

# Precarious Migration

# Where does precarity come from?

Historically: *from places that no longer have economic stability.*

Such as: *South Wales after the end of coal.*

If the notion of precarity comes  
from post-industrial Europe...

Does "precarity"  
describe anything in  
South Africa?

Meanwhile in South  
Africa...

# South African constitution, 1996

## Chapter 2: Bill of Rights

# **Freedom of trade, occupation and profession §22**

Every citizen has the right to choose their trade, occupation or profession freely. The practice of a trade, occupation or profession may be regulated by law.

# Labour relations §23

1. Everyone has the right to fair labour practices.
2. Every worker has the right—
  - a. to form and join a trade union;
  - b. to participate in the activities and programmes of a trade union; and
  - c. to strike.

Can one really say that one has the right to choose one's profession if there are no jobs?



# **Barchiesi, *Precarious Liberation***

The official discourse of the South African transition praised patience over radical demands, reconciliation over conflict, and personal initiative over reliance on public programs. Work and wage labor test the boundaries of postapartheid citizenship because they are quintessentially liminal categories encompassing, in the everyday lives of black South Africans, material precariousness, memories of past expropriations, potentials for social solidarity, and expectations of a better life under nonracial democracy. (27)

# The civic meaning of work

1. What is the relationship between a **citizen** and a **subject**?
2. What is the relationship between labor and politics?

# Security and capitalism

The ANC's historic program, the 1955 Freedom Charter, declared that "there shall be work and security." (25)

Whereas old imageries of citizenship rights gave rise to expectations the state could hardly manage, the resignification of the citizen into a consumer devolves governmental tasks to the individual's economic self-discipline. (175)

# Deindustrialization in the East Rand

Following COSATU's adoption of the ANC's program, East Rand workers massively participated in political strikes, but their militant visibility contrasted their deepening economic vulnerability. Employers imposed layoffs, technological change, and work reorganization without consulting the unions, which perceived their control of workplaces slipping away due to increasingly opaque economic forces. The recession of the 1980s was followed by liberalization and restructuring in the 1990s, which confirmed the decline of East Rand manufacturing. (168)

# Precarity and unionization

- » Precarious labor (flexibilized, outsourced, downsized) is bad for unions
- » How can you organize temporary people?
- » One response to this is to have agreements governing contract work.

A note on class:

The precarious are not quite the  
poor.

*The earnings of the near totality of the working poor were too high to qualify for public housing finance and too low for mortgage lending. (171)*



Much of the inner city has become a loosely regulated zone of trade, barter, money laundering, and counterfeiting amid ageing, dilapidated apartment blocks interspersed with incongruously gentrified pockets of cafes and art galleries. A haphazard semi-legal entrepreneurial texture connects and overlaps with gangsterism, vigilantism, unfettered real estate speculation, undocumented migration, and national and international crime syndicates. It also, however, provides services and protections to a precarious multitude, invisible to official regulatory agencies, unmarked in institutional territorial grids, unable to claim constitutional rights, and redundant on the labor market. (176)

The discursive production of a globalized Johannesburg summons, instead, an alternative universe of shiny and efficient postindustrialism. Such a representation surely risks dismissing the living conditions of the majority as abnormal and pathological. It also, however, resignifies precarious employment into two contrasting normative narratives. On one hand, informality denotes an unruly, potentially threatening otherness to be kept at bay with ubiquitous gated communities, high walls, electrified fences, armed checkpoints, and surveillance cameras. But, on the other hand, informality can indicate a virtuous path to accumulation, which finds solace in clichés from the city's colonial origins as a rugged frontier promising endless rewards for daring entrepreneurs. (177)

No doubt, labor in South Africa was never industrialized in the same pattern as in Britain.

Nevertheless, there are eerie similarities:

- >> Deindustrialization entails the decline of organized labor.
- >> Labor may react by linking with social movements.
- >> Precarity and unemployment yield stigma.
- >> Old working classes are left out of new economic narratives.

Barchiesi's politics.  
What are they?

# Precarity and migration



*The Refugee Journey Across the Mediterranean*





*Another migrant ship overturns in Mediterranean Sea*

Hans Lucht

Darkness before Daybreak:  
Darkness before Daybreak: African  
Migrants Living on the Margins in  
Southern Italy Today



# Forms of work

- >> Day labor
- >> Regular work with a "capo"
- >> Regularized labor (very rare)

# Fishing for work

Watching the fishermen at the pickup “joints,” how they concentrate on cars passing by in an attempt to figure out which of them might contain an employer about to pull over, is strangely reminiscent of going canoe fishing with residents of the fishing village in Ghana. I was reminded especially of the crucial moment before the net is cast, when (p.33) the crew sits and waits in silence, the outboard motor switched off, and everybody is watching the fish, the waves, the sea birds, anxious not to get it wrong, while keeping an eye on the competing canoes.

*It's like that. You have to pay attention to whatever is around you and grab it. If you're studying a fish, you'll always pay attention to the sea and the way it moves in the water and how you'll catch your net around it. You have to be very careful [at the roundabout]; maybe someone will be calling you or inviting you, but because you're not paying attention or looking at the cars, you'll not notice the person calling you, and somebody standing afar will rush to your place. This also happens on the sea. You'll be at a place and there's fish right there—only you wouldn't know it. But somebody will see it, and before you know it, they'll come from afar and drop their net. (32–33)*

# No legal protections

*There's no law. Anything can happen at any time. You can be told in the middle of the work to leave and go away. For instance, today the police came to check our papers, and we had to run and hide. Sometimes they come to check out the new buildings to see if everything is in order—if the taxes are being paid and if the people working there have documents. The capo gave us a signal, and we knew we had to run. We ran into the bushes; some locked themselves in the bathrooms. When the police had gone, we received a signal from the capo and we came back to work. (35)*

# Vulnerable bodies

1. To robbery and stolen wages.
2. To poison.
3. To homosexual aggression and sexual assault.
4. To racist stereotypes.

# Precarious present for a stable future?

Finding a job that will generate a relatively steady flow of income —thus both sustaining the immigrant while he stays in Europe and allowing him to set money aside for the family in Ghana — appears to be the dream of every young man from the Guan village who comes to Europe, as does, with a view to the future, one day building a house at home. The data here are surprisingly unanimous. There appears to be no ambition to become European or even to belong to European society, possibly because in Naples African illegal immigrants perceive the prospect of

# Theories of difference

*Northern Italians have stigmatized southerners by the very same labels that are today deployed to signify immigrants... Many Italians, having in mind... southerners' supposed inherent differences, feel that Italy is not "a receiver nation capable of incorporating a permanent migrant community." It could be argued, accordingly, that migrants settle into a well-established North-South dichotomy of difference-making that places them in unfavorable positions as naturally inferior and unwanted and, moreover, that the new immigrants have displaced the dominant discourse; that is, **the hierarchical misrepresentation and mistreatment once reserved for southerners is now projected onto immigrants.** (60)*