question about the immigrant precariat. As mentioned, Standing downplays their role in the struggle for social and political

transformation. Other scholars like Hannah Lewis and her colleagues make the opposite reading. They underline the potential of the precariat constituted of migrant workers and examine their potential for forming a political force capable of collective action and resistance against neoliberal capitalism (Lewis et al., 2014; see also Casas-Cortés, 2014). The migrant precariat thereby holds a role in reviving political conflicts and confronting political power. Political conflict makes the migrant precariat visible as political subjects. Following Jacques Rancière's discussion with Arendt's work one can argue the *sans-papiers* have enacted the right to have rights when they speak as if they had the same rights as citizens (Rancière, 2004; Schaap, 2011). The Freedom Not Frontex case to be discussed later illustrates this well. Andrew Schaap, linking up with Rancière, captures this when he claims that the political is constituted when those who are not qualified to participate in politics act and speak as if they were (2011: 35).

Collective campaigns like "A Day Without Immigrants" in 2006, organized by Latino immigrants in the United States (see Longhi, 2013) and the *24 sans nous* in France in 2010 where migrants stopped working and stopped consuming to show what life would be like without immigrants, demonstrate the emergence of new political subjectivities – the non-pacified social subjects – and how they can take agency. These examples illustrate that precarity can produce political subjectivity. The precarious figure is, so to speak, interpellated as an acting subject. Interpellation is not coming from established political parties but from alternative constellations in civil society, perceivably including new forms of political parties; for instance, the Spanish Podemos Party (see Jørgensen and Agustín, 2015).

Agency: The Precariat and Precarity as Resistance and Catalyst for Transformation

Inglehart's (1977) "silent revolution" and post-materialist narrative from the 1970s has been adopted in studies of social movements, which have often been seen as the bearers of post-materialistic values. Class cleavages in this reading – the mobilizing factor of the labour movements – were seen as pacified. The rise of poor people's movements, the EuroMayDay initiatives and the resistance of the precariat through manifestations like the "indignant" movement in Spain (*Indignados*, 15-M) and the different manifestations of Occupy-related appropriations of public space show that socio-economic structures still influence present-day mobilizations and that class issues matter.

Precarization hence harbingers new modes of participation. While this may seem like an "over-optimistic" perspective, I argue that demanding analytical and empirical attention to links between precarization, practice and resistance can pave the way for a re-envisioning of politics. Not as a "counter-movement" in the Polanyian sense, but as articulated resistance and the emergence of political subjectivities. Tsianos claims that the emergence of new subjectivities in recent decades (post-Fordist societies) is "not the configuration of production […] but the embodied experience of shifting arrangements of exploitation" (2007: 190). These "shifting arrangements" are located within and *beyond* labour market arrangements but also intervene in the social dimension. Resource mobilization approaches to studying social movements typically regard social movements as anchored in individuals committing themselves to a cause and taking up the concerns of a social constituency to which they do not (necessarily) belong, due to a sense of *solidarity* (Giugni and Passy, 2001). Linking this claim to the power of *indignation* (coming from the literature on the precariat) points to a broadening of the bases for protest and mobilization. To capture the potential for structural change and systemic critiques, we need to return to the root of the word precariat (i.e. an amalgam of "proletariat" and "precarity") and change the conception of the proletariat and the limits of this category. What is the potential of the proletariat under contemporary neoliberal

capitalism? Harvey made this point under the heading "alternatives" in his 2012 book *Rebel Cities* and asked:

> Mourn the passing of the possibility of revolution because the proletariat has disappeared, or change our conception of the proletariat to include the hordes of unorganized urbanization producers (of the sort that mobilized in immigrant rights marches), and explore their distinctive revolutionary capacities and power. (2012: 130)

Harvey did not regard this (the new heterogeneous group) as a "dangerous class" but as a productive collective organizing, as a *potential*. This understanding also paraphrases Hardt and Negri's claim that traditional unions cannot "represent adequately the complex multiplicity of class subjects and experiences" (2009: 110).

However, Hardt and Negri also contend that the impotence of the unions does not signal a "farewell to the working class or even a decline of worker struggle but rather an increasing multiplicity of the proletariat and a new physiognomy of struggles" (2009: 110). Harvey does not use the term "the precariat" but describes the new formation and resistance as "urban struggles and organizing processes", and Hardt and Negri use the term "the multitude". Why should the precariat then be a better term? Perhaps it is not, but it does – in the outline given so far – describe both the structural conditions of global economy and the constitution of new political subjectivities to challenge these conditions formed from very heterogeneous identities and not least the capacity to form a common social space for struggle; in other words, *conditions, identity* and *process* as well as the social spaces where agency takes place. In this sense these new struggles are a "movement of movements". The precarity protests during and outside EuroMayDays have created alliances between cultural producers, knowledge workers, migrants, autonomists, unemployed, trade unions, radical leftist unions, and organizations of irregular people (Lorey, 2010; Raunig, 2004). The capacity for change is still to be investigated and assessed as the claim-making calls for long-term structural change. Regardless of the outcome so far, Occupy has been successful in identifying, disturbing and problematizing "common sense". In Gramscian terms, common sense is hegemony, which must be challenged to create transformation. Occupy managed to "occupy" the language and has, according to different scholars, altered the way the framework of global economy is being discussed today (Chomsky, 2012; Langman, 2013; Žižek, 2012).

A common "warning", which can be derived from the literature on the precariat and more importantly by following recent mobilization, is not to depict precarious groups as victims. While the structural position in the economic and social system may be precarious, these groups are not *only* victims of precarization. When precarity is framed as a deviation from the social norms, such a framing simultaneously presents a diagnosis of the problem and a prognosis of the solution.

Unemployment is framed as an individual problem, and governments develop policies that sanction and punish groups believed to be a burden. This conveys a liberal-paternalistic message, which is a key element of neo-liberalism: that society, in Wacquant's words, is liberal and free at the top and restrictive, paternalistic and authoritarian at the bottom (2004/2009: 8). In *Punishing the Poor*, Wacquant delivers a powerful analysis of how neoliberal governance has increased social divisions and led to policy-making that seeks to punish and discipline "problematic" groups, thereby redefining the modalities of government action. Within this political logic, emphasizing individual responsibility is a necessary tool for revitalizing welfare societies. Neoliberalism has no logical wish, need or drive to end inequality, however. Social theory does the precariat no good in depicting precarious groups only as victims. As Robinson argues:

> This framing of the precariat as victims at best and a social problem at worst both denies agency and voice and contributes to repressive measures aimed at marginal people. It often uses a certain doublespeak:

concern with exclusion is really concern with what is perceived as people's failure to "include" themselves in the system on the system's terms; people are then to be "enabled" or "given opportunities" – often euphemisms for coercion – to be "included", in effect, to be forced to circulate, communicate, work, etc. (2011: n.p.)

In practice, this victimization is challenged and refuted. Raunig shows how the precarity movement (across Europe) abandoned the dictum "stop precarity!" in favour of a positive identification with the precariat as a group of heterogeneous identities whose self-image is a social movement, not a group of victims (Raunig, 2007).[8]

Precarity does not necessarily designate a common cause (nor a class-in-the-making), and we should not lump too much into one concept (cf. the critique of Standing). There are both institutional and other divisions (e.g. legal statuses and memberships) that cause distinctions, but it *can* function as a social space in which struggles are articulated and united. Neilson and Rossiter describe precarity as an ontological experience and social-economic condition "with multiple registers that hold the potential to contribute to a political composition of the common" (2008: 55). They argue that these differences and experiences can be translated into a common space. Generalizing from a concrete example of Indian taxi drivers who mobilize in reaction to racist attacks, they argue that political possibilities emerge with such moments of protest (2008: 67). Becoming common can be seen as "precarization as political constituting" (Lorey, 2010)[9] and precarity can empirically be seen as a "catalyst for developing a new radical politics of everyday life" (Shukaitis, 2013: 642). This is exactly asking what precarity *does*.

Practices

The two cases of precariat practice described in this section illustrate the article's argument that precarity is not only a sociological category but represents a point of mobilization and resistance. Precarity is what Casas-Cortés (2014: 206) has described as "a toolbox for rearticulating fragmented social realities". Migration and mobility are core components of capitalism.[10]

Lampedusa in Hamburg

Lampedusa in Hamburg (LiHH) sprung from the "Emergency North Africa" odyssey, which started in 2011 during NATO's intervention in Libya, and was intensified by geopolitical instability in Tunisia and Egypt. In the first five months of 2011, more than 45,000 refugees from Libya arrived in Italy, most of them with origins in the sub-Saharan region and other parts of Africa, and all of them forced out of Libya where they had managed to make a living. Their lives were characterized by hardship but only some of them were refugees in Libya. What they had in common was that they all became refugees when they were abandoned by their workplaces (many of them international companies) in Libya when the war intensified and all were forced to flee regardless of their previous status. Arriving in Italy, they were absorbed in the Emergency North-Africa Program, which, however, was terminated in February 2013 under the Monti government. The emergency was officially declared over, and the lives and future of the thousands of refugees were ignored. To remove them from Italian responsibility, the authorities issued a one-year humanitarian permit, which gave them mobility within the EU according to the Dublin Regulation. However, most of the refugees were sent back. The LiHH movement was formed in March 2013 by a group of refugees from the Libyan war in direct response to German and European laws. About 300 refugees coming from Italy openly challenged the limits to free movement imposed by the Dublin Regulation. In Hamburg, the group began to organize a protest

movement. It has since engaged in a fundamental and vital struggle for the members' own right to stay and for the rights of all asylum seekers, refugees and migrants to freely decide where to move, live and work. LiHH's slogan "We are here to stay!" illustrates this type of struggle as it directly challenges the widespread idea that asylum seekers and refugees are only here temporarily. Access to work and identity as workers are central issues for the group. Both in their public contestation and in conversations they point to the lack of working rights, precarious conditions and exploitation in the clandestine labour market as central problems. Their banners claim belonging to a broader united precariat. Appropriating precarity (as connected to labour conditions) in this sense offers a platform for mobilization as well as an expansion of the conflict and their claims-making as their protests now go beyond issues of asylum and connect to claims for fundamental rights. As argued by Raunig above, a positive self-identification rather than one of vicitimization. Their main message is summed up in the protest slogan, "We did not survive the NATO war in Libya to come and die in the streets of Hamburg". This message displays the interlinks between international conflicts and local conditions as well as the brutality of the current border regime. LiHH has developed a large support base including churches, the leftist St Pauli football club, local schools, the university, the theatre, alternative social movements and to various degrees trade unions such as Ver.di and IG Metall (IG Metall has initiated meetings between migrants, metal workers and dock workers to exchange knowledge and experiences). Schools and students have organized protests. In an interview with local union leader Peter Bremme from Ver.di, he informed me that the union accepted the refugees as members even though they do not have working and residence permits. GEW, the education sector union, has done the same. A symbolic act perhaps, but still an expansion of alliances. The most recent development in Hamburg is an increasingly strong connection to the local "Rights to the City" movement (*Recht Auf Stadt*) (Jørgensen, 2015). This broadens the conflict by adding a common diagnosis of gentrification and precarity in relation to housing and urban planning that is not dependent on citizenship status.

Freedom Not Frontex

> The categories "refugees", "migrants", and "citizens" […] create borders between people. The division of people and countries by borders daily kills human beings. Abolish all borders! Stop the killing! (March for Freedom, 2014; translated from French).

This slogan was used in the transnational solidarity march "Freedom Not Frontex", which drew participants from all over Europe (especially from Germany, including activists from LiHH) to Brussels in May 2014 followed by an Action Week in Brussels in conjunction with the European Council meeting (see Figure 1). The Action Week was organized by the Blockupy movement, but based on participation and observations in the camp in Brussels it appeared self-organized and directed by refugee actors.

Freedom Not Frontex strengthened the link between struggles of migrants and refugees with anti-austerity politics and thereby broadened the conflict and expanded the political space for struggle. Referring to the commonalities in precarious conditions of immigrant and non-immigrant actors could create a new unity. The refugees and migrant workers I talked to during the week emphasized this several times and, equally important, the local unions took up the same message.

The march was significant because it shows the contours of a transnational solidarity movement based on common conditions of precarity and thereby illustrates how precarity becomes a mobilizing force (as a militant identity), a political analysis (condition) and strategy. The national precarity

Figure 1. Banner from the Freedom Not Frontext Demonstration in Brussels.
Source: Martin Bak Jørgensen.

movements (uniting *sans-papiers*) from different European countries (France, Belgium, Italy) were among the central organizers in Brussels. The Action Week was followed up by a meeting in Paris and a new international event in Rome in November 2014 where The International Coalition of Sans-Papiers and Migrants (CISPM) called for united actions. The most recent initiative was a four-day conference and action week in Berlin in February 2015 under the heading "Stop war on migrants!", organized by CISPM. After the March and Action Week, refugee activists shared their experiences and encouraged mobilization for further actions across Europe, for example in an invitation to a meeting in Amsterdam between LiHH and the Amsterdam-based "*Wij Zijn Hier*" [We are here]:

> After the experience of the March for Freedom, we realized how important it is for specific movements to connect even more, to spread information about different struggles around Europe and to create awareness in these various countries, so that we can be united against this system that kills and remains dominant despite all the resistance. (https://www.indymedia.nl/node/23990)

Precarity here becomes a vehicle for mobilization. It provides a political analysis and it defines a strategy for resistance.

A Short Conclusion

Based on the two cases we could ask if precarity has had the transformative potential needed. Neither case has been rich on political successes. The LiHH movement today is scattered, and several members have left Hamburg; the claim for freedom over Frontex has been ignored; the European borders are as strong as ever, and the spring and summer of 2015 has added tragically to the body count of people drowning in the Mediterranean in search of a secure life. Nevertheless, both cases show that the struggles continue and that the collective will survive and grow. The problem is structural and not limited to the individual. No matter how many or whom the authorities continue to evict, it will "only" be individuals. The authorities cannot evict the problem, which became evident in 2014 when German police wanted to evict a group of Lampedusa refugees from an abandoned school in Berlin where they had resided for months supported by local civil society. Protesters shouted "You can't evict a movement". If we link these immigrant struggles to broader forms of protest, contestation and struggles against austerity and neoliberal capitalism, the notions of the precariat and precarity allow us to analyse these contestations across social categories and divisions. I will argue that this article contributes to the growing literature on precarity in three ways. First, it has underlined the importance of taking the migrant as the starting point for a further theoretical development of the concept – doing so allows us to bring in the lived experiences as a basis for a broader struggle for democracy; second, the article has emphasized the agency of the actors involved in these social and political struggles and thereby contributes to creating a counter-narrative (also developed by other authors) speaking against the victimization of migrants; and third, the article contributes to the literature by identifying empirical realities which we can use to develop our theoretical understandings of migration and precarity as more nuanced. Precarity and the precariat have been discussed and analysed in very abstract terms, which has prioritized the structural transformations causing precarity over the perspective of the heterogeneous actors forming the precarity. Thereby the transformative potential of the precariat has been somewhat downplayed.

Precarity is not a new phenomenon, but identifying the links between conditions of migrants and precarity as a condition in the present phase of capitalist economy offers us a toolbox for understanding contemporary practices, commonalities among immigrant and non-immigrant actors, and new forms of identity formations, alliance building and political strategies of resistance. This type of study is needed for the purpose of developing the scope of precarity studies. Doing so also opens up for more militant investigations (in line with critical migration studies and critical border studies), which can aid the ongoing struggles for more just and inclusive societies. Situating ourselves as researchers in this reality and identifying the commonalities opens up not only a critical theoretical engagement, but also a practical one. Syrian refugee El Mouthena, whose statement opened the article, continued as follows:

> "It just government and the government is elected from citizens of countries where you are suffering. If you want to solve your problem you must mobilize those who select government. To stand up with you then you have power and can change something. And from today we must start working mobilizing in every country we are there, if you are refuge or migrant we don't care you are human like us. And we support you".[11]

Notes

1. The Frassanito-network wrote a working paper for the EuroMayDay preparations in 2005, which presents the activists' own distinction and conceptualization of the terms "precarious", "precarization" and "precariat" (Frassanito-network, 2005). In short, precarization is seen here as a process that can establish a frame for constituting political subjectivities, mitigate differences and identify commonalities and ultimately a space for struggle (see also Neilson & Rossiter, 2005).
2. This critique has also come from the precarity movement itself, e.g. the Frassanito-network (2005).
3. What later turned into the Left Unity Party also running for election in some districts in the UK election on 7 May 2015.
4. The discussion about the "commons" has resurfaced in the last few years. It has been a central part of the Italian *autonomia* tradition of activist research (Negri, Tronti, Berardi, Virno and the "newer" generation: Marazzi, Fumagalli, Roggero, Mezzadra and others; see for instance Lotringer and Marazzi, 2007). The idea of the commons is clearly related to that of precarity and the precariat. The commons (or "common-wealth" in Hardt and Negri's terms) stands as a practical and viable political alternative to the neoliberal society fostering eternal individual competition. Instead of pursuing favourable solutions for the individual, it stands for a collective subjectivity pursuing action and practices that benefit the commons.
5. A recent mapping of world protests between 2006 and 2013 showed that lack of "real" democracy is the most frequent issue in global protests (Ortiz et al., 2013). It is also perceived by the protesters as the explanation for economic injustice as it prevents economic issues from being addressed. In other words, representational democracy is not doing what it is supposed to do.
6. The struggle against precarity is older than the 15-M mobilizations and similar of course. For instance, the EuroMayDay mobilizations against precarity, explicitly framed as such, date back to 2000–2001 (e.g. Doerr, 2010; Foti, 2005; Lorey, 2010).
7. New political parties engaged in anti-austerity and basically anti-capitalist issues have surfaced in the UK, Spain and recently in Bosnia and Slovenia, and at EU-level (the Party of the European Left). Likewise, the Greek Syriza party's success can be seen as a response to the organic and political crisis.
8. Some scholars question the precarity movement's ability to effectively organize radical action (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008). Mezzadra and Roggero (2006) add that the EuroMayDays did not generate common forms of organization and praxis (the article is written in 2006, however, and they might reach a different conclusion today if they took, for instance, 15-M networks into consideration). The precarity movement has also been criticized for lacking representativity (see Robinson, 2011). Finally, Butler (2009) argues that since precarity is expanding rather than contracting, the ontological sameness of precariousness is not recognized and therefore cannot be the starting point for politics.
9. Lorey's argument here is that becoming-common as political agency, something on the move and a practice, is a constituent power (Lorey, 2010: 7). Although the latter term is taken from Negri, it is different from Hardt and Negri's (2009) concept of the common as a social ontological constitution. The focus here is on the process of becoming and practice. This resembles Neilson and Rossiter's understanding of precarity as a "transversal movement that is never stable" (2008: 63).
10. The following section is based on different sources. For the case of "Lampedusa in Hamburg", from participant observations at meetings, events and demonstrations in Hamburg, informal interviews with refugees (in St. Pauli Church and living places) and activists in Hamburg, formal interview with union leader at Ver.di, online material and written material collected in Hamburg. For the case of "Freedom Not Frontex", the discussion is based on online material, participant observations and interviews conducted during the Action Week in Brussels, which took place at the same time as the European Council meeting in June 2014.
11. I have kept the grammar as in the original statement in both quotations.

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