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Precarity without borders: visions of hope, shared responsibilities and possible responses

This precarity debate intends to raise the following questions by proposing an introduction and three replies that come from tenured and non-tenured track anthropologists. The aim is to think critically about precarity within academia:

- What does it mean to be a precarious researcher in today's academia, which is ruled by a predatory system?
- How can this situation be framed in terms of shared responsibilities?
- Could solidarity and unionisation get us out of this situation?

My 'personal' experience as a precarious researcher

I am writing this from my office in Mayotte, an overseas island region of France situated in the Mozambique Channel of the western Indian Ocean. Recently, I got a permanent academic job after eight long years of precarity: jumping from one post-doc to another, waiting for a project to be funded while desperately trying to write a European Research Council (ERC) proposal, or doing other 'intellectual tasks' in order to boost my career. I received the 'good news' with no particular joy and no celebration. I was just confused. Furthermore, I now had a permanent position produced a shift in my life that belied the fact that I was entering a 'transitional' phase: experiencing liminality (Turner 2006 [1969]; Van Gennep 2004 [1909]), while changing my status from a precarious researcher to a tenure-track associate professor, I would temporarily lose my reference points.

'Un poste de Maître de Conférences, ça ne se refuse pas!' (An Associate Professorship can't be turned down!): I said this to myself on the very first of the seven days I was given to accept or reject the offer. Moving me from the centre of Europe to its peripheries, this new 'overseas job' would push me even deeper into what had become a lifetime project of academic mobility. I was, as has been said to me, '*une rescapé*' (a survivor) who got a tenure-track position in a country (like many European colleagues) where the decline in the number of tenure-track positions causes concern. Of Romanian origin, I studied in Romania, Italy and France, moved between different countries for several postdocs and applied mainly in France for tenure-tracks before 'landing' in the Indian Ocean for a permanent job – few positions were available either in my native country or in Italy. Just to give some numbers in order to understand why I did not reject the position: in 2019, in France there are only three 'Maître de Conférences' positions in anthropology for the 160 PhDs who received a

'qualification' that made it possible for them to apply for tenure-track. To these 160 scholars we can add the other PhDs who had already earned the title in previous years and are likely to apply.

This introductory personal statement to the Debate session describes one of many episodes of 'personal precarity' (LeVon 2018). Therefore, I am in the position of having experienced and witnessed precarity from different points of view: on the one hand as a former precarious researcher, dependent for years on short-term academic contracts, and on the other as a freshly recruited researcher entering the world of those who, I argue, could be seen as in some ways responsible for encouraging precarity (Elcioglu 2010).

In the framework of this debate on precarity, I would like to raise the following issues:

• What does it mean to be a precarious researcher in today's academia, which is ruled by a *predatory* system?
• How can this situation be framed in terms of *shared responsibilities*?
• Could *solidarity* and *unionisation* get us out of this situation?

Of course, these questions do not claim to be exhaustive but rather are merely entry points meant to lay the groundwork for a discussion on precarity analysed through the lens of 'shared responsibilities' between institutions, regions, young and senior scholars. Nevertheless, on what terms can 'precarity' be defined, considering that it encompasses different levels and work categories? Precarity is a multidimensional term (Kasmir 2018), but it can also be understood as 'nested precarities' (Bakker Kellog 2018). This refers to fixed-term contracts, mobility pressure, flexibility in a predatory system, low pay, uncertain outcomes, job insecurity: 'nested precarities' that give the rhythm to the everyday precarious existence of many of my colleagues.

Glimpses of a precarious researcher's life in academia today

In conversations with my colleagues, we often asked ourselves how long we would keep on believing that something might change in our (personal and academic) lives. As PhDs, postdocs and beyond, at every level we are lured by a 'cruel optimism' (Berlant 2011) and pressured to perform and prove that we are excellent in all our tasks. But what does it mean to be excellent, to be original in an academic neoliberal system that offers no security? A system that is ready to get rid of us as soon as the working contract has finished, offering nothing other than 'unemployed excellence'.

It is common knowledge that precarious researchers are expected to produce scientific data in an insecure environment. They have to be flexible and cope with all kinds of predictable and unpredictable situations, adapt continuously to life-changing circumstances and stressful conditions of hard work under pressure, torn apart by isolation and invisibility, intellectual migration, mental health issues or job insecurity, to name just some of the salient features of precarity. In order to withstand continuous external academic shocks, precarious scholars need to be resilient. As Manyena suggests, resilience might not be considered as an outcome but as a process: 'a deliberate

process (leading to desired outcomes) that comprises a series of events, actions or changes to augment the capacity of the affected community when confronted with singular, multiple or unique shocks and stresses' (2006: 438). Being resilient as a precarious researcher might be seen and analysed critically as a competence acquired over time. The precarious researchers usually demonstrate resilience in their professional life through daily behaviours, thoughts and actions while trying to fight a ferocious system within an academic-scape that exploits the (young) scholar to the maximum. Yet, from a critical point of view, being resilient might simply be an *individual strategy* that leaves no space for solidarity between peers and ignores the structural aspects of precarity.

In the arena of precarity, usually our actions are individualistic, driven by the will to succeed in what we are doing, and often we choose to play the game of a system that contributes to the condition of precarity. One day, at a roundtable on precarity, a professor who was almost at retirement age said: 'I'm happy to be at the end of my career and not be forced to live through what (young) scholars have to endure! Maybe one solution would be fewer PhD students! Numbers of PhD students have increased so much that it is very hard to find a place in academia!'

This statement is definitely in line with what Platzer and Allison write about 'critiquing departments across the discipline for their complicity in the overproduction of unemployed PhDs … [in] a "predatory," system … unwilling to teach graduate students to do something other than what we do' (2018: np). For sure, presently there are too many PhDs and not enough tenure-track positions in a context that could be seen as the 'death of the public university' and where 'collegiality and professional trust are fast being replaced by competition, surveillance and managerialism' (Shore and Wright 2016: 49; see also Rogler 2019).

How can this situation be explained?

As a first step, this condition can be described from a structural point of view. If we look at the structural embeddedness of precarity, we can question why there are so few positions available in anthropology within universities and research centres. Of course, this is not only the case in our discipline but also elsewhere in the social sciences and humanities (among other fields) and relates to the wider crisis in the academic system. More broadly, it is society as a whole that needs to be analysed. How can we explain why so little importance is given to anthropology within the academic system or by those who make funding and employment decisions? It seems that not every discipline at university is asked to justify its existence in social terms in the same way. Just to give an example, astrophysics, bacteriology or pure mathematics are never questioned in the same way. A possible answer may refer to an implicit hierarchy of disciplines as some are regarded as more dispensable, or less legitimate, not to say 'less scientific' than others.

Maybe we need to rethink the way we teach anthropology and form future generations of anthropologists, focusing on different occupational fields outside academia. From this perspective, we should work towards making our discipline more visible and show that our professional skills are needed in such different areas of strategic and timely importance as transcultural communication, migration and refugee studies, and

the analysis of social, political and economic transformations and right-wing populism, public health and climate change.

Moreover, the mismatch between supply and demand facilitates precarious situations. In this context, Kathleen Millar speaks about the 'hidden politics of precarity' and interrogates the 'condition, category, experience' of precarity assuming that 'precarity is not a diagnosis of the present but rather a starting point of analysis or a way of asking how precarious labour and precarious life articulate in particular times and places' (2017: 5). Certainly, precarity can be seen as a starting point of analysis but also as a struggle against the increasingly predatory system within which we must not complain but instead must be proactive. A predatory system that takes advantage of the presence of precarious scholars, transforming them in easy prey, by making them work and produce scientific knowledge at low costs.

Those affected are trapped in a framework of 'stolen time' (Khosravi 2018) that condemns them to an apparently endless condition of precarity in which they strive to reach the 'transition' to a 'settled' researcher position. Precarity, as Anna Tsing, states is 'life without the promise of stability' (2015: 2), which, of course, differs in various parts of the world. Our personal and professional life projects are repeatedly postponed, with little prospect of achieving our goals. We are more vulnerable than ever, but at the same time we are prepared to accept interminable academic travelling, working under time pressure and continuously applying for funding with no distinction between work and free time, almost embracing workaholism as a remedy. As Vita Peacock puts it, we can speak of 'precarity as a form of dependence' (2016: 100). Certainly, the path to professorship is not an easy one and a form of *inter-dependence* can be observed within the system: precarious scholars need postdoc positions to advance their careers, and professors as principal investigators need postdocs to complete research and finalise projects. Without doubt, this situation is directly linked to the rise and complex effects of an audit culture that urges scholars to be more productive, to constantly chase 'money for research', forcing them to at times pay high costs in terms of anxiety and depression (Loher and Strasser 2019).

This issue is even more pertinent if we consider that 'quality' measurement has turned research into an *ordinary* job just like any other that depends on the conditions of supply and demand. I am wondering at this point if a researcher position is still attractive from an economic point of view, considering the personal investment in long and costly academic studies.

Shared responsibilities and interpersonal relationships

The present situation in academia divides precarious early career academics threatened by unemployment on one side and overworked permanent senior staff on the other who continuously compete for third-party grants. However, the notion of 'shared responsibilities' encompasses a wider range of actors involved in the system. These actors include supervisors and departmental or university directors, but perhaps also higher organisations such as ministries of education or labour, as well as national or international governmental bodies. How we address questions of shared responsibilities depends in part on our understanding of their nature and aim and acknowledgement that such responsibilities can be *vertical* (between precarious scholars and tenure-track professors) or *horizontal* (between peers experiencing similar situations).

Discussions of shared responsibility cannot be purely 'theoretical' but must also be embedded in a broader conceptual and political discussion of senior researchers' responsibilities within an (in)efficient academic system that is unable to provide for the progression of early career scholars. How many supervisors really think about the future of their PhDs and postdocs and devote time to preparing them for a time when they will need to build a career beyond the end of a contract? And how many PhDs find a job in academia in accordance with their chosen career path and highest qualification?

We can describe this as *vertical responsibility*, that is, a kind of responsibility that spans the academic 'hierarchy'. This is a strong form of responsibility: those in secure positions can more easily take risk to change things in the field as they have more social and symbolic capital. From the perspective of vertical/hierarchical responsibility, it can be said, without risk of generalisation, that PhD students and/or postdoctoral researchers make a contribution by reinforcing research data and publications in many departments and are thus 'useful' in the overall assessment of the system by those who carry out academic audits. At the same time, we are dealing with a fragile form of responsibility, because those in secure and precarious locations occupy structurally different positions in the field, which means that their interests differ and might give rise to a delicate relationship between responsibility and power (Shore 2017). How we address questions of shared responsibility depends in part on our understanding of their nature and aim. In this respect, precarity might be analysed in terms of interpersonal relationships seen as strong connections between people. These connections can form in a context that is potentially regulated either by a relationship of power or by mutual agreement and commitment. Such interpersonal relationships are shaped by the experience of precarity and can be seen from different perspectives: that of relationships between the precarious scholars, and that of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, in which the supervisor sets the rules and the supervisee follows their lead.

There is also a *horizontal* dimension of shared responsibility: among peers in a similarly precarious situation. A transnational anthropological union of precarious researchers must be developed that can advocate for the rights of precarious researchers and organise common action. In this respect, the PrecAnthro collective is a good example of how taking shared responsibility can help precarious researchers to 'move beyond self-pity, overcome hyper-fragmentation and fear, and organize collectively before the changes in place make solidarity across positions, contracts, and contexts impossible' (AllegraLab 2016: np). Of course, this type of 'responsibility' encounters a series of limits that can be linked to unstable positions, the long haul of 'improving' one's career, lack of economic resources or leaving academia due to economic reasons or disillusionment with the system.

We can say with Trnka and Trundle that a variety of forms of responsibilities govern social and political life, but there are also the myriad ways that people respond to calls to be responsible. Assuming personal responsibility can be either enabling or a burden, or frequently both. People may respond to demands to be personally responsible through resolute acts of irresponsiblisation or by recasting accountability and obligation onto others, including the state and other collective forms (Trnka and Trundle 2017: 8).

Possible solutions: investigating ideas and strategies

It seems that we are dealing with a dead-end situation and there is no immediate solution. What we need are concrete actions and a profound critique of the entire academic system combined with a reflective critique of ourselves, and of our own choices to accept and be part of a predatory system. There is no doubt that things get even more complicated for precarious scholars working within academic structures that have different politics or organisational 'models' and put into practice particular 'audit culture[s]' (Strathern 2000) that influence individuals' future choices and status in the system in a certain way.

The logic of an academic system that imposes precarity as a condition for a more efficient research system is not followed through to its fullest conclusion. The political constraint to maintain tenure-track researchers at quite a high cost limits the capacity to offer well-paid precarious jobs. Thus, we could consider precarious jobs as being necessary to partly maintain the established research system based on relatively well paid and secure jobs. In this way, we could say that the new public management policies are facing significant contradictions in maintaining the traditional public research system while simultaneously applying efficiency rules in the research field according to the new market ideology. To come back to my own experience, low levels of turnover in academia are common both in Italy and France, where it's rare to obtain a tenure-track position before the age of 40 and the path to a permanent position is a difficult one. The system is more inclined to encourage short-term contracts and rely on the work and research of adjunct professors to fulfil the daily teaching requirements. Certainly, the situation differs from one country to another: in Romania, it was the norm to obtain a tenure-track position at a relatively young age even though positions were limited, albeit less so than in France and Italy. Things have changed during the last decade and the adoption of a new audit culture system (Mihăilescu 2016) has radically reduced the number of job opportunities for young scholars who started their studies in Romania.

Perhaps it will be no surprise that the majority of lecturers in a range of countries are on precarious contracts and many tenure-track scholars benefit from the precarity of others. The search for solutions might be utopian and is of course complex work. To some extent, we should be able to turn the 'traditional' academic logic upside down and try to change the system and empower young generations by adopting 'best-practices' that render the employment system more transparent. We must also trust the generations of younger but also the senior scholars whose solidarity and mutual understanding might help solve the problem.

A possible solution would be solidarity and unionisation – solidarity that makes us think of being in the same boat and sharing the same difficult conditions and demands. For those who have experienced long-term precarity, the resolve to continue is stronger than ever. But is it possible to develop solidarity? How can we set about developing this kind of solidarity even though we know that contexts will differ? How can we develop this kind of solidarity in the long term? The current status of precarity must be analysed in terms of shared responsibilities, the system critiqued and solutions advanced to put an end to precarity. We might reimagine precarity in terms of a solidarity that is based on common interests and objectives, which would shift attention from individual to collective responsibility. While focused on the strong structural differences encountered in European academia, it nevertheless has the potential to unite scholars across a range of countries. What we need are common ideas and actions to

fight precarity and refuse to nourish it, even if in some countries it could be said that 'That's the way it is; nothing can be done! It's a dead end'. A dead end can be demystified if the entire system is theorised in terms of shared responsibilities.

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Undisciplining our thinking

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Shared responsibilities in relation to precarisation and the growth of (academic) precarity can only mean shared responsibilities to effect change. If change is the objective of shared responsibility, it seems useful to employ a precise, possibly narrow understanding of the term precarity. Such a narrow (or, I would say, specific) notion of the term is necessary for thinking about possible ways out, because only with such precision can we address the actual workings of precarisation, and of precarity as a disciplinary tool which constantly reaffirms its hold over our ways of engaging in our endeavour to learn more about the world.

This means distinguishing precarity from a broader notion of a fundamental ontological precariousness. The distinction that Judith Butler made between precarity and precariousness is useful here: precarity is not precariousness – the vulnerability of human beings or the fundamental unpredictability of life; it is not insecurity as such, let alone poverty. Precarity works through insecurity, including economic insecurity, and it realises its hold over us through such insecurity. But precarity is more than insecurity; it is a means by which a specific relation to wage employment is generated: you always have to be on call, to be ever call-able, never certain when and whether at all you will be called. This is not to say that the condition of precarity is limited to one's labour; rather, it is precisely the encompassing disciplinary effects of the precarity that results from this specific relation to wage employment that mark it as distinct from other situations of (economic) insecurity or ontological vulnerability: precarity potentially shapes our 'technologies of the self' through an extensive self-responsibilisation.

Precarity is thus a disciplinary tool that holds out the promise of the non-precarious life that it is set against, and that forms both the aspirational horizon and the standard of success, of achievement, of 'normality' even in times when this model is vanishing everywhere. To speak of precarity necessitates having an idea of life courses that are planned, and both economically secure and predictable; life courses which are achievable. This of course is a very particular idea of a life course, and rather limited in its social, geographical and historical reach. It is a model of a life and labour very much connected to the mid-century promises of Keynesian capitalism in the North, a promise realised only for very few among both blue and white collar labour. Thus, its actual possibility or achievability has always been heavily skewed in terms of gender, class, race and nationality. Nonetheless, this life course has established itself as the aspirational standard, and it is precisely through this that its disciplining effect manifests.

Precarity as such is not new; for most it has been part and parcel of capitalist relations. It is not new even in academia. It is increasing in this field because of the growing number of people entering higher education. This growth of higher education in itself is also related to the further precarisation and devaluation (both in wages and social status) of other occupational paths. What is new are the tools of disciplining. These disciplinary tools work in different ways in the different segments of the precariat. If we can roughly distinguish between low-skilled service-sector work, or rather the often practical skills that society depends on but values little in terms of wages and social status, and the economically highly valued skills of the 'creative' precariat, the disciplining takes different forms. What they share is self-responsibilisation. What distinguishes them are the tools that for the highly skilled academic precariat demand absolute commitment to predefined academic formats and for the low-valued service jobs discipline through the constant threat of withdrawal of the means of subsistence in the case of non-compliance with the bureaucratic formalities of state welfare.

Precarity is thus disciplining through the conditionalities of security. In academia, the vocational demands and the 'conditionalities' of security have been ever more standardised, quantified, formatted and 'mainstreamed' in recent decades. The seeming objectification inherent in impact factors, mobility, third-party funding amounts – that is, audit culture's rule by numbers – invisibilises the new structures of power and dependence in the academy. To conflate the current conditionalities with the older structures of dependence in the academy is to misunderstand the workings of the system. The current conditionalities of security have replaced the old forms of patronage with the chimeras of seemingly less personalised dependence on citations, visibility, networking, etc. that conceal the ways academic hegemonies operate.

Of course, even those who entirely fulfil the conditionalities engendered by the audit culture cannot be certain that they will gain security. It is precisely by means of this specific unpredictability, even arbitrariness, that academic precarity reveals its disciplining effect: over-fulfilment. Over-fulfilment that engenders insecurity is legitimised by the understanding of scholarship as a 'calling', a vocation, which demands complete dedication and the abandonment of all other commitments in life.

Not only is this bad for our well-being and our capabilities – capabilities that are shaped outside the academy but without which scholarship is impoverished. Lacking the extra-academic experiences that make us who we are, we can no longer know what is important to learn. It is, moreover, inimical to the growth of knowledge, to academic freedom as a prerequisite for gaining knowledge. Academic freedom is a prerequisite for the growth of knowledge because we cannot predict what knowledge we will need for this world, and how to attain such knowledge.

Today, precarisation is one major tool for curtailing academic freedom by disciplining thought. In terms of production of knowledge, nobody profits from this, least of all 'the general public'. Too many unnecessary things are published in order to have too many peer-reviewed journal articles; too much (expensive, because tenured) time is spent on evaluating others rather than conversing with them and trying to better understand the world. Too much effort is spent on writing grant applications in formats that demand the adherence to canonical knowledge. The growth of knowledge is replaced by a competitive rat-race to fulfil the criteria necessary to get the carrot of security. These criteria do not ensure the advance of knowledge (and neither does competition as such): the rat-race leads to further entrenchments of canons, to 'mainstreaming' in format and content, to the inhibition of daring thinking and, moreover, to

a retreat into a self-referential world in which there is no understanding to be gained of the world out there, of the human condition. To gain knowledge we must undiscipline scholarship.

This is why we are all in it together – albeit in different ways. Precarity fundamentally shapes our relationships, the ways in which we work (together), how we think and write, the ways in which we learn and ask, and what we can want to know. It fundamentally shapes what counts as knowledge, and what knowledge is recognised as valuable.

What can shared responsibility mean in this context? Does responsibility arise here from our causal role in producing the system, or our myriad failures to change it? Who profits from precarisation? Does anyone? The attribution of blame or the assumption of profit is, it seems to me, based on a superficial analysis of the system, from which nobody really profits. Such an assumption of profit potentially also stands in the way of a shared action for change, since it suggests false oppositions between tenured and untenured colleagues. Responsibilities arise independently from fault; they go beyond our immediate or mediate causative role. They arise from being concerned, in the sense of being implicated in and affected by. Responsibilities arising from concern are prospective responsibilities, which call us to care about what we are implicated in and for those who are in it with us.

If our shared responsibility thus arises not from culpability, but from concern, it touches on our capacity for change. We need to analyse the extent to which we each can make a difference; moreover, we need a vision of what we want.

In our different positions within the current system, the capacities to make a difference are differently distributed, and those in tenured positions who enjoy a high degree of security and opportunities to shape the practices of academic administration can do a lot. Unfortunately, there are people in these positions who believe in the current system, or treat it as a given without realising their freedom to shape it. But those who think, as I do, that not only individual lives but also science as such would be better served if we freed them from the constraints of the rat-race can and should speak up in all the myriad instances which reproduce this system. Those who sit on committees have the power to make the right things count, not the numbers or the speed, but the content and the careful engagement with the world. Publishers could ensure that voices that speak a 'lesser' language get heard. Those in charge of faculties and institutes have the possibility to get rid of rules that increase precarity and establish others that grant security. We can protest against new precarising rules and regulations, and we often do, often in vain. We all run up against the impossibilities of doing things differently in the daily administration of the university. But we can also 'boycott' these rules and act in other, inventive and subversive ways. We can fight the relocation of funds into ever-proliferating third-party funding programmes with their fluctuating prerogatives of topicality, interdisciplinarity, collaborative formats across faculties/universities/countries/continents, etc. and insist that these funds be invested in the universities to make scholarship independent again.

However, we the tenured are often caught between conflicting responsibilities. At the same time that we want to take responsibility for resisting the system and changing it, we feel compelled to help those in precarious positions to navigate through it. By trying to act responsibly towards our non-tenured colleagues and advising, even challenging, them to adhere to the conditionalities of success, we reaffirm these conditionalities. Because we try to take care of many, we – worst of all – cut up positions

into ever-smaller pieces. To create jobs, we apply for project funds – affirming the *pro-jectification* of the academic system rather than demanding the return of funds to the universities to secure the time and the freedom to think, the freedom to choose one's forms of collaboration and learning. Only such independence can enable the genera-tion of questions and knowledge relevant for our lives and for this world.

To this end, we have to put all our efforts into furthering and *securing* possibil-ities for undisciplining thinking. Undisciplining thinking here is the independence from and transgression of not only the boundaries of disciplines and their canons, but, more importantly, from disciplining through the conditionalities of the audit culture. Undisciplining thinking means developing a vision of what science and scholarship can be and how they can be productive, and debating what we need to learn, and how learning is possible. Undisciplining thinking is the means for knowledge to go beyond the academy and its circuits, and will enable the generation of questions and knowl-edge relevant for our lives and for this world.

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K A T H A R I N A   B O D I R S K Y

Precarity: bringing the state back in

Georgeta Stoica invites us to think about shared responsibilities in ending precarity in and across anthropology departments infused with 'audit culture'. She looks for the causes of precarity predominantly in the academic job market, such as in a mismatch between supply and demand, and thus emphasises how shared responsibility can aim at increasing the visibility of anthropology or training fewer PhDs. Especially fore-grounded are an interpersonal responsibility of the supervisor to the supervisee and the importance of transnational anthropological unions (such as PrecAnthro) to 'advocate for the rights of precarious researchers and realise common action'.

My response to her reflections seeks to bring the state back in, both as a cause of precarity and a target of political action. I suggest analysing precarisation in view of the political projects that work to (re)make state practices and institutions. This has consequences for the ways we think shared responsibility in attempts to act against the precarious conditions of (academic) labour.

As I am far from the first to notice, precarity – in academia, as elsewhere – is noth-ing radically new. Rather, it is the *sine qua non* condition of labour (be it of intellectual or other sort) in capitalism, unless the commodification of labour be contained by state regulation, as was the case for parts of Europe in the middle of the 20th century. Relatively secure jobs thus appear as the exception not the rule, when seen through a wider spatial and temporal lens (e.g. Kasmir 2018; Millar 2017). Importantly, how-ever, state regulation plays a role not only in decommodifying labour, but also in

commodifying it. The extension of market logics that has been described as a hallmark of neoliberalisation requires rather than abolishes the state: it involves reregulation, not just deregulation (e.g. Harvey 2005; Peck and Tickell 2002). We thus need to understand (changes in) state practices as a main force in the structuring of precarious labour. And those changes in turn are part and parcel of political projects.

In contemporary Europe, neoliberalisation is not the only cause of intensified precarity. Rather, the state-enabled coercive logics of the market and of the repressive state apparatus are combined – to different degrees and in different ways in different countries – in the disciplining of (academic) labour via precarity. (And that this is indeed disciplining, imposing limits on the kinds of knowledge that can be produced as well as on collective political action, should be clear.)

Take the case of Turkey, where the coercive logic of the repressive state apparatus currently is paramount in producing precarity in academia but the market dimension is far from absent (e.g. Von Bieberstein *et al.* 2019). While academia has long been a relatively state-controlled space in Turkey, the repression of (critical) academics has reached new heights in the past three to four years (see this issue, as well as Baser *et al.* 2017; Caglar 2017; Tören and Kutun 2018). Among the roughly 120,000 public officials dismissed by emergency decrees since the coup attempt of July 2016, close to 6,000 were academics, of whom close to 400 had signed the Peace Petition (adapted from Human Rights Joint Platform 2018). The dismissed have little to no chance of finding formal employment in the non-academic job market. Precarity – almost too soft a word to describe this condition – results here from outright and manifold dispossession. Moreover, persecution goes well beyond dismissals. The creation of precarious lives, for the opposition as well as former allies of the regime, forms here part of a project of state remaking in both its narrow and general sense (Gramsci 2000). It involves not only the exchange of state personnel and transformation of state institutions but also attempts at control over the kind of knowledge that can be made public. And in this regard, Turkey – even if a particularly strong case – is far from exceptional in contemporary Europe, where a range of projects of authoritarian populism (Hall 1988) have worked to remake their respective states.

In response to repression, hundreds of academics have left or fled Turkey. Many of them have migrated to Germany and entered a different context of precarity, one where the coercive – state-enabled – logics of the market seem paramount. The playing field here is not level along such lines as those of class background, ethnicity, nationality or gender and will disadvantage many of the academics from Turkey in their attempts at developing longer-term careers in Germany. In German universities, only about 19 per cent of academic staff have professorships; 80 per cent of academic staff in the age group of 35–45 without a professorship are employed on fixed-term contracts (Konsortium Bundesbericht Wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs 2017).[1] There is no space here to go into a detailed discussion of the immediate causes of this, such as the specific regulations for fixed-term contracts at universities or the competitive allocation of (public) funds with a concomitant reduction of base funding (*Grundfinanzierung*) to the universities (Gallas 2018). It suffices here to highlight that the increased precarisation of academic labour formed part of a more general process of neoliberalisation in Germany – and in that sense, of state remaking – in which all governing parties collaborated over the past decades.

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[1]   In the entire age group below 45 years, 93% have fixed-term contracts. These numbers also include doctoral students with a university contract, as the German system does not differentiate between doctoral and postdoctoral employees.

If we place political processes of state remaking centre-stage in our analysis of precarity, what follows in terms of shared responsibilities? Working against precarious employment at the level of the university and the discipline, as Georgeta Stoica suggests, is undoubtedly important. There is a space for action here that no doubt could be used more extensively than is often the case. However, this should not blind us to the fact that the boundaries of this space are set up elsewhere and that any attempt to transform the universities in a systemic way needs to address this. Thus, it seems paramount to challenge the specific political projects that have been remaking the state – on the national, the EU, in some cases the regional levels – and producing the manifold faces of precarity in Europe. This will require forging connections across different sites of struggle, beyond the discipline and beyond academic labour, so that a struggle to transform the universities forms part of a larger political process.

Some of this is already underway. An example from the German context is the recently founded network Gute Arbeit in der Wissenschaft[2] (Network for Decent Work in Academia), which unites a diverse range of initiatives of the so-called *Mittelbau* – academic staff without a professorship – from different universities and seeks to effect changes in particular on the national level. Some of these initiatives (e.g. unter_bau or Uni Kassel Unbefristet) go beyond academic labour in their attempts to remake the universities. In collaborating with unions such as the GEW and VERDI, the network also ties into broader struggles for improved work conditions in Germany. There is moreover an incipient collaboration with Academics for Peace Germany,[3] who seek to organise solidarity with dismissed researchers in/from Turkey, many of whom have in fact been active in developing alternative forms of sharing knowledge.[4] Such attempts at multi-level, networked organising are promising but also face formidable challenges, not least because of the precarious circumstances in which they are mostly taking place. All the more important is Stoica's call for the taking on of shared responsibility by those more securely employed in academia.

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Academic futures, or which 'solutions' to academic precarity? A reply to Georgeta Stoica's 'Precarity without borders'

I think we all recognise the agony in Georgeta Stoica's biographical narrative of a mobility which is aspirational and damning at the same time, having moved, as she

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[2] For more information, see http://mittelbau.net (accessed 3 April 2019).

[3] For more information, see https://academicsforpeace-germany.org (accessed 3 April 2019).

[4] See e.g. OFF University at https://off-university.com (accessed 3 April 2019) or Mersin Kültürhane, among many other initiatives in Turkey.

has in her academic journeying, from Romania through Italy and France only to take up a position, semi-reluctantly, in Mayotte, situated in the northern Mozambique Channel. I read this as a forceful critique not just of the conditioned mobilities that re-inscribe colonial and racial divides on academic subjectivities but equally of the very aspirational structure by which we come to loathe what we used to treasure (tenured employment) and learn to defend what we used to hate (academic hierarchies). Does this 'structure of feeling' not encapsulate the bitter-sweetness of the new generations of anthropologists who have to fight fiercely for their right to remain in academia only to find that tenure, if and when it comes, offers little relief in the generalised conditions of academic precarity? In a context where endless cycles of evaluations and fierce competition combine with the undermining of secure jobs, academics are constantly on trial, and positions are won with the painful knowledge of the many who were rejected. In the context of such widespread and deeply personal effects, how can we nurture conversations about working conditions for academics which are supportive of livelihoods and human potentiality, and what would such a politics of resistance and hope look like?

In this brief commentary, I offer some reflections on the question of solutions to academic precarity that Georgeta Stoica raised above, based on my own experiences of organising temporarily employed researchers in Denmark and thinking about the strategic challenges for building an anti-precarity agenda. My comments will therefore be coloured by the particular compact of labour regulation and publicly funded research and teaching universities in the context of strong Scandinavian welfare states, though I believe the neoliberal points of convergence in 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter and Leslie 1997) – not least within EU member states – outweigh whatever historical differences remain in the national organisation of academic labour. I think the most acute challenge before us lies in combining what we know about the complicated politics of precarity in academia – its dependency structures (Peacock 2016), status hierarchies (Reitz 2017) and sacrificial forms of labour (Barcan 2016) – with the predominant repertoires for thinking about and acting on labour issues. There is presently a large gulf between these two discourses of knowledge: the literature on precarity fails to address solutions, while union approaches are unable to comprehend the intricate power configurations that produce the financial, biographical and emotional insecurities of academic life. But these divided understandings need each other in order to build a comprehensive politics against precarity and I think Stoica nails this point beautifully when she states that: 'we need … a profound critique of the entire academic system combined with a reflective critique of ourselves, and of our own choices to accept and be part of a predatory system'. Ultimately, the conditions of precarity that define academic life – financial and career insecurity, exploitation and self-exploitation, abuse, silencing and curbs on academic freedoms, gender and racial hierarchies, forced mobility – are not external to our institutions but rather folded into their structures of initiation, reward and redistribution in terms of status and economy.

I have titled my intervention 'academic futures' because I think the path towards a more fair organisation of academic work requires us to think critically about the institutions we have erected over the past centuries for guarding and passing on particular bodies of knowledge, so that 'solutions' does not come to mean 'restoration' of hierarchical, privileged and isolated modes of research. It is easy enough to blame precarity on neoliberalism, but maybe this is not enough. First, because academia's entanglement with capitalism is much longer and goes much deeper than issues of labour, and second

because such a perspective elides the problematic of academia's historical institutionalisations of privilege and alliances that require a much deeper critique of power than is possible if the terrain of enmity is conceptualised only in terms of present conflicts. Instead, we should ask ourselves what kind of academic communities we would like to build so that egalitarian relationships and robust self-determinacy nurture the development of our discipline.

The first exercise in bridging the divide between a theory of and politics against precarity might therefore usefully start with a *desacralisation* of academic knowledge and the academic community. Christian Rogler has documented the reproduction of an angst-ridden vocation ideology – what he terms a 'precarious privilege' (Rogler 2017) – at the heart of the apprenticeship machinery (PhD, postdoc, etc.), which serves to secure allegiance to the insecure livelihoods of academia. This punctures a common misconception of academic precarity that aligns it with poverty (Gee 2017), for it is important to realise that academic precarity accommodates both relative wealth and relative poverty. While it is always easier to exploit poor workers, the central characterising feature of academic precarity is not the question of remuneration but the widening contradiction between intellectual specialisation and job insecurity. Academia is not merely a field of expertise within a societal division of labour. It is at the same time a specialised community that protects and glorifies a particular tradition of knowledge production by deliberately forcing on its members an ideology of distinction from dominant society. Academics are different – we learn through rounds of ritualised initiation – in our scientific epistemologies and obscure corpuses of knowledge as well as in our relationship to work, which springs from a personal motivation for truth (or 'curiosity' in its postmodern version). Unsurprisingly, such community dynamics of inclusion turn into jealously guarded position-protectionism and tightened processes of exclusion in times of crisis. But the ideologies of community membership have a cultural effect with consequences that may be harder to perceive, as the contradiction of knowledge specialisation and joblessness becomes individualised and displaced onto academic subjects through the idea of good and bad careers. When Stoica suggests that we should engage in a 'reflective critique of ourselves', I would therefore suggest that we start with deconstructing the idea of privilege in academic labour, which is itself joined with romantic notions of academic knowledge as elevated above other types of labour and their material and immaterial products. There is nothing sacred about academic knowledge – it is simply a specialised field of intellectual engagement – but its sacrality helps to enslave us when we become committed to an academic intellectual domain because it ties us to the brutal infrastructure of its reproduction.

This leads me to the second exercise I think is necessary in the process of thinking about solutions, and that concerns directing our energy at the most powerful vectors of exploitation. It is not tenured colleagues who are the structural enemy of academic precarity – even if they reproduce and deepen its effects by culturalising and informalising it. It is rather the political space that allows academic knowledge to become commodified and that authorises new structures of value extraction. Much has been written about the 'neoliberalisation' of academia, which documents the intensified auditing and competition in higher education and teaching environments, but maybe an example from Denmark will show more clearly what is at stake in this struggle. As I am writing these lines, the Faculty of Humanities at Copenhagen University is in the grips of an austerity exercise which means a 57 million DKK cost reduction over the next two to three years, out of which 31 million will be on salaries. This skewed undermining of

livelihood securities for research and teaching staff comes only months after an even more severe layoff of humanities and social science researchers at Aalborg University and despite Copenhagen University being financially well-cushioned against ongoing public cutbacks to the education sector with its own independent 2 billion capital fund. In addition, the university is experiencing a general growth of material expenses – particularly for high-profile building projects – and administrative functions, and the entire national academic system is increasingly burdened by rising fees from publishing houses at a total cost of over 200 million DKK in 2017. Conflicts over academic labour no longer take place within the academic community and its traditional institutions, which used to offer a barrier against commodification. Both punishment and reward in academic careers have melted into globalised networks of tech-development and financialised products that have helped pry open the academic community for a deepened marketisation of its knowledge production.

There are no easy ways to mobilise against these processes of exploitation that deepen inequalities by generalising and individualising competition over increasingly scarce resources. At the minimum it requires, as I have indicated, a critical re-evaluation of academic futures, involving both the ideology of the research community (Bhambra *et al*. 2018) and the institutional frameworks within which we work (Levin and Greenwood 2016). To accomplish this, I believe it is necessary to ally with the broader labour movement and to open a wider debate on the role and place of labour in national and global productions of wealth. In this exercise, we must be willing to recognise ourselves as labourers who are neither unique nor demand privileged treatment. From this perspective, I am hopeful that new forms of solidarity can grow that transcend national political economies, are not limited to a particular class of immaterial labour, and through which new forms of collaboration and knowledge sharing can grow.

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GEORGETA STOICA

Changing the system – a response to Julia Eckert, Katharina Bodirsky and Dan Hirslund

Replying to the meaningful arguments put forward by Julia Eckert, Katharina Bodirsky and Dan Hirslund is not an easy task. I will try to be brief and grasp some salient points in order to leave space for readers to discuss further and reflect. From the three replies, it is crystal clear that precarity is not a new condition and it is not restricted only to academia, as it is 'the *sine qua non* condition of labour' (Bodirsky). Precarity does not imply that there is a 'model' of the precarious researcher: rather, it is a condition that forces precarious scholars to 'practise' a continuous lack of certainty, unable to organise and think their (academic) future.

Bodirsky makes the brilliant suggestion 'to bring the state back in, both as a cause of precarity and a target of political action'. In order to take up this challenge we would have to reflect in a critical way on the role of the state, state power and repression. The case of Turkey fits the debate like a glove and involves not only Turkish scholars but also European colleagues who lost their jobs in the 2016 attempted coup – an action that led to the professional annihilation of many of our colleagues, wrongly identified as 'terrorists' on the grounds of their critique of the state. This new condition forced them to experience precarity in a different country, such as Germany, which like many other European countries is trapped in the same system involved in the 'disciplining of (academic) labour via precarity'.

One particular phrase, among many others, caught my attention in Eckert's reply: 'Today, precarisation is one major tool for curtailing academic freedom by disciplining thought'. This is a powerful statement that criticises the entire academic system. It pushes us to think in a different way, especially with regard to knowledge production, almost suggesting that insufficient new scientific knowledge is produced to serve society at large. This presents us with a contradiction: on the one hand, we are forced within the audit culture to produce more and, on the other hand, quality is replaced by quantity.

Julia Eckert writes: 'in terms of a production of knowledge ... too many unnecessary things are published in order to have too many peer-reviewed journal articles; too much (expensive, because tenured) time is spent on evaluating others rather than conversing with them and trying to better understand the world. ... The growth of knowledge is replaced by a competitive rat-race to fulfil the criteria necessary to get the carrot of security ... The rat-race leads ... to the inhibition of daring thinking and, moreover, to a retreat into a self-referential world in which there is no understanding to be gained of the world out there, of the human condition. To gain knowledge we must undiscipline scholarship'.

Within this framework, we have to keep in mind that even access to the status of precarious researcher has become difficult during the last decade and sometimes the age limit excludes us from the job market. Maybe a possible solution that questions the system would be to establish a 'public audit' of the extent of precarity within universities and research institutions.

Knowledge is also addressed by Hirslund in his reply when he says that 'the literature on precarity fails to address solutions, while union approaches are unable to comprehend the intricate power configurations that produce the financial, biographical and emotional insecurities of academic life'. Reasoning in terms of academic futures might be a solution that would give us the opportunity to think critically about the institutions that are structuring our lives.

I opened the Debate with a personal experience of precarity. I'm aware of the difficulties of long-term precarity, of a 'stable instability', and I recognise the privileged position I am now in. Speaking in terms of 'shared responsibilities', I do think it is part of my duty to support my colleagues who (still) struggle with precarious positions. As Julia Eckert writes, 'we are all in it together'. For this reason, we have to mobilise ourselves, by reinterpreting, criticising and boycotting a system that is taking advantage of precarious researchers. She also states: 'precarity fundamentally shapes our relationships, the ways in which we work (together), how we think and write, the ways in which we learn and ask, and what we can want to know. It fundamentally shapes what counts as knowledge, and what knowledge is recognised as valuable' – a knowledge

that is produced within the precarity framework and that should help us to produce new research questions and advance the state of the art of the field.

Only by joining forces and accepting shared responsibilities can we effect operational change. A long-lasting cooperation between precarity working groups, scientific associations and lobbying groups might be a good starting point. EASA as an association understands the importance of precarity and dedicates a great part of its activities to precarity issues. Its programme is an ambitious one and it relies on the involvement and common fight of not just its members. Together let's try to find possible solutions in order to fight and diminish precarity in academia. We are counting on you! On your skills to act and fight precarity.

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Précarité sans frontières : visions d'espoir, responsabilités partagées et réponses possibles

Ce débat sur la précarité vise à soulever les questions suivantes en proposant une introduction et trois réponses provenant d'anthropologues titulaires et non titulaires. L'objectif est de réfléchir

de manière critique à la précarité au sein du monde universitaire :

- Que signifie être un chercheur précaire dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, dans un milieu universitaire qui est gouverné par un système prédateur ?
- Comment cette situation peutêtre encadrée en termes de responsabilités partagées ?
- La solidarité et la syndicalisation pourraient-elles nous sortir de cette situation ?

Mots-clés   précarité, être en situation de précarité, responsabilité, université, vulnérabilité