Revisiting precarity, with care: Productive and reproductive labour in the era of flexible capitalism

Mariya Ivancheva and Kathryn Keating

abstract

This article seeks to reconsider the concept of precarity by bringing in the discussion of care. An increased academic interest in the subject of precarity and precarious working conditions in advanced, post-industrial economies is often premised on the false binary of precarity-stability. While stable working and living conditions have historically been a privilege of a minority of autonomous individuals, engaged in productive work, free from direct dependence or dependents, women and marginalised groups are often made more precarious, as their highly exploitable labour assets are not given any, or certainly not an equal value. And while stability at work can destabilize precarious lives of people with care responsibilities and marginalized groups, who need flexibility in order to navigate their lives, subjecting the affective domain to the principles of the market does not offer an effective solution to the inequalities between productive and reproductive labour. The article works on three different levels – the critique of ethnocentrism and androcentrism of the concept of precarity, the introduction of precarious living conditions into the discussion of precarious labour, and the insistence on the necessity to insert solidarity, care and love back into our workplaces as a way to resist capitalist competitiveness and alienation. We also warn against the risk of such care labour being exploited by a next cycle of capitalist appropriation. Reviewing a range of empirical studies, we explore the ways in which care destabilizes the neat boundaries between precarity and stability. We argue that repositioning care as a central activity in all human production and reproduction, both outside paid labour and inside it, allows us to see more clearly potential venues of exploitation and liberation within the predicament of precarity.

Introduction

The concept of precarity – a term describing the flexible and uncertain working and living conditions in the contemporary world – is often presented in opposition to the idea of stability. On the one pole stands the idea of a permanent job or career: a secure and stable life-long chain of economic pursuits and social relations that promise steady upward mobility across generations (Sennett, 1998: 9). On the other pole remains the hyper-flexible contractual labour and displaced life advanced by new forms of managerial capitalism.

While precarious life and labour are a global and historical norm (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008), in recent years scholars have increasingly focused on precarious employment and living conditions in wealthy Euro-Atlantic states. A growing 'precariat' has been defined as people living in increased insecurity in relation to labour and production, distribution of resources and services, and relations to the state and voice in the decision-making process (Standing, 2014). Exploitative, violent and arbitrary working and living conditions – more commonly associated with women, marginalized groups, and people in the developing world (Mitropoulos, 2011) – has started to affect two groups protected by the post-war pact between labour and capital: the professional middle class and organised workers in the Global North.

Paradoxically, it is only in this new context, that precarity is seriously taken into consideration and its discussion is projected from the contexts where it is a new exception, to those where it has been a norm. This produces an ironic twist. Having blocked the supposedly straight roadway of life and career prospects, considered as granted to workers in the former context, precarity has become the subject of anxiety and disdain. The stable career track is presented as the ideal to which we should all aspire. Thus, while precarity stands for allegedly new forms of labour and living, its opposite often is represented by a stalemate political imaginary of the return of a 'golden age' of consumer capitalism.

Drawing on empirical studies from across different disciplinary fields and geographical areas, this paper seeks to re-examine theoretically the concept

of precarity to better resist its manifestation within our life and workplaces. We argue that in order to overcome the false binary of flexibility-stability that constitutes the concept of precarity, and to address the inequalities created and exacerbated by it, we need to bring the concept of care into the discussion of precarious labour and life in more than one way.

First, it is important to address the reality that both emotional caring and care sector work have been some of the most flexibilised, stigmatised, invisible, and exploited forms of work in human history (Federici, 2004; 2014). It is mostly done by women, migrants, minorities, and people from the Global South who are most often subject to different forms of symbolic, structural and physical violence as their labour is undervalued or unrecognised.

Secondly, we need to acknowledge the limitation of the current discourses of forms of production, distribution, and relation to the state (Standing, 2014) and of the forms of mobilization (Shukaitis, 2013) they engender. These still focus predominantly on the productive rights and human freedoms of a highly individualized, rational, able-bodied, self-sufficient (male) citizen involved in remunerated productive labour. This focus neglects the importance of care that remains a central, yet often invisiblised condition in the sustaining of human life and community in and outside of work.

Yet, bringing care into the discussion of precarity, we also argue that we should not collapse the distinction between productive and reproductive work. This should happen neither by claiming remuneration of emotional and care work, nor by blurring the line of distinction by resorting to arguments of affective and 'immaterial' modes of labour. Blurring this boundary, we claim, is no solution to the alienation and stratification at precarious workplaces.

Drawing on Johanna Oksala's critique (2016) of Michael Hardt and Tony Negri's (2004) use of the concept of affective labour, we see it necessary to address the relation of care in precarious working and living conditions not by simply claiming remuneration and benefits for domestic and care workers. The International Wages for Housework Campaign (Federici, 1974)

was radical not just in connecting pay with the recognition of social rights and the centrality of reproductive labour to production. It also showed how much capitalism depends on extraction of marginalised and unpaid reproductive work.

Yet, moving from acknowledging this central contradiction of capitalism, while insisting on the material value of precarious forms of care work, we still claim that it is not just difficult (Lynch, 2007) but also potentially dangerous to attribute an exchange value to love, care, and solidarity cherished for their non-commodifiable and inalienable use value. It could mean attributing monetary value and extending the capitalist logic of competition and alienation into all domains of our life (Oksala, 2016). It could also mean endowing the traditional nuclear family with even more monetarized logic, and steering nuclear families in even steadier forms of competition for absorption of different forms of capital for their own home and generation, while extracting care needed at other spaces we inhabit.

Instead, we call for a profound rethinking and eventual reorganisation of the productive domain around the concept of care. We argue that in order to move beyond the false dichotomy of flexibility-stability, which offers no solution to the current juncture of capitalist development, it is crucial to see the emancipating potential in a profound reorganisation of working relations. The abstract demand for liberal individualizing autonomy, which has been instrumentalised through new managerial systems and used by capitalism to steer workers into always more alienating work, needs to be suspended as a condition of oppression in itself.

With Kathleen Millar (2014) we argue for a relational autonomy that sees human beings as profoundly dependent on desires for sociality, intimacy, and relations of care in both their lives and work. However, unlike Millar, we do not plead for a 'politics of detachment' of precarious workers distancing themselves from their jobs in order to navigate their caring lives. Against the ongoing managerial attempts to pit life against work, exploiting our out-of-work abilities (Fleming, 2013) while individualising and privatising (self-)care, we solicit an understanding of a life-work continuum, in which work should not be based on competition but on love, care, and solidarity.

Only when radically opposed to the individualized, divisive, and invisiblised exploitation within patriarchal structures, can this new concept of work be used to build new collective subjectivities that recuperate the destroyed social fabric in the era of flexible capitalism. And while our life abilities and extra-work qualities (Fleming, 2013) as well as caring practices themselves (Ivancheva and Krastev, 2019) can be exploited to extract surplus from alienated workers and marginalised communities, it is important to nurture radical practices of care that overturn power dynamics, cut across hierarchies of casualization, and expand the horizons of resistance in increasingly toxic workplaces.

The article follows in three parts, starting with a brief review of how the concept of precarity has developed as a subject of academic concern and a rallying point for collective action. In the first part we reflect on the political and economic dimensions of precarity, and their often ethnocentric and androcentric biases, within which care relations are most often silenced. In the second part we look at the ethical and social dimensions of precarity, which, as a politically-induced condition, can be damaging to individuals and groups. Bridging the politico-economic to the social aspects of precarity, we show how already marginalised or under-resourced social groups are disproportionately affected, physically, mentally and socially, by the negative consequences of precarity. In the third part we bring together the discussion of care and precarity; we look at how love, care, and solidarity work (Lynch et al., 2009) are invisibilised and subsequently undervalued in comparison to work that is considered directly economically productive. Drawing on empirical research, we look at how flexibilised and precarious labour is gendered, racialised and classed, and used to navigate the intersection of paid labour and complex care responsibilities.

This article, produced in preparation to enhance on our own empirical research operationalising precarity within a project on new intersectional equalities in the academic workforce (Ivancheva et al., 2019), is based not on our own data, but on the review of an already existing wealth of empirical research on the subject. Such review helps us revisit the concept of precarity with fresh eyes and conclude that in order to challenge inequalities produced and exacerbated by precarious labour, there is a need to include

love, care, and solidarity as central into any conceptualisation of and resistance against precarity. Rather than a narrowly defined focus on care only in romantic love and within the nuclear family, we envisage collective practices of care in our workplaces. In order to destabilize the current individualizing system of competition and life dominated by employment (paid work), it is not enough to create welfare institutions that pit working lives to lives-outside-work, or act as prosthetics to aid our expansive working lives. We aim to initiate a discussion on how to re-organise, instead, our very understanding of productive life-at-work and create ways to embed love, care and solidarity within working places as means of resistance against casualisation and exploitation. Only so, we can challenge from within the increasing care-lessness (Lynch, 2010) that working lives, and lives in general are exposed to.

Precarious labour: Ethical and political dimensions

Precarity has become a concept central to scholarly attempts to grasp the complex changes in working and living conditions in advanced capitalist societies. Used initially to designate the proletarialisation of white-collar workers (Weber, [1948] 2002), by the end of the 20th century it re-emerged in the struggles of student, unemployed, and flexible workers' movements in Western Europe, who experienced the crumbling of the post-war welfare state and the Fordist labour regime (Bourdieu, 1997; Berardi, 2009). The 'new deal' between state and capital, achieved by organised labour earlier in the 20th century had left out part-time and temporary contract workers, women, migrant workers, and workers in the developing world, for whom precarity has been a norm rather than an exception (Nielson and Rossiter, 2008). Unemployment, flexibilisation and uncertainty now also became the predicament of a generation, whose parents had enjoyed guaranteed remunerated employment with benefits and securities. Activists and scholars related to this generation used 'precarity' as a frame of collective action against the neoliberal restructuring in public sector, privatization and market deregulation that marked the new crisis of capital (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008).

Precarity as a claim

Yet, the critique against precarity came together with such against a historical form of capitalist organisation through the state that was ripe in the post-war era. And whereas the so-called artistic critique of the post-war capitalism defied bread-and-butter social critique by uncritically embracing the drive for authenticity, freedom, and flexibility (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: x-xii), both stemmed from real concerns. The state bureaucracy was a tool of capitalist, imperialist, and patriarchal forms of social organisation. Secure employment carried out by men or increasingly by middle class women, was operating thanks to the invisible and unrecognized forms of reproductive and emotional labour (Fraser, 2013). The latter were not seen as equally important or remunerable to 'productive', paid employment (Federici, 2013).

Critique against the oppressive state order was absorbed by capitalism in its next reincarnation (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007), and produced a new monster: neoliberal governance and new managerial labour organisation. By flexibilising labour and seemingly reducing state regulation, it created new ever more invasive and exploitable forms of work. Still, by holding the tension between working and existential conditions the term precarity addressed as a collective action frame both the need of secure and stable future, and the push for authenticity and freedom against the routinized bureaucratic discipline.

Precarity as class distinction

Recent debates on labour precarity have inevitably referred to Guy Standing's work on 'the Precariat' (Standing, 2011; 2014), which suggests the emergence of 'The Precariat' as a new class within the contemporary class ladder. For Standing, the members of the Precariat experience precarity in three dimensions: in the relations of production, economic redistribution, and political participation and representation in relation to the state (*ibid*.). Standing sees potential for development of a Precariat class-consciousness based on shared anxiety, anger, anomie, and alienation (Standing, 2011: 19, 21), but recognizes the peril of multiple vulnerabilities dividing instead of uniting workers (*ibid*.: 25).

However, in Standing's writings care and reproductive labour do not receive significant attention except when linked to hospital workers or charity volunteers in crumbling welfare states (Standing, 2014). His analysis does not take into account the marginalized groups who have been historically excluded from production, distribution, and equal participation. Positing anxiety, anger, anomie, and alienation as the main condition of precarious workers, Standing remains fixed on those working in productive labour within advanced capitalist societies. And while Standing himself has called for a redefinition of work as productive only (*ibid*: 107-108), his texts never explore the connection between precarious work and reproductive work done predominantly by low-paid women and migrants. His focus on the commonalities of precarious work across contexts and classes has been criticised for disguising rather than disclosing existing inequalities including between precarious and industrial workers in developed countries, pitted against each other as rival 'reserve armies', and pushing precarious labourers to resort to 'first-order loyalties of ethnicity, caste, race, and creed' for affinity and struggle (Breman, 2013:135-137).

Precarity as a global action frame

Over the last decade scholars have discussed the serious limitations to precarious workers' organising. Traditional unions have had an ambivalent role in this process, as the un(der)employed have traditionally been perceived as a weak link in workers solidarity as difficult to recruit and potential strike-breakers (Brugnot and Le Naour, 2011). In the Global North, research on precarious workers' mobilising has shown that the huge variation of conditions and hierarchies in the precarious workforce challenge collective action frames (Mattoni, 2015). And even if frustrations with precarious work are shared across borders, the possibility to think of international strategies is undermined by country-to-country legislative differences: for instance differences between production-based and contract-based flexibility results in the reliance on different coalitions and action repertoires across seemingly similar cases (Vogiatzoglou, 2015).

Against this background, Stephen Shukaitis articulates the need of struggles against precarity to focus on a more transversal, work-and-life relating

experiences that can bring groups together to develop new forms of individual and collective autonomy, and 'new modes of being and community that are not determined by labour' (Shukaitis, 2013: 658). To do that, it is crucial to challenge the ethno- and androcentrism that underpin most scholarly work on the subject of precarity.

Precarity as ethnocentric

Critics have pointed out that the works on precarity mostly focus on the exceptionalism of the American case (Lee and Kofman, 2012: 389) or other Euro-Atlantic countries (Neilson and Rossiter 2008). Bret Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2008) state that rather than an exception, precarious labour is a global and historical norm. For them, European and North American movements' and scholars' use of precarity as a mobilizing and analytical frame has no resonance with the rest of the world where life and work stability and security are not experienced by the majority.

For Ching Kwan Lee and Yelizavetta Kofman precarity takes different shapes in the Global South where deregulation, privatization, and market liberalization have led to assault not only on labour rights but also on life and livelihood of workers (Lee and Kofman, 2012: 390-392). Many post-colonial countries have produced novel forms of exploitation (Muehlebach and Shoshan, 2012). Some developmentalist states have done away with labour protection, causing mass internal migration and casualization or the opening special economic zones (SEZs), feeding off unregulated labour and 'partial border citizenship' (Lee and Kofman, 2012: 394-397).

Precarity as androcentric

The focus of labour studies and studies of precarity on the individual male and white worker, engaged in productive work has also been criticised. Shifting from a unionized factory worker to an artist or creative worker, this figure is idealised, respectively, as vanguard of the proletariat or of the 'Precariat' (Fantone, 2007: 9). Their polar opposite has traditionally been the 'suburban housewife' (Oksala, 2016: 281).

Yet, as Silvia Federici (2004) has shown as a response to E.P. Thompson's examination of industrial workers, 'women's work' has been pushed out of the productive sphere and marginalized. This happened during the European Enlightenment process of the enclosure of the commons – used by women to support household consumption – and the push of peasants towards cities: the spaces of waged and timed labour. In this process, women became the indispensable – yet undervalued – double tool of capital: not regarded and remunerated as workers, their reproductive work was used to yield and bring up healthy workers. To force women into this situation, they were made legally dependent on the patronage of male breadwinners, denied control over their bodies, and witch-hunted for performing labour liberating them and their offspring from inextricable poverty (*ibid.*).

The impact of early capitalist formation on the economic subjugation and coercion of women continues today. Housework remains informal, unwaged and largely unrecognized, even if increasingly commercialized (Federici, 2013). Women who entered the labour force since the interwar era have relied on flexible labour or the work of other often migrant women to 'have it all' – a job and a family (Fraser, 2013; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; O'Hagan, 2015). Today women still form a large percentage of the labour force in part-time positions, and are times less likely than men to work full-time, progress in their careers, and be independent from bread-winning partners (OECD, 2015: 115, 176). New forms of debt have also emerged that produce ever further extraction from vulnerable female and feminised bodies (Gagyi, 2019; Cavallero and Gago, 2019).

Decentering precarity

Thus, with few exceptions the discussion of precarity has remained focused on productive rather than reproductive, and on material rather than on immaterial labour (Gill and Pratt, 2008). Important recent debates on the infringement of new technologies into human work still largely focus on precarious male workers in the Global North (Cant, 2019; Moore, 2017). Unsurprisingly then, precarity – a historical characteristic of women's invisibilised, immaterial, and affective work – only became an issue of concern once it came to characterize 'productive' work in global capitalism

(Oksala, 2016). Even then, the critics of precarious labour mostly focused on the creative and information industries, and the movements against precarious labour – on organising youthful, able-bodied, highly educated people with a relative lack of caring responsibilities (Gill and Pratt, 2008).

While traditional Marxist feminists have long spoken of reproductive labour, the term was often used to include unwaged work to provide food, shelter, and care, inside, but not outside the traditional family structure (Gill and Pratt, 2008). More recent feminist analysis has included precarity-focused critique of other structures such as heterosexual marriage, maternity, care-work, and individualized self-exploitation (Fantone, 2007; Zechner, 2013; Coin 2017). While much of this critique addresses precarity in the lives and communities of the theorists – including through the focus on emotions and practices of care in social movements and artistic collectives (Zechner, 2013) – it opens debates on precarity to groups formerly absent from it: those living and working under extreme forms of feminized and racialized precarious conditions in global commodity chains.

Johanna Oksala has more recently argued that a narrow focus on abolishing the division between productive and reproductive labour, or remuneration of reproductive work – eclipses a whole ethical aspect of both labour and care (Oksala, 2016: 296-297). 'In an economic system, in which resources are primarily distributed to individuals according to their ability to compete in the economic game — as opposed to their need or their right…women's reproductive labour can only ever be a handicap' (Oksala, 2016: 299).

The abolition of the distinction between productive and reproductive labour, then, sounds like a new threat to lift all determinations rather than suspend a condition of oppression (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). New struggles against precarity need to treat both already existing structural conditions of oppression that persist at workplaces, and the attempts of individualizing, profit-led working conditions to define all aspects of our lives. Instead of trying to abolish this distinction between reproductive and productive labour by bringing rationalities from the productive sphere into the personal and communal domain, the struggle against the negative aspects of precarity should bring systematically care work and affective labour into the

workplace. This also requires the discussion of not directly labour-related aspects of precarity: those related to life and livelihood that are exposed to acute forms of inequality and care-lessness (Lynch, 2010) under advanced capitalism.

Precarious life: Ethical and social dimension

A focus on workers as independent, hypermobile actors solely occupied with income and welfare benefits, denies the fact that personal lives are complex, and that mobility decisions are made with affective realities in mind. Work and life outside the workplace are not neatly delineated. Isabell Lorey notes, 'it is not only work that is precarious and dispersed [for precarious workers] but life itself' (2015: 9). For Judith Butler, 'precarity' is 'a politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death' (Butler, 2009: ii). Franco Berardi insists that in order to understand the political economy of contemporary capitalism, we need to grasp the psychopathology of relations based on economic competition for maximum profit (Berardi, 2009). Mike Davies calls for a political analysis of precarity examining the physical or physic damage of precarious work: its impact on social integration, social transformation or their failure (Davies, 2013).

Precarity creates increasing demands on mobility and flexibility. While flexible arrangements can contribute to workers' mobility power (Alberti, 2014), they can also be manipulated by employers to implement exploitative organisational models of insecure labour and incessant work. Hence, there is not a 'true flexibility' but an 'inflexible flexibility': a rigid and a prescriptive vocation that displays greed and reverberates on the life of the individual (Morini, 2007: 48-9). Empirical research on different groups affected by such processes has shown their deep, divergent impacts.

Political precarity and vulnerability

Groups and populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and who experience routine aggression or lack of adequate protection by states, suffer

precarity expressed as 'maximised vulnerability' and minimised equality (Butler, 2009: ii). Judith Butler speaks of 'precarious life', as not 'recognisable, readable, or grievable' (*ibid*: xiii). As well as equal access to resources, equal participation requires conditions of being recognized and listened to as a political subject: of being considered worthy of living, worthy of welfare, and of care as an integral human being (*ibid.*: iv).

Thus, for persons and groups who are exposed to physical or symbolic violence and frequently unrecognised or misrecognised, precarity is a permanent state of induced competition: a zero sum game over scarce symbolic and material resources which determine who counts as a subject and who does not (Butler, 2009: iv). Under these conditions, access to rights and equality is possible only through assimilation to structures of violence (*ibid*.). Insurgence often becomes an only means of subaltern populations to fight back against the hard power of the state and the soft power of civil society, which impose oppressive legal frameworks and power structures (Chatterjee, 2004).

Economic precarity and exploitation

Beyond exposures to symbolic and physical violence, the market creates subtle, yet brutal mechanisms of cutthroat competition, exploitation, and exclusion by limiting the time to dedicate to love, tenderness, and affection (Berardi, 2009). The separation between life and work through the introduction of regular hours into a work routine and the division between employers' time and 'own' time (Thompson, 1967: 60-61) is now a privilege.

Under constant demands to perform a growing number of fragmented mental tasks, the body-mind of the contemporary worker is completely taken up; he or she is not treated as an integral individual but as package of abstract, depersonalised time, purchased and sold out by company owners via management (Berardi, 2009: 42; Moore, 2017). These conditions result in a dissatisfaction and stress as workers are constantly required to adjust to new standards and skill-sets (Standing, 2011: 124). More recently, a growing tendency to also treat out-of-work skills and social capacities of workers as

yet another exploitable asset has blurred the life-work continuum at the advantage of work (Fleming, 2013).

There is also a further sense of 'wasted labour' and 'bullshit jobs' (Graeber, 2018), combined with fear of having to remain stuck in their cycle because of scarcity. Starting a temporary contract, workers are worrying about and already searching for future work (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Reducing the value of life to the value of one's paid work produces an existential angst. Workers' mental and physical activities are in accelerated labour that leads to collapse, depression, and to low motivation, self-esteem, and sexual desire (Berardi, 2009: 37-38). This process negatively impacts workers' health and wellbeing: it leads to fatigue, exhaustion, frustration, and the inability to plan ahead. Anxiety, insecurity and individualised shame often lead to burnout, substance abuse, physical, mental and emotional disorders (Gill and Pratt, 2008).

Precarity and gender

In relation to gender, the flexibility and mobility which have increasingly come to characterise precarious labour under capitalism are characteristics that have historically been associated with work designated as 'female' (Morini, 2007). While the number of women in paid employment has risen dramatically, women in the workforce have an increased likelihood of holding low quality jobs, along with immigrants, recent school leavers and workers considered to be 'low-skilled' (OECD, 2015). Women, who still try to accommodate paid work and unpaid domestic responsibilities, dominate fast-growing service sectors of the new economy (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009), and comprise the majority of part-time and flexible workers globally (OECD, 2015).

All these inequalities considerably impact workloads and the 'double-burden' of paid labour and unpaid care or domestic work, as well as on income and career progression. Women also perform the larger share of affective labour and 'emotion work'. Commonly depicted as unskilled, effortless and outside the labour process, emotional work remains unrecognised or dismissed as embodied, natural, immaterial (Bolton, 2009).

It is obscured within the institution of the family 'by privatising, feminising and naturalising much of the work involved in its reproduction' (Weeks, 2011: 143). The moral imperative to care remains highly gendered in both paid and unpaid environments (O'Brien, 2007). This gendered division of labour has real consequences for political and economic participation for women.

Precarity and mobility

An increased expectation of mobility is another aspect of life, particularly for fixed-term, part-time, 'underemployed' and 'casual' workers. Liz Oliver writes about the relational impact of temporary labour even for those in relatively privileged 'white-collar' occupations as contract workers in scientific research. Geographic mobility extends the individual capacity to tolerate instability and requires decision-making that can be harmful for personal relationships or requires bringing partners, children, and extended family members across time and space (Oliver, 2012: 3860). Beyond change at work, and constant re-negotiation of career decisions, the end of each contract also means renegotiating friendships, family, and collegial relationships (*ibid.*). By changing countries, workers often curtail their previous social and professional networks. Many suffer loneliness and depression while others take on the responsibility of moving their whole families along or commuting across regional or national borders to make ends meet (Ivancheva, 2015).

Women are particularly exposed to vulnerability with less access to permanent positions, and caring responsibilities both in and out of the paid labour force (Ivancheva, 2015: 42). While wealthier and middle class women find partial solutions in hiring care workers (O'Hagan, 2015), a global, and rural-urban, 'care deficit' emerges (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003). Daughters or mothers of care workers remain out of education or of work to take care of children or elders, while their respective mothers or daughters become caregivers to other people's loved ones (Parreñas, 2005; Deneva, 2012).

Precarity and 'hostile environments'

As a temporal and spatial process that meshes with the requirements of the labour market at certain stages, migratory processes add a further dimension of precariousness via visa regimes that produce labour market immobility and insecurity. Migrants – and especially low paid migrants from the Global South – navigate within a new institutional environment. On top of their labour precarity, they have to deal with an employment and a racialised migration system. Precarity translates into an 'institutionalised uncertainty' that produces workers over whom employers have increased control (Anderson, 2010: 300).

Precarity is in many ways exemplified in undocumented migrant workers, who are overrepresented in low-paid, poorly regulated sectors (Anderson, 2010; MRCI, 2015). For undocumented workers, where employment or residency could end suddenly and therefore time must be used 'productively', here is a keen sense of 'living off borrowed time' (Nobil Ahmad, 2008). Persons in these situations are often extremely confined within work and home spaces. The complexities and idiosyncratic character of the immigration and work permit systems across nation states, the use of agencies to hire workers, the ease with which in low-paid and poorly regulated sectors can become undocumented, all exacerbate precarity and related inequalities (Meszmann and Fedyuk, 2019).

Precarity and automation

Labour automation adds yet another aspect of precarity in relation to care. The threat of job loss of over 800 million jobs over the next two decades (Vincent, 2017) will also happen in parallel with the aging of a vast proportion of population in the developed world in need of care. What is more, as Tiziana Terranova has pointed out, even if automation frees time and energy, this surplus is incessantly 'reabsorbed in the cycle of production of exchange value leading to increasing accumulation of wealth by the few' (Terranova, 2014: np). And while care work has been discussed as unreplaceable by digital technologies, differentiated services for those able to pay and those unable to afford care would mean ever growing shortage of access to care labour for the latter, exposing them to new forms of alienation

and affective precarity. Despite the rise of 'the cyborg', most work is still premised upon gendered, classed, and racialised labour that is downplayed as 'unproductive' or 'immaterial' (Caffentzis, 1999).

The intersectional inequalities of precarity

These examples show some of the ways in which precarity intersects with factors to destabilise life or increase vulnerabilities. However, in certain cases, hyper-flexible, though precarious working arrangements can help rather than hinder precarious lives. Kathleen Millar's work shows how precarity helps in the conceptualising labour as 'inseparable from issues of subjectivity, affect, sociality and desire' (Millar, 2014: 35). Her ethnography of informal workers at a garbage dump in Rio de Janeiro, exemplifies how precarious labour can enable greater flexibility and self-determination in paid work. Through this, paid labour can be better interwoven with relationships and care responsibilities. While in some contexts unstable work 'destabilises daily living' and has a negative impact on income as well as public identity and social belonging, for the *catadores* working in the garbage dump amidst poverty and threat of violence, 'unstable daily living destabilises work' (*ibid.*: 35). For many workers, and particularly those with limited resources, a more stable affective and relational life trumps a more stable but highly restrictive and inflexible low-waged work. This process facilitates individuals and families to 'relational autonomy', to be able to 'sustain relationships, fulfil social obligations, pursue life project in an uncertain everyday' (*ibid.*: 35). Though low-status, dirty and difficult, employment at the garbage dump provides a method of navigating employment and earning income in the midst of other forms of social and economic precarity that go beyond the disruptions to routine and contingency associated with full-time, low-wage jobs.

Thus, in spite of the vulnerabilities created and exacerbated by precarious working conditions, within the current system, highly flexible labour can be more compatible with care responsibilities for workers seeking to negotiate life within globally unequal geographic locations and oppressive social realities. In precarious living situations, flexibility holds the potential to facilitate greater self-determination and autonomy (Millar, 2014: 40), and

that might not be possible within fixed working hours requiring full-time availability. A refocus on care and affective relationships in precarity gives a nuanced view of complex social realities. A binary conception of precarity-stability and fixed work-life boundaries masks lived experiences, as well as the social and historical contexts in which subjects operate.

The vision of fixed life-work boundaries has also underpinned the classical Marxist notion of the working class as bearer of universal characteristics, transcending territory, culture, or lineage, in its strive towards a universal liberation from exploitation (Berardi, 2009: 62). Here, the notion of the working class avoids the discussion of workers as territorially and contextually bounded in their experience of belonging and caring relations. Precarity has not only been a constant feature of labour for the global majority; it has become a normalised feature of the life and work of those employed in certain poorly regulated sectors: care and domestic work, sex work, retail, catering and hospitality, agriculture and construction. Even in sectors dominated by men, work is gendered through distribution of domestic work, often done by women workers. They navigate a series of temporal, geographical and financial arrangements in the unequal terrain between unpaid care and paid labour. Not taking into account precarious living arrangements and care relations in the discussion of work creates further obstacles to conceptualising a transformative alternative in which oppressive hierarchies are not simply replicated, but challenged.

Precarity and care: Rebuilding the social fabric

Lynch et al. (2009) theorise the nature of affective care as constituting circles of care relations: primary care relations of love labour, secondary care relations or general care work, and tertiary care relations of solidarity work. Care is not an isolated sphere of activity. It is intertwined with economic, political and cultural relations (Baker et al., 2004). Inequalities in these areas of life exacerbate affective deprivations and the ability to perform love, care and solidarity (Lynch and Walsh, 2009: 41). In the context of precarious employment, greater energy and time is required to compensate for a lack of stability. A constant need to adapt feeds into an erosion of social relations

(Anderson, 2010: 303), as well as of capacities to care to develop relationships of love and solidarity in and outside the workplace. Caution is needed against paternalistic and parochial 'dark' sides of care (Tronto, 1993), ascribing caregivers more authority over those receiving care, and more value to mother-child links rather than larger social interdependence. Yet, with Joan Tronto we employ a political concept of care that transcends individual rights and insists on responsibility of humans to each other.

Access and time to care

When it comes to love labour and affective work, paid and unpaid care work is subordinated to labour seen as more economically profitable or valuable, while affective and love labour are subordinated to labour that is considered 'productive'. This is particularly so for persons in low-paid and precarious employment. In addition to the negotiation of environment and irregular working times, unstable employment or frequent changes of employer presents significant challenges to creating and nurturing social and affective relationships. Social and economic inequalities, exacerbated by precarious and unstable conditions, weaken the human capacity to perform affective work – the active doing of tasks and rituals that communicate affection, love, and care. In this process, those with less time and resources such as low-wage workers, those with multiple jobs, or persons with multiple caring responsibilities and little support, are disadvantaged. They experience constant deficit of time, as well as of the material, physical and emotional resources necessary for love and care (Hochschild, 2003). Thus, people in precarious living and working situations face additional barriers to creating and nurturing loving relationships, both in and out of work, than those who do not face these restrictions. Comparatively, persons with greater time, energy and resources are in a position of privilege and better equipped to manage the working day to include time for affective labour (Lynch et al., 2009; Claassen, 2011).

The cost of care

To make up for the growing lack of time for affective labour in the lives of the ever fewer workers privileged with stable employment, the caregiver has appeared on the scene of complex micro- and macro-politics. Paid and

unpaid domestic labour and primary caregiving within families is still overwhelmingly performed by women (OECD, 2014). For those that can afford it, it is delegated to women with less access to the labour market, who are often poorer workers from minority or migrant background (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Anderson, 2010). The increased demand for outsourced care work and the commodification of such labour has resulted by what has been called a 'care deficit' as many workers migrate to perform care, domestic and affective work elsewhere (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). This 'extraction of care' (Parreñas, 2003: 53) from peripheral to core countries, and from poorer rural areas to affluent urban centres (Deneva, 2012), means that wealthier countries and families benefit from such arrangements at the expense of the families of caregivers whose labour is often undervalued and underpaid (Gutierrez- Rodríguez, 2014; Parreñas, 2005).

Competition vs. care

A third way in which new flexibilised forms of work are related to the question of care concerns the new imperatives of social organisation that erode cooperation and solidarity (O'Flynn and Panayiotopolous, 2015). Social relations or potential bonds of collective care are ever more damaged though a culture of competition and individualism. In this environment precarity thrives as a self-sustaining ideological energy, hinging on our preoccupation with 'our individuality, our unique destiny, our special distinctive abilities' (Horning, 2012: np). That workers are increasingly required to simultaneously and constantly compete even when co-operating with peers and co-workers presents an emotional burden. It produces an environment hostile to dissent: while those who speak up are penalised, the others remain divided, and in constant fear (Courtois and O'Keeffe, 2015). This 'universal competition' results in further separation from networks of protection for workers (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: 427) and calls for care and self-care rebuild solidarity and the social fabric in social movements they form (Zechner, 2013).

The status of love, care and emotional labour

While care is increasingly outsourced, automated, and commercialised (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003, Oksala, 2016), it is still considered 'unproductive' and attributed lower status vis-a-vis other forms of labour. Following Oksala's (2016) argument on affective labour we argue that, while the remuneration and recognition of professional care labour is important, by itself it remains unable to tackle the enclosures of love, care, and solidarity work that produce precarity. The affective dimension of everyday life is further invisibilised by a more general approach to precarity that focuses on work alone. Even if certain forms of are attributed price and turned into a commodity, there will always be forms of love, care, and solidarity that will defy the market logic. Pushed even further into the private domain, they will be left to those less privileged groups – often migrant, low-income and minority women – whose marginality keeps them out of traditional sphere of exchange. One way to address this inequality is to examine the care needs of those providing care, and of all workers generally. Engagement with employers and building support networks within the workplace could allow a symbolic and material recognition of workers that in addition to financial remuneration. Only by incorporating care into an analysis of precarity, and resituating the centrality of love, care, and solidarity to individual and societal wellbeing, can the inequalities and injustices of precarious labour and life begin to be truly addressed.

Productive vs reproductive labour

Accounting for the double bind of precarity, it is important to take into account two disparate realities that are still an intrinsic part of this concept. Precarious work, rather than causing vulnerability, can provide a flexible foundation to precarious or unstable living, particularly when it serves to accommodate affective responsibilities. In such cases rebuilding the social fabric cannot start with a firm division between life and work identities, and champion 'life' as normatively positive, and 'work' as negative. Working lives and life outside of paid work are equally part of one's integral life. They can be equally sources of positive and negative identification depending on the conditions under which they are experienced. In examining precarisation

as political constituting, we should take into account that it is a contested field that should not be conceived of as necessarily negative: subjects are not only productive for the purpose of capitalist accumulation, but for communication, knowledge, creativity and affect (Lorey, 2015). Precarisation becomes a base on which workers can articulate desires and struggles for alternative forms of living, and to recompose work, life and relationships. The rejection of this division and the repositioning of love, care, and solidarity as an integral part of work can be seen as a way to reinvent a relational autonomy of workers that can replace individual autonomy as technique of new managerialism (Millar, 2014).

Importantly, erasing the distinction between productive and reproductive, material and affective labour under the conditions of capitalism, is not an easy solution to our current predicament (Oksala, 2016). A 'simple' solution, such as offering more maternity leave and welfare benefits to women and caregivers will not solve the gender or global inequalities. On its own, allotting a price to care work, and affective labour, while relying on women's unpaid role in reproductive work, will not offer a long-term solution either (*ibid.*: 299). While affect and care are increasingly commodified, they remain rare sites of resistance against the logic and moral of the market. A focus on paid labour neglects the reality that work and life outside paid work cannot be clearly delineated. Some forms of affective labour by their nature are inalienable or cannot be commoditised (Lynch, 2007). There is an urgent need to ground care and self-care in the workplace, not as a technology of further extraction, but as a sign of clear resistance against the individualising and alienating labour. The reorganisation of productive forces toward the building and maintenance of nurturing, affective relationships and bonds of solidarity and community is even more important in a context in which workers, focused on individual, everyday struggles, are seen as temporary and replaceable. In order to challenge the negative effects of precarity a recognition and redistribution of the capacity for love, care, and solidarity must be prioritised.

Discussion

In this article we worked on three interconnected levels. In the first part we critiqued some androcentric and ethnocentric tendencies in the debate of labour precarity. We then moved on to discuss the highly gendered and racialised aspects of care work, both affective labour and the professional (if not always professionalised) care work that is often done by those experiencing precarious working and living conditions. In this we emphasised that in relations of social reproduction, the ability to build communities and access relations of love, care, and solidarity, are crucial to subsistence and survival. In the last section we showed how the intersection of precarity and care illuminates how the monetisation of reproductive and care work, claimed by campaigns such as Wages for Housework, bears significant limitations. While it sheds light on the extraction of surplus from reproductive and care labour, it also brings an instrumental, calculative logic into domains of human life and livelihood that remain the last resource of resistance against capitalism. We claim that, reversely, care and affective labour should be brought into the core of productive work and used as a means of resistance and resilience against alienation.

Considering a grounded understanding of precarity, which also reflects the affective aspect of our lives, means to also examine our understanding of what kind of subject and practices we envisage in struggles that would challenge precarity. Flexible employment has created both an impossibility for a shared labour identity, and a parallel craving for a 'we' (Sennett, 1998: 148). The latter is represented in a new emphasis on a defensive character of the nuclear family and the local and national 'community' which have become defensive spaces from which assaults are made against the imagined 'other'– the subject envisaged behind one's own working misfortunes. Clutching to networks of aid, however, is no longer such an easy solution, as flexible capitalism 'radiates indifference, reengineering institutions in which people are treated as indifferent' (Sennett, 1998: 146).

Moving beyond the double bind of precarity and addressing related inequalities can only happen when positive communal identities and practices reorganise the current relations of production. This would involve

placing the value not on individualised competition, but on collective solidarity, care, and love (Baker et al., 2004). There is a need to recognise symbolically, but also compensate and honour in very material terms those whose lives have always been vulnerable and marginalised, and whose labour and sacrifice has always been taken for granted.

It is also very important to rethink the subjects that have thus far been envisaged as revolutionary subjects. Paradoxically, both the Marxian proletarian and the autonomous, rational actor championed by neo-liberalism feature indifference to the affective domain, ignoring the relational life of humans as interdependent, loving, caring and solidaristic beings (Lynch and Ivancheva, 2015: 18; Lynch, 1989). Focusing on subjects as independent, economic actors determined by their economic status, reinforces a 'competitive individualism' which underpins precarity, and is 'no longer seen as an amoral necessity but rather as a desirable and necessary attribute for a constantly reinventing entrepreneur' (Lynch and Ivancheva, 2015: 18).

While it is beyond the scope of the article to give exact prescriptions of how this could work, we can speak of some basic lessons from our own experiences of bringing solidarity, care and love into a toxic workplace, where–similarly to multiple experiences in the neoliberal university – we were both profoundly precarious in different, intersectional, and often conflicting ways.

Our differences – of professional rank and of salary within a vertically structured hierarchy; of financially unstable rootedness vs. financially stable displacement within our local life and work context; of being a white migrant or a national from a migrant background; of being feminists within a macho working culture that required self-promotion and cut-throat competitiveness – slotted us mercilessly into different, potentially antagonistic categories. These categories had divided many in our positions and us from other colleagues in previous jobs. They could have easily created serious cleavages either by producing hierarchy and disparity resulting in passionate envy, and destructive competition and adversity between us; or by instantiating cold disinterestedness in which life and work could only be

lobotomised from each other with a sterile dexterity so they never intersected.

It took everything from intentional and systematic everyday gestures of care, through to bigger efforts and sacrifices on behalf of both of us to be in solidarity with each other, against the vulnerability of our individual and shared positions and while resisting assimilation and co-optation into the oppressive structures in order to access individually better conditions. This was needed to start rebuilding an alienating working environment into something that between us felt like a safe space. From there we could be introspective with our own reactions of moments of conflict, and generous with each other. From there we could also reach out to others, producing slowly and despite all odds a caring community that spread our mutual care to other colleagues without expecting full reciprocity but with the expectation of respect for our efforts and the space we had built. Transgressing the life-work boundary and bringing a similar sensitivity to our workplace that we had in our friendships outside of it, was our strongest weapon against the divisive force of precarity.

Thus, in order to challenge the universalistic underpinning in understanding of the working classes, and, for that matter, of any collective agent of social change, we suggest a more organic, grounded understanding of workers' experiences is needed. It could entail organising through a shared analysis not of our strengths, but of our vulnerabilities and care needs. It could look like Jane McAlevey's (2012) power structure analysis on the reverse – a less formal vulnerability structure analysis, aimed at building mutual understanding and trust at precarious workplaces. It could entail opening safe spaces among precarious workers for sharing-based analysis of individual vulnerabilities, strengths, caring commitments, and dis/comfort zones. Unlike a campaign where external forces are analysed, the point could be to open up about, share, and come to terms with our own strengths and weaknesses. Doing this could not be easy, but it could lead to trust building and ac/knowledge/ment of our own and others' limits that underpin any realistic strategy against an oppressive power structure.

Revisiting the debate of precarity with the concept of care, the article crucially insists on the distinction between productive and reproductive work in a landscape where care labour is pushed outside economic exchange, or exploited at the expense of productive activity (Federici, 2013). Through recognising, revaluing, and reintroducing care in the workplace, we suggest that a more holistic approach, rather than an artificial work-life divide, would nurture workers' wellbeing and positive relationships. The recognition and remuneration of care labour is important, but making care workers better paid and more secure is not enough to bring transformation of the current system driven by a market logic. Instead, we claim that love, care, and solidarity should be integrated into the productive sphere, engaging all workers in producing practices of collective care at work, that can corrode the institutions and culture of carelessness in capitalist firms and neo-managerial public institutions. A sincere effort to go beyond precarity and the multiple inequalities it creates and sustains must include recognition of the necessity of non-alienating social production and reproduction.

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the authors

Mariya Ivancheva is a sociologist and anthropologist of labour and higher education. Her academic work and research-driven advocacy focus on the casualisation and digitalisation of academic labour, the re/production of intersectional inequalities at universities and labour markets, and the role of academic communities in processes of social change, especially transitions to/from socialism.
Email: m.ivancheva@liverpool.ac.uk

Kathryn Keating is a policy researcher with interest in gender, work and finance. She has done research, taught, and produced policy reports and academic publications around issues of reproductive justice, labour, and care.
Email: kathryn.keating@gmail.com