

Intersectionality and precarious subjectivities: Within and beyond labour and organisational perspectives

Abstract

This Special Issue draws on intersectionality to explore how interlocking forms of discrimination and marginalisation culminate to produce, structure, and sustain precarious subjectivities within and beyond neoliberal workplaces, and how subjects cope with or resist them. This collection brings together studies across diverse time-space configurations and social groups/labouring bodies – queer NGO activists in China, middle-class women writers during post-first-wave feminism, individuals facing endometriosis and sexual harassment in contemporary workplaces, as well as digital freelancers in India and essential workers in Poland. Doing so, we articulate the temporalities and situatedness of precarious labour alongside political and organisational pressures, while also uncovering the micro-political resistances in the everyday lives of workers across the Global North and South. Methodologically, these articles show the power of biographical and historical approaches to unpack the affective and material experiences of social differentiation and marginalisation at work, moving beyond monolithic accounts of precarity and precariousness as generalised conditions and experiences, towards more nuanced understandings of how precarious subjectivities are shaped, experienced, and contested in specific historical and organisational contexts. Together, these contributions deepen critical understandings of precarious subjectivities by emphasising their affective, embodied, and relational dimensions as shaped by intersecting forms of inequality. Bringing critical management and organisation studies into dialogue with employment and industrial relations studies, the Special Issue foregrounds pathways for transformative organisational practices that challenge intersectional inequalities and reimagine possibilities for dignity and justice in precarious life-worlds.

Keywords affect, agency, embodiment, intersectionality, precariousness, relational dynamics, resistance, subjectivities

Introduction

In 2023, we set out to explore how precarious subjectivities take shape within and beyond the unstable realities of precarious labour. Often defined by low wages, irregular income, insecure employment, and a lack of collective representation, precarious labour has spread across all occupational sectors, driven by unsupportive labour regimes in the Global South and North (Armano et al., 2017; Barchiesi, 2011; Chan et al., 2019). Our starting point for this Special Issue was the consideration that precariousness emerges as not only a rupture from the abstract forces of neoliberalism, but rather, as a structuring logic intimately bound to histories of colonial extraction, racialized and classed divisions of labour, and gendered care obligations (Mezzadri, 2022). This project was our attempt to decentre assumptions that

unstable employment conditions alone act as the precursor to precariousness and instead consider how instability and uncertainty saturate everyday life and relations, often preceding, rather than following, the erosion of wage-earning work.

Echoing Vij (2019), this was critically important to us, as the dominant conceptualisation of precariousness as tethered solely to unstable employment risks universalising a temporally and geographically specific experience of stability that has never been equally distributed. The very idea of stable, full-time employment has always been the exception rather than the norm for many categories of workers. In the Global North, full-time and permanent work has been a model centred on the male breadwinner, excluding a large proportion of women and all those working in the informal economy (Lorey, 2015; Milkman, 2020). In the Global South, labour markets have long been characterised by informality and exploitation under colonial and post-colonial capitalist regimes (Agarwala, 2013; Mosoetsa et al., 2016). As such, the vocabularies and long-standing dichotomies used to analyse these labour experiences — such as standard versus non-standard, formal versus informal, employment versus self-employment, and paid versus unpaid labour — have never fully captured the complexity and unevenness of labour relations, which now more than ever before require critical reassessment.

Reflecting on global developments since our call for papers, the urgency of this exploration has only deepened. We find ourselves in an era defined by overlapping and intensifying crises – an escalating climate emergency, the restriction of LGBTQIA+ and human rights across the globe, expanding conflict zones, the cost of living crisis, and the forced displacement of stateless and racialized migrant populations. Compounding these challenges is the resurgence of powerful far-right governments whose exclusionary policies and nationalist agendas amplify social inequalities and exacerbate precarious conditions for those marginalised

and ‘othered.’ These crises do not merely serve as a backdrop, but rather animate precarious subjectivities by magnifying who is recognized as valuable or disposable (Butler, 2004).

Drawing on intersectional approaches (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990, 2023; Yuval-Davis, 2006), this Special Issue comprises a collection of articles that illustrate how precarious subjectivities emerge through insecure lifeworlds, situating precariousness as an experience shaped by intersecting axes of social differentiation. Here, the intersections of race, gender, legal status, disability, class and caste, and family ties produce uncertainties, insecurities, differentiated vulnerabilities, but also modes of endurance within and beyond paid work (Alberti et al., 2018; Meszmann and Fedjuk, 2019). Aligning with recent calls for a radical reimagining of management and organization studies (MOS) through diverse critical perspectives (Zanoni et al., 2024), we bring together contributions that cut across geographical and disciplinary divides — MOS, labour, and migration studies among others — to examine how precarious subjectivities are lived across diverse empirical terrains. We foreground precariousness not as a uniform or recent phenomenon, but as pluralised, with contributors examining precarious subjectivities across different contexts and timescapes. In particular, this collection contributes to existing debate by tracing how precarious subjectivities are constituted through everyday embodied, affective, and relational encounters at the nexus of institutional arrangements and global inequalities — and how, despite or perhaps through these conditions, precarious subjects articulate strategies of their own world-making.

Our introduction unfolds as follows: first, we begin by detailing key scholarly conceptualisations of precariousness and precarious subjectivities. We then shed light on our own positionality, giving voice to the editorial process before turning to the contributions, which advance understandings of precarious subjectivities along three interrelated dimensions of precariousness — embodied, affective, and relational, explored through an intersectional lens

that attends to how forms of difference co-constitute lived experiences of precariousness. We conclude with reflections on future research directions.

Conceptualising Precarious Labour and Precariousness

Within the vast and heterogeneous academic debate, the concepts of precarity and precariousness have been developed as analytical categories for understanding contemporary conditions and experiences of insecurity and instability (e.g., Butler, 2004; Standing, 2011; Lorey, 2015). Three broad perspectives can be identified in the literature, with each strand offering insight into how precarisation unfolds and the subjectivities it shapes (Armano and Murgia, 2013; Millar, 2017).

The first considers *precarity* as labour insecurity, foregrounding the restructuring of labour markets under neoliberal globalisation, marked by the decline of the ‘standard employment relationship’, and the rise of insecure and unstable forms of contractual relations in which workers assume the risks of work while receiving minimal social protections and benefits (Kalleberg, 2009; Kalleberg and Vallas, 2017). The second perspective, drawing on feminist and post-structuralist theories (Butler, 2004), frames *precariousness* as a lived and relational condition that extends beyond employment contracts and work arrangements and shapes everyday experience (Ettlinger, 2021; Lorey, 2015). The third perspective emphasises precariousness as resistance and political potential, highlighting how it can be mobilised to generate new forms of agency, solidarity, and political subjectivity (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008; Standing, 2011). While analytically distinct, these three perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they offer complementary insights into the complex ways ‘precarity’ and ‘precariousness’ are manifested and at times, contested across diverse socio-economic and geopolitical contexts. This Special Issue situates itself primarily within the second approach, while also addressing the structural and political dimensions that shape precarious subjectivities globally.

Precariousness as a lived experience

Several scholars have explored how precarity is not only a labour market condition but also a subjective experience lived through everyday practices of self-management, with workers internalising structural risk, assuming responsibility for their own protection and performance, and cultivating adaptive orientations that reflect the erosion of collective safeguards (Armano et al., 2022; Gill and Pratt, 2008; Lorey, 2015). For example, Peticca-Harris et al. (2020) examine how Uber drivers manage algorithmically enforced insecurity by cultivating entrepreneurial, self-responsibilising orientations based on different work motivations and family needs. Uber drivers internalise the platform's logics of flexibility and performance monitoring, shaping subjectivities that are simultaneously autonomous and constrained. Rather than resisting precarity outright, drivers learn to inhabit it — navigating risk, insecurity, and fluctuating earnings through strategies of self-discipline and emotional regulation. A central insight emerging from this study and the broader corpus of work is that precarious subjectivities are not merely reactions to unstable employment, but develop through the institutional, technological, and discursive frameworks that organise contemporary labour. Thus, workers' subjectivity remains ambivalent, not wholly determined by structural forces, but negotiated through everyday practices of adaptation.

Over the years, the growing richness of academic engagement with precariousness prompted a rethinking of dominant academic approaches, particularly in response to critiques of Western-centric assumptions embedded in dominant understandings (Ivancheva and Keating, 2021; Mosoetsa et al., 2016). In the Global South, where colonial legacies and postcolonial capitalist arrangements have long shaped labour markets, precariousness has never been exceptional. Rather, informality, irregularity, and social devaluation have been enduring features of work, particularly for lower-caste, racialised, and migrant workers (Agarwala, 2013; Chan et al., 2019). Structural adjustment programs and other external interventions have further entrenched these inequalities (Arrighi, 2007), reinforcing patterns of dispossession and

exclusion, highlighting that for many, precariousness is a constitutive dimension of lived experience shaped by intersecting regimes of marginalization, a condition ‘of heightened risk, jeopardy, and threat for specific populations’ (Lloyd, 2015, p. 218). From this vantage point, precariousness is rooted in systemic oppression within an increasingly inequitable global system, reinforcing the uneven distribution of insecurity among marginalised groups (Ivancheva and Keating, 2021). These disparities are particularly evident in labour relations and broader societal structures, where intersecting dimensions of biography—such as race, gender, class, caste, age, sexuality, immigration and refugee status, and dis/ability—shape differentiated exposure to economic instability and exploitation (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2022; Graham and Papadopoulos, 2023; Greer et al., 2019). Here, precarious subjectivities are co-constituted through experiences of denial, conditional visibility, and the absence of care across social relations, infrastructures, and encounters with the state (Zulfiqar and Prasad, 2022).

Scholarship engaging this perspective has explored how precariousness is experienced as a diffuse and persistent condition of living. Segarra and Prasad (2020), for instance, examine how undocumented migrants in the U.S. navigate a legal and social landscape marked by racialised surveillance and the systematic denial of recognition. Their subjectivities are shaped less by the absence of employment than by the constant threat of erasure — a precariousness that is legal, corporeal, and existential. Along these lines, Jagannathan and Rai (2022) show how precariousness in India is intensified through the convergence of neoliberal state restructuring, public health degradation, and religious nationalism during the Covid-19 pandemic. A similar logic of exclusion is at play in Zulfiqar and Prasad’s (2022) study of low-caste sanitation workers in Pakistan, situated within entrenched systems of caste, class, and religious marginalisation. In this context, subjectivities are shaped not through voice or self-redefinition but through constrained accommodation to everyday abuse, boundary policing, and social stigma.

The capacity of workers to contest their conditions – both individually and collectively – has long been a central concern within critical MOS. In particular, a growing body of research that draws on Foucauldian and post-structuralist frameworks explored forms of resistance embedded in the fabric of everyday life. Here, resistance is not always overt but is enacted through refusals, subversions, and micro-practices of counter-conduct that challenge dominant subjectivities and normative expectations (Fournier, 1998; Norbäck, 2021). These dispersed forms of contestation make visible how even mundane or informal practices may contain political force. For example, Zulfiqar (2022) offers a Global South perspective by tracing how women workers in Pakistan's informal economy engage in quiet, persistent strategies of refusal, community organising, and relational care to challenge extractive development models. Her study moves beyond institutionalised resistance to examine how marginalised workers build slow, embodied forms of political subjectivity through shared stamina, refusal, and mutual dependence.

Staying within this focus on resistance, other studies have examined more organised or collective mobilisations — particularly those emerging outside traditional labour institutions. Gherardi and Murgia (2015), for instance, examine how precarious workers build alternative spaces for recognition and support, developing relational infrastructures that reflect both shared vulnerability and mutual aid. Similarly, Graham and Papadopoulos (2023) explore how digitally networked and autonomously organised labour in ecological and gig economies cultivates new forms of social cooperation. Their work highlights how precariousness can foster what they term *pre-figurative politics* —everyday acts that build alternative modes of organising and living together outside of conventional labour logics. Further, Alberti and Joyce (2023) illustrate the collective imaginaries that underpin low-paid gig worker mobilisation in migrant and racialised communities. Their research demonstrates how solidarity is cultivated not only around shared employment conditions but also through broader identifications rooted

in place, culture, and lived experience, highlighting how coalitions often emerge outside traditional labour institutions, such as trade unions, and foster new practices of mutualism, particularly among workers excluded from standard labour protections. Building on this focus on formations of solidarity, Gaillard and Galière (2024) show how Muslim migrant food-delivery workers in France draw on religious identity and community ties to navigate algorithmic control in gig work. Rather than resisting overtly, these workers tactically align digital platform affordances with spiritual practices — asserting agency through moral support, shared rituals, and collective adjustment. In these studies, precariousness can become a space for culturally grounded resistance, with subjectivities fostering new imaginaries, collective organising, and alternative modes of mutual support amid systemic marginalisation (Alberti & Joyce, 2023; Ivancheva & Keating, 2021; Murgia, 2025). Having traversed key strands of scholarship on precariousness and precarious subjectivities to demonstrate where the literature has been, we situate this Special Issue by identifying a need for deeper engagement with how such precarious subjectivities at the nexus of everyday living and working are unevenly shaped and distributed across global, structural, and intersectional lines.

Intersectional precariousness

Building on these scholarly debates, this Special Issue takes up a central question that cuts across the described traditions: *how does marginalisation shape the production and experience of precarious subjectivities, within and beyond labour?* Drawing on an intersectionally sensitive approach that centres the lived experience of precariousness (Collins, 1990; 2023; Rodriguez, 2018; Yuval-Davis, 2006), we explore how precariousness emerges through the interplay of racialisation, gendering, classed hierarchies, migration status, caste, age, sexuality, and dis/ability. These are not static categories of biography, but dynamic social positions that structure how vulnerability is distributed across institutional, spatial, and biographical contexts (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

Since Crenshaw's (1989) foundational work on intersectionality as a critique of single-axis legal frameworks, the concept has expanded to encompass the complex and interlocking systems of marginalisation that shape lived experiences globally (Liu, 2018; Kirk, 2020; Taylor, 2023). In employment and industrial relations studies, there have been some critical efforts to apply intersectionality to understand barriers to collective representation for migrants and minoritised workers as well as trade unions' intra-organisational constraints in organising workers discriminated because of their age, gender, migration, race and ethnicity (e.g. Alberti et al., 2013; Katz and LaVan, 2023; Lee and Tapia 2023). In MOS, the focus on intersectional inequalities to explore experiences of precariousness has been limited. This stands in contrast to Acker's (2006, 2012) recognition that workplaces are key sites for the reproduction and reinforcement of intersectional inequalities, and despite ongoing calls for research that better captures the complexities of the life-work nexus. While some research gestures toward intersectional dynamics, these are often implied rather than made explicit. Notable exceptions (e.g., Soni-Sinha, 2013; Zanoni and Miszczyński, 2024; Meliou et al., 2024) have shown how precariousness is shaped through layered structures of marginalisation. However, even these accounts often remain tethered to formal work arrangements and tend to centre the individual worker as the main analytical unit, rather than engaging intersectionality as a methodological or theoretical framework for understanding how precariousness is differentially experienced and produced.

In contrast, this Special Issue foregrounds how precariousness is lived at the intersection of systemic inequalities and everyday life. Following Calás et al., (2013), we understand intersectionality as a mobile, precarious, and transitory realisation of the self, temporarily fixed by the neoliberal rhetoric of 'choice' and 'self-empowerment', drawing attention to the wider social terrains in which precariousness is constituted. As such, intersectionality is not simply a framework for identifying categories of difference, but a dynamic process where embodied

subjectivities are negotiated within broader social, economic, and historical structures. These include, but are not limited to, neoliberal logics of responsabilisation and choice (Calás et al., 2013) as well as colonial legacies, racialised governance, and gendered hierarchies that operate across diverse geopolitical contexts (Ivancheva and Keating 2021). This framing of intersectionality as a dynamic, situated process aligns with Meliou et al.'s (2024) call to interrogate how historically entrenched systems of inequality “variously shape and recalibrate the precarity of life” (p. 925), which we expand upon by reorienting the analytical gaze away from formal organisational structures and toward the lived textures of precariousness.

Precariousness becomes then a lens for tracing how intersecting inequalities are inhabited, and how subjectivities, entangled in broader socio-political struggles, emerge, are constrained, and at times, rendered politically meaningful. Informed by longstanding feminist and critical theoretical work on the embodied, affective, and relational dimensions of subjectivity (e.g., Yuval-Davis, 2006), we draw on these insights — in conversation with the contributions to this Special Issue — to theorise precariousness as unfolding at the intersection of marginalisation and insecurity across work and life. This approach departs from frameworks that focus on individual “worker characteristics” or abstract structural logics, instead centring the embodied, affective, and relational dynamics through which intersectional axes of differentiation are borne and precariousness is lived.

While studies across feminist political economy, critical labour, and organisational research have gestured toward the embodied, affective, and relational dimensions of precarity (see Bhattacharya, 2017; Mezzadri, 2022; Zulfiqar, 2022), these aspects are rarely theorised explicitly. By foregrounding embodiment, affect, and relationality as analytic anchors within an intersectional framing of precariousness, this Special Issue moves beyond economic or contractual understandings to offer a more cohesive account of how precarious subjectivities are produced through these intersubjective dynamics. While a full review of these theoretical

traditions is beyond the scope of this introduction, we draw selectively on key insights to articulate how intersectional precariousness unfolds through these dimensions.

Embodied precariousness draws attention to the corporeal experience of insecurity — how certain bodies are subjected to heightened exposure, strain, and regulation in ways that are neither accidental nor evenly distributed. Rather than being neutral vessels, bodies are marked by social and historical processes that render them differentially visible, vulnerable, or disposable depending on their racialisation, gender, ability, age, or migration status (Butler, 2004; Puwar, 2004). These embodied inequalities manifest across sites of work, care, and mobility, where some bodies are disproportionately burdened by exhaustion, pain, or exclusion, while others are shielded from harm. *Affective precariousness* highlights how precariousness is not only a material or structural condition but is deeply felt and navigated through emotional intensities such as fear, fatigue, anxiety, and hope. These affective registers are shaped by political, economic, and cultural formations — from nationalist discourses to market logics and entrepreneurial ideologies — that govern belonging, aspiration, and moral worth (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2011). Precariousness is thus not only endured but anticipated and internalised, becoming a condition that structures subjectivity and relation through felt experience. Finally, *relational precariousness* refers to how precarious conditions are produced, mediated, and sometimes mitigated through social ties, dependencies, and exclusions. This includes both formal and informal networks — in workplaces, households, communities, and activist, co-ethnic or religious networks — where support may be exchanged (e.g., Zulfiqar, 2022), but also where inequalities can be reinforced and responsibilised (Acker, 2006). These relations are central to how precariousness unfolds, as care obligations, informal solidarities, and social abandonment are differentially patterned across lines of class, race, and gender (Ettinger, 2006; Federici, 2019; Fotaki and Harding, 2017).

By highlighting these dimensions, this Special Issue advances a more situated account of precarious subjectivities, one that centres how precariousness is lived through power-laden histories, intimate relations, and everyday negotiations within and beyond the porous boundaries of work and working. In doing so, we extend the analytical and political horizons of MOS by showing how precariousness becomes inhabited, opening space for new research questions, methodologies, and solidarities, and inviting critical organisation scholars to expand how we think about insecurity, resistance, and collective possibility in precarious times.

Reflecting on intersectional precarities in academia

While exploring the intersections of precariousness, we also encountered their rough surface firsthand in the process of editing this Special Issue. Our work was conditioned by the structures of higher education, including hierarchies and practices of codification and certification of excellence alongside financial, spatial, and time constraints. We tried to cast our net wide with our open call for papers, and while we received many contributions, the sample was skewed toward case studies and authors from the Global North.

The dexterous process of double-blind review meant that each paper in this collection underwent at least two rounds of peer review, with three reviewers involved in each stage. The thorough reviews, for which we are deeply grateful, tended to favour papers that conformed to the conventions and standards of rigour typical of the Anglo-Saxon academy, inadvertently marginalising submissions grounded in other academic traditions or shaped by different linguistic and stylistic norms. While inclusive in intent, the call for papers and review process, like the broader academic infrastructures they are embedded within, operated within institutional norms that partly constrained the very openings we hoped to create.

Our commitment to publishing papers that not only focused on precariousness and intersectionality, but also explored their interrelation, further narrowed the pool. There were also surprising gaps in terms of sub-themes. For instance, in our call for papers, we invited

contributors to engage with the intersections of mobility and precarious labour. Yet—despite the burgeoning literature on precarious migrant labour—we did not receive a wealth of submissions in this area, which may reflect the ongoing work needed to open the field of MOS more fully to migration and postcolonial studies. Still, we received a richness of contributions from across various fields of study and research topics ‘within and beyond labour and organisation’, with each contribution speaking to the intersections of power, vulnerability, and resistance—offering new insights into how precariousness is experienced and contested by those who bear its weight.

In line with a feminist ethic of situated solidarity and radical vulnerability (Nagar, 2017), and as echoed in recent research on de facto stateless communities (Habiburahman & Alamgir, 2024), we approach positionality not as something to merely acknowledge but as a relation of responsibility. Positionality is deeply political, especially within unequal global knowledge regimes, and requires political reflexivity to confront complicity, power asymmetries, and epistemic privilege (Abdelnour & Abu Moghli, 2021). Rather than aiming to transcend or neutralise these differences, we recognise that solidarity must be organised through them (Nagar, 2017). Following this ethos, emphasising trust, shared vulnerability, and relational accountability as key to shaping solidarities between differently positioned collaborators, we aimed to foster an attentive and supportive editorial space that valued authors’ situated knowledges (Habiburahman and Alamgir, 2024).

At the same time, throughout the editorial process, we were acutely aware of our own positionality, recognising that our own biographies and subjectivities, shaped by intersecting layers of privilege and vulnerability, influenced how we perceived and engaged with the concept of precariousness in this Special Issue. We write as four women of European descent, based in advanced capitalist countries in the Global North, with both visible and masked intersectional characteristics. Three of the four guest editors were pregnant during the process,

and three experienced ill-health, either personally or within their families. While our academic and professional positions afford us certain privileges and render us comparatively ‘more’ stable than some, this stability is far from absolute, particularly in a period marked by intensifying economic and political precarity in higher education. This instability is especially felt by critical scholars, and even more so by those working in feminist, gender, and intersectional studies—areas increasingly subject to marginalisation and institutional resistance globally. In this context, our role, as we saw it, was not to speak for others, but to work alongside diverse contributors to amplify how precarious subjectivities are lived and theorised across intersecting axes of inequality. In doing so, we engage our positionality as both a reminder of our situated privilege and a commitment to relational, ethical responsibility within a broader scholarly and political project (Rodriguez and Ridgway, 2023).

Contributions

In this section, we present the Special Issue contributions, highlighting how precariousness is lived and felt as it is navigated and at times, resisted amid globalisation, technological change, and intersecting inequalities. Together, these articles deepen understanding of precarious subjectivities and open new directions for transformative research and collective action. We group the contributions into three thematic threads that explore how embodied, affective, and relational forms of precariousness produce and shape subjectivities at the intersection of work arrangements and global inequalities.

Embodied Precariousness

Victoria Williams, Jo Brewis, Vincenza Priola, and Kate Sang examine how gendered bodies become precarious when they do not conform to the able-bodied and productivity-driven temporalities of contemporary work. Using feminist disability theory and the concept of ‘crip time’, they introduce ‘endo time’—a gendered temporality that captures the unpredictable and disruptive symptoms of endometriosis. Unlike the broader notion of crip

time, endo time is specific to menstruating bodies and highlights how chronic reproductive health conditions intersect with the rigid structures of paid work.

Drawing on interviews and diary entries from 21 women working with endometriosis in the UK across different age groups, employment sectors, and ethnic backgrounds, the authors identify three mechanisms through which endometriosis produces precariousness. First, ‘regularly irregular embodiment’ disrupts the normative rhythms of work, challenging expectations of productivity and consistency. Second, the ‘weighted time of disbelief’ reflects how long diagnostic delays and employer skepticism contribute to epistemic injustice—a fundamental lack of recognition of the condition’s severity. Finally, workers must engage in ‘time travel’, strategically negotiating flexibility and trade-offs to navigate the unpredictability of their symptoms while maintaining employment.

This article makes a critical intervention in MOS, arguing that discussions of just workplaces must account for the fluctuating nature of long-term gendered health conditions. Set against the broader gender health gap—characterised by under-diagnosis, under-research, and systemic neglect of gendered health issues—the study demonstrates how endometriosis constrains workers’ ability to adhere to standardised work schedules, leading to financial instability and loss of professional confidence. Beyond its contribution to understanding the socio-material and embodied effects of disabling organisational structures, the study powerfully highlights the epistemic injustice experienced by workers with chronic conditions. Employers and colleagues lack the discursive resources to comprehend and validate their experiences, reinforcing precariousness at the intersection of gender, disability, and labour. Williams, Brewis, Priola, and Sang’s study aligns with the call for papers’ focus, particularly in its attention to how precariousness is lived through the body and how structural inequalities manifest corporeally. Their work extends discussions of intersectional precarious subjectivities by examining how chronic illness disrupts normative work expectations and entrenches

gendered, health-based exclusions within organisations. In doing so, they respond to the call's emphasis on how precarity is not only a legal or economic condition but one that is *existential* and *bodily*, shaped by intersecting forms of social marginalisation.

The theme of health-related precarity and its intersection with organisational structures is also explored in the article by **Adam Mrozowicki, Jacek Burski, and Agata Krasowska**, which examines how essential workers in Poland—across education, health care, social care, and logistics—experienced precariousness during the Covid-19 pandemic. The authors extend this discussion by showing how essential workers in Poland—differentiated by sector, gender, age, and migration status—faced heightened physical and social vulnerabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic, developing both privatised and collective strategies to navigate their precarious conditions. Their findings underscore how precariousness is shaped at the intersection of occupational structures, demographic inequalities, and sector-specific exposures to risk. Combining biographical and intersectional approaches, they develop a typology of life strategies used by precarious workers, shaped by two intersecting dimensions: the role of social ties (privatised vs. communitarian) and individual orientations toward precarity (proactive vs. reactive).

Using Schütze's (2005) biographical research methodology, the authors show how biographical identities—shaped by gender, age, sexuality, and ethnicity—serve as resources for workers crafting strategies to cope with precarity. Their findings reveal a dominant trend of privatisation, where individuals rely on self- and family-centered survival strategies, rather than collective action. However, the study also challenges the assumption that privatisation is inevitable, identifying emergent solidarities informed by organisational resources, trade union activism, and labour movements. While pandemic conditions intensified precariousness, they also opened limited spaces for collective agency. By integrating biographical and intersectional approaches, the study provides a critical sociological lens for understanding how intersecting

inequalities shape workers' capacities for resistance and collective organising. Mrozowicki, Burski, and Krasowska's study responds to the call for papers' emphasis on embodied precariousness by demonstrating how essential workers in Poland experienced precarity not only through economic and contractual instability but also in the *physical toll* exacted by their labour during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their analysis highlights how bodily endurance, exhaustion, and exposure to risk became defining aspects of workers' precarious subjectivities, reinforcing intersectional inequalities along lines of class, gender, and occupational status. By tracing how workers developed both individualised and collective strategies to navigate these conditions, the study extends the call's focus on how embodiment mediates both vulnerability and resistance within precarious labour regimes.

These contributions illustrate embodied precariousness, showing how precarious conditions are etched onto the body—manifesting through exhaustion, illness, and physical strain—while also serving as a site of negotiation and resistance. Williams, Brewis, Priola, and Sang demonstrate how chronic health conditions like endometriosis disrupt normative work expectations, exposing the ways in which structural inequalities manifest in and through the body. Their study highlights how disabling organisational structures not only create material barriers but also impose epistemic injustices, as women workers struggle to have their experiences recognised and accommodated. Mrozowicki, Burski, and Krasowska extend this discussion by revealing how essential workers in Poland experienced these embodied vulnerabilities in distinctly intersectional ways, shaped by sector, gender, age, and migration status. While older women in education, health, and social care faced intensified workloads and emotional strain, younger and migrant workers in logistics contended with precarious contracts and hazardous conditions, highlighting how precariousness is both materially inscribed on the body and structured by intersecting inequalities. Moreover, these lived experiences of pain, exhaustion, and exclusion expose the limits of current organisational and legal protections.

At the intersections of health, labour, and structural exclusion, these articles illustrate how precariousness is materially and symbolically inscribed on the body, deepening existing theorisations of embodiment by showing how organisational norms privilege certain bodily capacities and rhythms while marginalising others (Puwar, 2004). In this context, embodiment becomes not just a site of difference, but a medium through which inequality is enacted and maintained. We are reminded that bodies are never neutral — they are read, judged, and disciplined through intersecting social hierarchies (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020). These contributions broaden our understanding of who is rendered precarious — whose bodies, shaped by gendered, racialised, and classed inequalities, do not align with dominant workplace temporalities and expectations (Acker, 2006). In doing so, they foreground how bodily experience is central to how precariousness is lived and institutionalised.

Affective Precariousness

Stephanie Yingyi Wang applies an auto-ethnographic and ontological approach to explore the affective dimensions of precariousness in her study of the working conditions of NGO workers in the LGBT movement in China. Drawing from Millar’s framing of precarity as “an open question about the relationship between forms of labour and fragile conditions of life” (2017: 7) and Pascucci’s insights on the “spatiality and materiality of humanitarian labour” (2019: 744), Wang illuminates how the affective experience of precariousness for LGBT ‘activist workers’ intersects with structural and relational dynamics with their peers.

Drawing from a decade-long involvement in China’s LGBTQ NGO sector as a feminist bisexual activist-worker, complemented by participant observation (2018–2020) and interviews with NGO activists, donors, and volunteers, Wang’s account focuses on the stories of three LGBT activist-workers in distinct organisations: a migrant sex worker NGO, an LGBT NGO established in the late 2000s, and a “lala” organization (a slang term in China including lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women). Unveiling the underpinning logics of the intersectional

processes differentiating the experiences of these workers alongside the racialised, classed, and occupational hierarchies shaping their organisations, is a powerful method to disclose the subjective feelings as well as the embodied experiences of precariousness for the participants, and how they are relationally and affectively (re)produced. Such a granular gaze is critical to illuminate how precariousness is experienced affectively and intersectionally within the wider context of China's state-repressed third sector supporting sexual minorities and queer movements. Against this background, the affective lens applied by Wang is crucial in our view as it reveals the specific feelings (of mental fatigue, frustration, and betrayal) that reproduce precarity of employment as an objective condition (e.g. short-term contracts dependent on funding).

The affect-based and intersectional understanding of precarious labour proposed by this author helps us to overcome the “binary framework of oppression (state) vs. resistance” that is still dominant especially in the literature on humanitarian work, and sheds light on the subjective operation of intersectional inequalities in organisations more broadly, whereby precarity operates through affects and everyday relational politics rather than being “a cold structure merely imposed on labour by capital from above.” Such contribution has relevance beyond China for the relative sustainability of activist organisations whose work appears increasingly necessary amid rising authoritarianism and anti-gender ideologies globally (Butler, 2025).

While Wang's study highlights how affective precariousness is deeply intertwined with activism and political repression, **Anna Oechslen** shifts the focus to the global gig economy, where emotional and communicative labour become central to sustaining employment. Her study illustrates how remote freelancers in India engage in affective hope labour—unpaid emotional work aimed at securing future opportunities— while navigating uncertainty and negotiating intersecting dimensions of difference in their professional lives. Focusing on Indian

designers working through digital platforms, the study examines how they perform affective labour to project professionalism, reliability, and authenticity—practices perceived as essential for establishing and sustaining long-term client relationships.

Affective labour is foregrounded as a lens to interrogate how social categories of difference—such as work ethic and skill, economic value, language, time, and visibility and aesthetics—are produced, reproduced, and contested in the global gig economy. The study highlights how geographical location, often overlooked in intersectional analyses, functions as a key axis of inequality, shaping interactions between predominantly white, Global North clients and digital freelancers in the Global South. Rather than dismantling intersectional inequalities, digital labour markets reconfigure and intensify them, entrenching hierarchies through platform-mediated interactions that dictate credibility, trustworthiness, and value.

This article offers a nuanced critique of how precariousness in remote freelancing is not merely a consequence of unstable employment structures but a continuous affective negotiation and identity-making process. By tracing how digital freelancers navigate the tension between professionalism and authenticity, the study highlights how affective labour becomes central to sustaining employment in platform-based work. Rather than relying solely on individual strategies, freelancers must engage in emotional and communicative labour to manage uncertainty, build credibility, and maintain relationships with clients and platforms. In doing so, the study reveals how affective labour is not only a means of securing work but also a mechanism through which broader inequalities in access, legitimacy, and professional recognition are reinforced. These insights extend the call for papers' focus on affective precariousness by demonstrating how emotional labour, self-presentation, and hope labour are not just responses to precarity, but integral to how platform economies structure inequality. By interrogating how affective labour intersects with race, class, and geography in transnational digital work, Oechslen's article advances an intersectional understanding of how precarity is an

existential and relational experience through *affective transactions*, and how it is actively shaped through emotional and communicative negotiations.

Taken together, Wang and Oechslen's studies reveal how precarity is not only an economic or structural condition but also one that is deeply felt, internalised, and negotiated through affects. Wang's study of LGBTQ activist-workers in China demonstrates how emotional exhaustion, frustration, and betrayal shape precarious subjectivities under political repression and economic instability, reinforcing their vulnerability while also generating moments of resistance. Oechslen, in turn, shows how freelancers in India engage in affective hope labour—strategically managing self-presentation, anxiety, and uncertainty in the pursuit of future employment. Both studies expose how affective states are central to how workers endure and navigate precarious conditions, underscoring affect not as incidental but as infrastructural to precarious life (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2011). Their findings also highlight the dual role of affect in both reinforcing and challenging precariousness: fear and exhaustion can lead to silence and compliance, while hope and emotional investment can sustain activism, professional credibility, and even resistance. In shifting the focus from material conditions to the psychological and emotional toll of precarity, these contributions underscore how precarious workers are not just economically insecure but emotionally bound to precarious systems through affective attachments that both govern and sustain them (Berlant, 2011; Ettlinger, 2021).

Relational Precariousness

While most of the Special Issue's contributions draw from contemporary dynamics in organisational life and the labour market at a critical time of change, **Kelly Thomson's** work introduces an historical perspective highlighting significant continuities in the intersectional nature of precarity. The article explores the precarious subjectivities of two iconic women authors, Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, whose detective fiction transformed the literary

landscape of early 20th-century Britain. By examining how gender and class shaped their lived experiences, the study provides a nuanced perspective on the challenges these women faced during the partial dismantling of institutional patriarchy spurred by first-wave feminism.

Using a micro-historical and biographical approach and drawing on autobiographies, letters, and fiction, Thomson highlights how both Christie and Sayers experienced patriarchal constraints within a middle-class upbringing, but with divergent life trajectories. Thomson connects their subjective experiences to broader patriarchal and class-based structures that marginalised women by limiting access to education, work, and autonomy. Christie, conforming to prevailing beauty standards, sought stability through marriage but faced severe precariousness after divorce. In contrast, Sayers, unable to rely on traditional marriage prospects, pursued independence through education and work, enduring societal stigma and financial instability as a single mother. Thomson's exploration of the authors' detective fiction reveals how both authors subtly resisted patriarchal norms, crafting countercultural portrayals of gender roles and vulnerability that challenged societal expectations. Thomson's study offers a deeper understanding of how systemic inequalities shaped the lives of these renowned authors while highlighting the ways they carved out space for agency and resistance through creative expression.

From a methodological perspective, this work highlights a common thread running through the Special Issue (see also the articles by Wang and Mrozowicki and colleagues), which emphasises the efficacy of a biographical lens in studying precariousness. Rather than focusing solely on the individual, differentiated or 'undifferentiated' worker impacted by the logics of precarious organisations (cf. Meliou et al. 2024), this approach moves beyond the individual as a unit of analysis, showing how precarious subjectivities are always embedded in and shaped by intersectional and relational processes of differentiation, exclusion, and inclusion. By tracing how precarity materialises in lived experiences—through systems of oppression, exploitation,

and marginalisation—the biographical lens offers a powerful way to capture the interplay between structure and agency, uncovering the broader social and historical forces that contour individual's conditions.

While Kelly Thomson's study examines how gendered and classed relationships shaped the professional precarity of women writers in early 20th-century Britain, **Lisa Buchter, Camille Dubourdieu-Rayrot, and Wafa Ben Khaled** maintains a focus on gender and class but shifting the focus to the contemporary workplace, where institutional hierarchies and power asymmetries render French interns particularly vulnerable to harassment and exploitation. Their study examines how interns—workers in structurally ambiguous positions—experience sexual harassment as a consequence of both their precarious status and the relational dependencies embedded in workplace hierarchies. Drawing on testimonies, interviews, and judicial archives in France, the study reveals how interns exist in a legal and institutional grey zone, neither fully students nor employees, making them particularly susceptible to workplace harassment. Their precarity is not only a product of temporary contracts but is also relational — shaped by their dependency on multiple institutional actors, including employers, supervisors, and educational institutions.

By refining understandings of class domination and institutional abandonment, the authors highlight how interns' lack of networks, diploma dependency, and professional inexperience create new forms of class-based inequality that intersect with gender and age. Although corporate anti-harassment policies exist, interns often find themselves excluded from protection mechanisms, as responsibility is fragmented between schools and employers. This structural accountability void discourages interns from reporting harassment out of fear of career repercussions, reputational damage, or retaliation. As a result, harassment is normalised and individualised as an expected “rite of passage” rather than a structural failure of organisational compliance. At the same time, the study underscores the dual role of relational

labour in shaping both interns' vulnerabilities and their potential for agency. *Interactions* with permanent employees, supervisors, and other interns determine how seriously their complaints are taken and whether they feel empowered to report harassment. While some colleagues offer support and informal protection, many act as institutional gatekeepers, reinforcing cultures of silence and normalising harassment as an 'inevitable' part of precarious work.

The authors argue that business schools and academic institutions must play a stronger role in addressing these vulnerabilities, not only by implementing protective measures but also by fostering critical awareness among students before they enter workplaces. Their study contributes to scholarship on intersectional precarity and inequality regimes by demonstrating how precarious work arrangements systematically expose certain workers to heightened risks of harassment, while institutional and legal frameworks fail to offer meaningful protection.

Both studies, despite differences in historical and occupational contexts, underscore how precariousness is co-constructed through *relational dependencies*—whether through the gendered and classed social networks that constrained women writers' professional agency or through the institutional entanglements that leave interns without clear protections. Thomson's study discusses how women writers' ability to sustain their careers depended on navigating professional networks that were shaped by class privilege, gendered expectations, and educational access—factors that simultaneously facilitated and restricted their agency. Similarly, Buchter, Dubourdieu-Rayrot, and Ben Khaled illustrate how interns' structural precarity is reinforced by their reliance on multiple institutional actors—employers, supervisors, and educational institutions—who dictate their professional trajectories while failing to provide meaningful protections against exploitation.

Together, these contributions reveal the dual role of relational labor: while relationships can entrench precarity by reinforcing exclusionary hierarchies and silencing dissent, they also serve as strategic sites where precarious workers negotiate survival, seek solidarity, and, at

times, resist marginalisation (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020). These studies also demonstrate that relational precariousness is deeply intersectional — structured by gender, class, seniority, age, and institutional power (Fotaki and Harding, 2017). Women writers' access to literary networks was shaped not only by professional standing but also by social expectations around respectability and financial security, just as interns' vulnerability to harassment was exacerbated by their temporary status, lack of networks, and professional inexperience. Precarious subjectivities, we see, are forged through social entanglements shaped by intersecting hierarchies of power, exclusion, and differentiation.

Future Directions & Final Reflections

This Special Issue has examined how precarious subjectivities are shaped through the entanglement of intersectional inequalities expressed through everyday experiences. Across diverse empirical and theoretical contexts, the contributors illustrate how precariousness is lived, felt, and socially embedded. By theorising precariousness as embodied, affective, and relational, the articles challenge economistic and overly individualised frameworks that obscure the structural and relational conditions through which precarious subjectivities are formed. Instead, they illuminate how insecurity is enacted through bodies, sustained through emotional and moral economies, and reproduced within relational fields of obligation and exclusion. In particular, the articles in this collection challenge the tendency to treat the structural, lived, and political as separate registers, demonstrating how they collapse into one another. What this Special Issue contributes is not a replacement of these frames, but a reconfiguration of their relationships through the lens of intersectionality.

Intersectionality, as taken up here, does more than identify multiple forms of difference, revealing how the economic, affective, embodied, and relational dimensions of precariousness are co-constituted through power-laden histories, geopolitical orders, and systems of recognition and dispossession. We have tried to unsettle the neat containment of precarious

labour as situated only within the workplace, showing instead how work, life, and political spheres bleed into one another across bodies, emotions, and social ties. In doing so, and spanning organisation and labour studies, we challenge the epistemic boundaries that have long governed what counts as precariousness—and for whom, highlighting its historical and geographically sedimentation and how it becomes differentially embodied and biographically inscribed.

Collectively, the contributions to this Special Issue offer new conceptual and analytical pathways for understanding precarious subjectivities in a global and intersectional frame. Specifically, they contribute in three interrelated ways. First, it reconceptualises intersectionality not as a descriptive layering of social categories, but as a processual and situated framework that better captures how precariousness emerges through dynamic configurations of marginalisation and oppression. Rather than viewing categories such as gender, race, class, sexuality or migration status as stable axes, the collection foregrounds how they operate relationally and are made meaningful through historical, geographical, and economic conditions that are inscribed on the bodies, emotions, and biographies of workers. Second, by articulating embodied, affective, and relational precariousness as analytical dimensions, the Special Issue advances a more nuanced understanding of how inequality is reproduced not only through institutional arrangements, but through the everyday textures of social life. These contributions expand the analytical terrain beyond contractual instability, showing how insecurity is rendered through physical exhaustion, emotional strain, and fragile social dependencies. Third, the collection foregrounds how precariousness permeates domains extend into domestic, intimate, and communal settings. By decentering the employment contract as the primary site of analysis, the articles demonstrate how precariousness is lived and negotiated at the intersection of work and life, survival and care, visibility and exclusion.

As we look ahead, several directions for future research and theoretical development come into focus. While this Special Issue foregrounds subjectivities, these are never formed in isolation but emerge through ongoing engagements with broader political and economic arrangements—legal regimes, welfare systems, immigration controls, and corporate governance structures. Thus, to understand how precarious life is navigated, endured, and at times resisted, we must remain attentive to the structural conditions that give it form. Building on this, we argue that understanding how precarious life is experienced requires close attention to how subjectivities are shaped through everyday, situated, and relational engagements with systems of power and governance. While feminist political economy has long highlighted how precariousness is embedded in broader crises of social reproduction (Bhattacharya, 2017; Mezzadri, 2022), our aim here is to expand this conversation by foregrounding precarious subjectivities not simply as structural outcomes, but as lived and ambivalent formations (Lorey, 2015). In doing so, we seek to open new directions for research that centre how precariousness is negotiated in daily life—through coping, adjusting, caring, enduring, as much as through overt forms of resistance.

We caution however, against overstating individual agency. Agency is always already shaped by power—partial, uneven, and exercised within asymmetrical social, political, and organisational contexts that enable some forms of resistance while foreclosing others. Recent research on the limits of agency shows that precarious workers' capacity to act is deeply conditioned by survival imperatives and structural constraints, and often takes minor, situated, and pragmatic forms rather than oppositional or transformative ones (Graham and Papadopoulos, 2023; Zulfiqar and Prasad, 2022). While many of the contributions herein reveal the creative strategies through which workers cope with or resist precariousness, it is vital to avoid romanticising personal resilience and instead to attend to how agency is exercised within—and often constrained by—the very structures that produce it. Tracing these grounded

experiences of navigating precarity to broader processes of precarisation requires analytical approaches attuned to how global neoliberal restructuring, transnational governance, and the rise of authoritarianism shape life and labour—particularly as these forces are mediated through digital infrastructures and racialised labour markets (Altenried, 2019; Gaillard and Galière, 2024; Mezzadri, 2022).

At the same time, there is a need to expand the geographical imagination of organisational research. This Special Issue is candid about the relative dominance of Global North authors and its empirical focus. While it brings together contributions from a range of geopolitical contexts that help decentre dominant Global North narratives in MOS, we also acknowledge the relative absence of Global South-based scholars in the final collection, a limitation that reflects enduring structural inequities in academic publishing and highlights the need for more sustained engagement with Southern epistemologies. We echo calls for more research grounded in Global South perspectives, including work that engages migration, feminist and postcolonial critique, and Indigenous frameworks. This is crucial not only to redress geographic imbalances, but also to unsettle Eurocentric assumptions through attention to Indigenous organising (Peredo, 2023) and to develop conceptual tools for recognising inequalities often obscured by Global North categories (Zulfiqar and Prasad, 2022).

We also urge scholars to push the boundaries of what counts as an organisational setting. Precarisation unfolds not only in formal workplaces, but also in homes, informal networks, activist spaces, educational institutions, and digital platforms, where new organisational forms embed precariousness through algorithmic management, racialised control, and legal exclusions (Kirk, 2020; Peticca-Harris et al., 2020; van Doorn and Vijay, 2024). In this light, we advocate for building interdisciplinary solidarities. Dialogue between MOS, labour studies, feminist theory, cultural studies, postcolonial and disability studies, and critical development research is essential for theorising intersectional precariousness in a more holistic and grounded

manner. This engagement resonates with *Organization's* longstanding commitment to unearthing and contesting the precarities endemic to capitalism, and, as reaffirmed in its recent manifesto to advancing radical and socially engaged critique (Zanoni et al., 2024). Our Special Issue contributes to this project by bringing together perspectives that challenge dominant paradigms and foreground struggles over inequality, marginalisation, and social justice. This includes sharing conceptual resources, epistemological and methodological challenges, and commitments to justice-oriented scholarship on intersectionality. While intersectionality is often evoked as a conceptual anchor, less attention has been given to how it is operationalised in empirical research—how it shapes the questions we ask, the methods we use, and the voices we centre (see Peticca-Harris et al., 2024; Rodriguez, 2018).

Considering the wider processes of precarisation discussed in this collection, future research may also explore how uneven trajectories of neoliberalism and their effects on workers' subjectivities—as well as the reordering of the world under new South/North divisions and geopolitical alliances—are further entrenching precariousness. War with diversity, militarised border regimes, new displacements, and accelerating climate catastrophe increasingly constrain workers' capacity to navigate their organisational lives. These dynamics highlight the need to further blur the boundaries of organisational research and to take seriously the shifting attributes of paid and unpaid labour under capitalism. Doing so may help reveal new subjective and collective potentialities of labour and must be undertaken through deeper and more sustained dialogue with scholars, activists, and communities rooted in both the Global North and South. At the same time, future research should avoid reducing precarious workers to homogeneous categories. Intersectional approaches must attend to the uneven textures of precariousness within and across groups—recognising how social positioning, including class, legal status, racialisation, and mobility (Alberti and Sacchetto 2024; Lee and Tapia 2023), as well as homophobia, transphobia and gender discrimination, shape distinct strategies,

constraints, and imaginaries of resistance (Hollibaugh and Weiss, 2015; Ivancheva and Pla, 2025, Yuval-Davis, 2023).

As we grapple with these complex transformations, we must also reimagine what organisational justice can mean. This Special Issue contributes to that reimagining by foregrounding how precariousness is lived and contested across intersecting axes of inequality, and by advancing intersectionality as both a conceptual anchor and an ethical imperative for justice-oriented and multi-disciplinary scholarship. Building on the insights and the contributions featured, we encourage scholars to move beyond narrow frameworks of inclusion or compliance and instead ask how organisations might address not only economic insecurity but also epistemic injustice, affective harm, and embodied exclusion — and how they might also (re)emerge as sites of resistance. Doing so requires challenging dominant norms of productivity, professionalism, and merit, while recognising the legitimacy of alternative ways of knowing, working, living, and organising.

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