

## **Migration and Work – Theoretical Perspectives under the Impression of Multiple Crises<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

The COVID-19 crisis has brought to light conflicts surrounding the exploitation of migrant labor in sectors of the economy which are relevant to the maintenance of everyday life.<sup>2</sup> The first lockdown in spring 2020 was followed by closures of the EU's internal borders, and this created labor shortages (including in Germany and Austria) in such essential sectors as agriculture and care work. Only a short time later, mass infections in industries that employ a large number of migrants became public. Migrant workers protested against the impossibility of social distancing in their accommodation, on the assembly line or in the fields. Online retail, harvest or meat industry workers demanded a reduction of their workload, fair and full payment, and the right to housing or access to social benefits.<sup>3</sup> Since then, heightened by other crises trig-

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<sup>1</sup> We thank Jens Beckmann and Alexander Gallas for their useful comments.

<sup>2</sup> For an early discussion in this journal see, among many others: Blauer Montag, Vom Notstand der Arbeitsgesellschaft, in: *Sozial.Geschichte Online*, 27 (2020), pp. 97–120; Cf. Maria L. Cook / Madhumita Dutta / Alexander Gallas / Jörg Nowak, Ben Scully, Times of Upheaval and Uncertainty: The Year in Review, in: *Global Labor Journal*, 11 (2020), 3, pp. 202–205; Corona-Monitor (eds.), *Corona und Gesellschaft. Soziale Kämpfe in der Pandemie*, Wien 2021. The debate on labor and migration in the Corona crisis was not least conducted in this journal, see: Dorothea Biaback Anong, Die perfekte Migration?: Saisonarbeit in der deutschen Landwirtschaft vor und während der Corona-Pandemie, in: *Sozial.Geschichte Online*, 30 (2021), pp. 115–160; Peter Birke, Die Fleischindustrie in der Corona-Krise. Eine Studie zu Migration, Arbeit und multipler Prekarität, in: *Sozial.Geschichte Online*, 29 (2021), pp. 41–87, [[https://duepublico2.uni-due.de/receive/duepublico\\_mods\\_00074351](https://duepublico2.uni-due.de/receive/duepublico_mods_00074351)]. For an overview see: [<https://sozialgeschichte-online.org/dossiers/arbeit-in-der-pandemie/>].

<sup>3</sup> Peter Birke, Grenzen aus Glas. Arbeit, Rassismus und Kämpfe der Migration in Deutschland, Wien / Berlin 2022, pp. 249–312. A detailed German-Austrian comparative paper, focusing em-

gered by events such as Brexit and the war on Ukraine, labor shortages in transport and logistics, as well as in food production, domestic services or hospital care, remain a much contested topic and are having a lasting impact on work processes and labor disputes in the sectors mentioned above.

The present article discusses structures and policies that have led to this contested constellation. In a first step, we attempt to develop a more fundamental view of how conflicts over migrant labor, as well as over labor-migration regimes, can be systematically understood. In this respect, we start with the thesis that concepts and insights from the sociologies of labor and migration may helpfully be brought together in order to understand, in particular, the dynamics and meaning of labor processes and labor struggles (section 1). We therefore discuss and combine concepts from both fields of research: ‘fragmentation’ (section 2), ‘differential inclusion’ (section 3), and finally the relation between ‘valorization’ and ‘racialisation’ (section 4). In section 5, we relate our conceptual explorations – at this stage very briefly – to our own empirical findings on labor and migration in the COVID-19 crisis by referring to the meat processing industry and care work as exemplary sectors.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. A blind spot, briefly illuminated

Looking at the evolving class relations in the societies of the global north, there is an urgent need to understand migrant labor as a significant feature in the (re-)composition of the workforce. In our opinion, the shortage of labor in essential sectors, visible today, cannot be understood adequately without understanding why low-paid work in many

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pirically on migrant labor struggles and union organizing, will be published by the authors of this text in Spring 2023. Cf. Neva Löw, *Arbeitskämpfe im Migrationsregime nach 2015. Ein Streik bei Amazon*, in: Buckel, Sonja et al.: *Kämpfe um Migrationspolitik nach 2015*, Bielefeld 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Johanna Neuhauser / Marwa El-Roumy / Yannik Wexenberger, *„Als ich diese Halle betreten habe, war ich wieder im Irak.“ Migrantische Systemerhalter\_innen bei Hygiene Austria und der Post AG*, Working Paper, Arbeiterkammer, Wien 2020; Felix Bluhm / Peter Birke / Thomas Stieber, *Hinter den Kulissen des Erfolgs. Eine qualitative Untersuchung zu Ausbildung und Erwerbsarbeit von Geflüchteten (SOFI WP 2020-21)*, Göttingen 2021.

sectors is almost entirely given to people without German or Austrian passports. In those sectors, it is quite obvious that there is a connection between the construction of fields of work as ‘migrant’ and their precarization. For this reason, objects that have long been understood as separate and delimited areas, especially in German-language research, must, in our view, be viewed more closely in their context and inter-relatedness. However, while the conditions of migrant workers have received increased attention during the pandemic, the underlying social division of labor has barely been addressed.

This does not mean that migrant workers are continuously and always invisible. Though their plight mostly stays in the shadows, it is from time to time dramatically illuminated.<sup>5</sup> For a short period after March 2020, public debate on this topic in our two countries was in some ways ahead of academic discourse. At the height of the pandemic, there was a growing understanding that many sectors in which a large part of the workforce labors without a German, Austrian or European passport have an ‘essential’ significance. This was the case for the food industry and agriculture, which were highly visible in public discourse, as well as for areas of indispensable care work (24-hour care, elderly people’s homes, parts of the health care system). At the same time, migrant workers<sup>6</sup> were repeatedly constructed as an ‘outside’ that does not belong to the community, and Corona hotspots were connoted as ‘migrant’ in a racist way.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence of this public attention, the im-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Peter Birke, Coesfeld und die Folgen. Arbeit und Migration in der Pandemie. In: *Sozial.Geschichte*, 27 (2020), pp. 137–157, p. 127, [[https://duepublico2.uni-due.de/receive/duepublico\\_mods\\_00072003](https://duepublico2.uni-due.de/receive/duepublico_mods_00072003)].

<sup>6</sup> Migrant workers are most often defined as those who have come in search of work. However, we also include those who have entered under other streams such as asylum, study or family reasons and who participate in the labor market. It is worth noting that migrants are also working in highly skilled fields, and in this sense too play an increasing role in the labor market and at workplaces. However, we find a growing polarization between the integration of migrants into high-skilled and low-skilled sectors, with a tendency that even highly qualified “newcomers” are confronted with problematic and exploitative working conditions. Since such constellations make up the largest share, we focus primarily on migrants in low-skilled and low-wage work, whatever the future trajectories of the recognition of their skills may allow them (or not).

<sup>7</sup> Birke, *Grenzen*, (see note 2), pp. 258–266.

portance of the political regulation of migration became evident during the crisis, be it in the form of opening and closing borders, a seemingly spontaneously developing system of defining labor as ‘necessary,’ or in the definition (and often expansion) of permissible working hours and desired/undesired employment relationships.

In contrast to the relevance of migrant work visible in current public discourse, however, many social scientific analyses of changes in the world of work have not, until recently, addressed migration at all. Even in research on Germany and Austria that focused directly on sectors and fields of work where migrant labor plays a significant part, migration was sometimes completely absent.<sup>8</sup> And though more empirical work has been done in recent years on the intersection between labor and migration, blind spots remain – these in some way reflect the connection that exists between the incomplete, fragile and hierarchized public discourse and migration research. This is particularly evident in those thematic conjunctures to which researchers, including of course the authors of this text, must orient themselves in order to ultimately generate institutional resources for their own work: a veritable wave of projects arose after 2015, but these were often quite instrumental, focused on topics such as ‘integration’ and ‘shortage of skilled workers.’ Or, more recently, on the immediate management of the mass flight from the Russian state’s attack on Ukraine. Very rarely, and only with a lot of effort, do researchers manage to work on these agendas against the grain.

A few examples can illustrate this. Recent studies had been dedicated to the subject of migration from the perspective of labor market segmentation and the transformation of industrial relations.<sup>9</sup> In addition,

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<sup>8</sup> A first indication of this is that in most introductions to sociology of work, migration is not represented as a specific field to be studied (exception: Ludger Pries, *Internationalisierung von Arbeitsmobilität durch Arbeitsmigration*, in: Fritz Böhle / Günter G. Voß / Günther Wachtler (eds.), *Handbuch Arbeitssoziologie*, Wiesbaden 2010, pp. 729–750).

<sup>9</sup> Moritz Altenried / Manuela Bojadzijev / Leif Höfler / Sandro Mezzadra / Mira Wallis (eds.), *Logistische Grenzlandschaften: das Regime mobiler Arbeit nach dem Sommer der Migration*. Münster 2017. Cf. Bridget Anderson, *Migration, Immigration Controls and the Fashioning of Precarious Workers*, in: *Work, Employment and Society*, 24 (2010), 2, pp. 300–317. There is also a

studies on the integration of specific ethnic groups into the labor market have increasingly emerged, though their insights often merely illustrate quantitative aspects of the segmented labor markets.<sup>10</sup> Many of the new studies on migration and work refer, as mentioned, to the period of refugee migration after 2015.<sup>11</sup> This means, however, that ‘internal’ EU migration, whose striking significance has become evident in the aforementioned conflicts surrounding the COVID-19 crisis, has so far largely remained under-explored.<sup>12</sup> Another blind spot is, still, the relation between segmentation in the labor market and in the labor process: while some studies do combine sociological questions of labor and migration, they focus primarily on the segmentation of the market and exclude questions of control and social conflict in and around the labor process. Moreover, recently completed research, if it investigates questions of the labor process at all, is often based on the concept of ‘in-

relatively developed discussion on migrant labor struggles on the international scene, see recently among others Carlotta Benvegnù / Bettina Haidinger / Devi Sacchetto, *Restructuring Labour Relations and Employment in the European Logistics Sector: Unions’ responses to a Segmented Workforce*, in: Virginia Doellgast et al. (eds.), *Reconstructing Solidarity: Labour unions, Precarious work, and the Politics of Institutional Change in Europe*, Oxford 2018, pp. 83–103. Virginia Doellgast et al., *Reconstructing Solidarity: Labour unions, precarious work, and the politics of institutional change in Europe*, Oxford 2018.

<sup>10</sup> For Austria see Gerlinde Titelbach / Marcel Fink / Raphaela Hyee / Katharina Valkova, *Beschäftigungsentwicklung von Inländer/inne/n und Ausländer/inne/n am österreichischen Arbeitsmarkt*. AMS Projektbericht, Wien 2018, [<https://irihs.ihs.ac.at/id/eprint/4910/1/2018-ihs-report-titelbach-fink-hyee-valkova-beschaeftigungsentwicklung-oesterreichischen-arbeitsmarkt.pdf>], for Germany see Jonas Felbo-Kolding / Janine Leschke / Thees F. Spreckelsen, *A division of labour? Labour market segmentation by region of origin: the case of intra-EU migrants in the UK, Germany and Denmark*, in: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45 (2018), 15, pp. 2.820–2.843.

<sup>11</sup> In Germany, special attention is paid to the studies of the Institute for Labor Market and Occupational Research of the Federal Employment Agency (IAB); see for example Herbert Brücker et al., *Fünf Jahre “Wir schaffen das.” Eine Bilanz aus der Perspektive des Arbeitsmarktes (IAB-Forschungsbericht 11)*, Nürnberg 2020. In Austria, the annual integration report also includes data on the situation of migrants in the labor market: *Expertenrat für Integration, Integrationsbericht 2020 – 10 Jahre Integrationsbericht*, Wien, [<https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/agenda/integration/integrationsbericht.html>].

<sup>12</sup> One exception is the study of Riedner, who conducted participatory observation in a worker center in Munich: Lisa Riedner, *Arbeit! Wohnen! Urbane Auseinandersetzungen um EU-Migration*, Münster 2018. See also Felbo-Kolding et al., *Division of Labor*, (see note 10). On intra-European South-North migration in the wake of the 2008 crisis: Jean-Michel Lafleur / Mikołaj Stanek (ed.), *South-North Migration of EU Citizens in Times of Crisis*, Wiesbaden 2017.

tegration,' which has been widely questioned in critical migration research.<sup>13</sup>

In our opinion, a conceptual connection between labor and migration processes is of great interest, not least on the basis of recent studies from German-language labor and migration research. The aforementioned blind spots of current research do, of course, need empirical work, but they also need an analytical compass. Here we view the concept of 'fragmentation,' as spelled out in the sociology of labor, as an interesting starting point. On this basis, in section 3, we will justify why we consider it important to combine this concept with that of 'differential inclusion' from migration research.

## 2. Fragmentation

Apart from the question of whether migration plays a role at all, it is also interesting how migration is conceptualized. Is there a systematic approach to the topic, and if so, what does it look like? After all, it is not only precarity in general that has been a central theme in recent decades, but also the process of fragmentation of employment relationships.<sup>14</sup> Many recent works even ascribe an almost epochal valence to this latter concept. 'Fragmentation' has been associated with various tendencies, whose 'point zero' ['Nullpunkt'] is often identified as the early 1980s.<sup>15</sup> Unsurprisingly, if one thinks of the classics of labor sociology after 1945, the automotive industry is typically perceived as the

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<sup>13</sup> Werner Schmidt, *Geflüchtete im Betrieb: Integration und Arbeitsbeziehungen zwischen Ressentiment und Kollegialität*, Bielefeld 2020. Other studies consider labor market integration as a goal in itself: Brücker, *Fünf Jahre* (see note 11).

<sup>14</sup> Hajo Holst (eds.), *Fragmentierte Belegschaften. Leiharbeit, Informalität und Soloselbständigkeit in globaler Perspektive*, Frankfurt / New York 2017. See also: Mick Marchington / Damian Grimshaw / Jill Rubery / Hugh Willmott (eds.), *Fragmenting Work: Blurring Organizational Boundaries and Disordering Hierarchies*, Oxford, New York 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Harald Wolf, *Auf der Suche nach der fragmentierten Arbeit. Über produktive Irritationen im Sekundäranalyselabor*. In: *Arbeits- und Industriesoziologische Studien*, 11 (2018), 1, pp. 76–90, p. 81.

concrete historical site of this starting point. Since the last two decades of the 20th century, the auto industry has experienced a gradual process that combines the decentralization of production units with the globalization of value chains. Keywords are lean production and the reduction of vertical integration, profit centers as a form of managerial control, group work and ‘self-organized’ forms of work, and outsourcing and subcontracting. It is noteworthy that not only the traditional over-emphasis on automobile factories, but also new forms of operational management, were central to the development of the debate on fragmentation.<sup>16</sup> Since the 1990s, the observation that labor relations were becoming marketized has also been the inspiration for the debate on the ‘subjectification’ of labor.<sup>17</sup> However, each of these debates has been conducted without a closer look at how the observed changes affect migration and vice versa.

In our opinion, the debate on ‘fragmentation’ currently conducted in the sociology of work also offers a starting point for linking research on work/work processes with work on migration.<sup>18</sup> We find it particularly

<sup>16</sup> This specific beginning could also be one explanation why migration is still rather secondary within that discourse, given the ideology of “universalism” of the working class, which is strongly represented in studies of the automobile industry, cf. Schmidt, Geflüchtete, (see note 13).

<sup>17</sup> New insights were also provided by the debate on precarization associated with the work of Robert Castel and the reconceptualizations that emerged in the work of Klaus Dörre and others at the University of Jena. See as an overview Klaus Dörre, Prekarität als Konzept kritischer Gesellschaftsanalyse – Zwischenbilanz und Ausblick, in: Ethik und Gesellschaft, 2/2015, [[http://www.ethik-und-gesellschaft.de/mm/EuG-2-2014\\_Doerre.pdf](http://www.ethik-und-gesellschaft.de/mm/EuG-2-2014_Doerre.pdf)].

<sup>18</sup> Of course, there is a lot of literature on fragmented labor markets, both with regard to historical processes and unfree labor, with regard to the dynamics of the re-composition of the working class, and as analyses of the relevance of labor migration. Cf., among many others: Karl Heinz Roth / Marcel van der Linden, Beyond Marx, Theorising the Global Labour Relations of the Twenty-First Century, Leiden 2014. Lisa Carstensen, Unfree Labour, Migration and Racism: Towards an Analytical Framework, in: Global Labor Journal 12 (2021), 1, [<https://mulpress.mcmaster.ca/globallabour/issue/view/422>]. While the aim here is not least to relate the existing transnational debate about the significance of segmented labor markets and fragmented workforces (i. e., ultimately about the connection between exploitation, migration, and labor relations) to the standards and concepts of German-language sociology of work, it must also be noted that even in English-speaking introductions to the field, “race” is often treated merely as a “special topic” and / or field of research, apart from the mainstream of industrial relations, labor processes etc. (critically see e. g. Satnam Virdee, Racialized Capitalism: An account of its contested origins and consolidation, in: The Sociological Review, 67 (2019), 1, pp. 3–27. Thus, an examination of

revealing that fragmentation contributes to the precarization of work by splitting what were once (formally) homogeneous workforces into several groups with different employers, employment contracts, and employment and working conditions.<sup>19</sup> The concept of ‘fragmentation’ has recently marked a turning point in labor and industrial sociology: it gradually moved away from placing the central analytical focus on that part of labor processes whose quasi-natural environment is assumed to be the workplace. Wolf describes this readjustment as a renewed consideration of the “division of labor on a large scale.” One is “no [longer] primarily aiming at the disaggregation of work within companies, but at the splitting off, redistribution and recomposition of a multitude of work processes within and between companies and industries.”<sup>20</sup>

We share the view that labor and employment relations must be examined in the context of changes within the division of labor as a whole, i. e., as a reconfiguration of power relations. At the same time, our hypothesis is that these changes cannot adequately be described without consideration of migration dynamics, because to leave those relations aside is to disregard an element that is crucial to the reconfiguration of the division of labor. Accordingly, the obvious question of how fragmentation processes are interwoven with inequalities along migration/ethnic and gender lines has remained largely underexamined in research on fragmentation.<sup>21</sup>

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the significance of migration at the point of production, but also in class relations, would be an important topic in the sociology of work in general.

<sup>19</sup> Marchington, *Fragmenting Work*, (see note 14); Jörg Flecker, *Fragmenting Labour: Organisational restructuring, employment relations and the dynamics of national regulatory frameworks*, in: *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation*, 4 (2010), 1, pp. 8–23.; Rosemarie Batt / Eileen Appelbaum, *The Networked Organisation: implications for jobs and inequality*, in: Damian Grimshaw / Colette Fagan / Gail Hebson / Isabel Tavora, *Making Work More Equal*, Manchester 2017, pp. 70–89.

<sup>20</sup> Wolf, *Fragmentierte Arbeit*, (see note 15), p. 77 (our translation).

<sup>21</sup> In this regard, Batt / Appelbaum (*Networked Organisation*, see note 19) consider the following in their critical review of the state of research on fragmentation: “[...] we lack deep empirical investigations at the intersection of organizational restructuring on the one hand, and race, gender and ethnicity on the other” (p. 83).



If we consider labor migration, what we see first is that their regulation has become more diverse. Several forms can be identified in Germany and Austria (as well as in many other countries). On the one hand, there are regulations reminiscent of the guest worker regime, through which workers in so-called ‘shortage occupations’ are recruited abroad for specific areas of work in a targeted and systematic manner, whereby residence permits are often tied to a specific employer.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the expansion of the EU since the first decade of the 21st century has brought about formal freedom of movement, which is, however, undermined by the denial of social benefits.<sup>23</sup> In Germany, the 2016 Integration Act linked the right of residence more closely to the willingness to be available for gainful employment of any kind.<sup>24</sup> In Austria, the release of the Red-White-Red Card in 2011 introduced a criteria-based immigration system for labor migration from third countries, which is intended to provide so called skilled workers in shortage occupations in addition to highly qualified workers on a demand-driven basis. Unlike the points systems of classic immigration countries such as Canada, however, permanent residence is not granted; instead, residence and employment permits are initially limited to one year.<sup>25</sup> Finally,

<sup>22</sup> In this regard, consider the early developments that have been discussed in Germany since the Immigration Act (2004/2005), cf. Serhat Karakayali / Vassilis Tsianos, Mapping the Order of New Migration. Undokumentierte Arbeit und die Autonomie der Migration, in: *Peripherie*, 25 (2005), 97/98, pp. 35–64.

<sup>23</sup> An example of this in Austria is the indexation/cutting of family allowances for people working in Austria whose main place of residence is abroad. The measure was initiated by the ÖVP-FPÖ government and particularly affects 24-hour caregivers: *Parlament aktiv, Parlamentskorrespondenz Nr. 1160 vom 24.10.2018. Nationalrat stimmt Indexierung der Familienbeihilfe zu*, Wien 2018, [[https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/PR/JAHR\\_2018/PK1160/](https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/PR/JAHR_2018/PK1160/)].

<sup>24</sup> On the development of the different moments of an “exploitation-oriented” but at the same time differentially organized migration regime in Germany, see for instance Lisa Carstensen / Lisa Riedner / Lisa Marie Heimeshoff, *Der Zwang zur Arbeit. Verwertungslogiken in den umkämpften Regimen der Anwerbe-, Flucht- und EU-Migration*, in: *Sozial.Geschichte Online*, 23 (2018), pp. 235–269, [[https://duepublico.uni-duisburg-essen.de/servlets/DerivateServlet/Derivate-46215/08\\_Carstensen\\_et\\_al\\_Zwang\\_zur\\_Arbeit.pdf](https://duepublico.uni-duisburg-essen.de/servlets/DerivateServlet/Derivate-46215/08_Carstensen_et_al_Zwang_zur_Arbeit.pdf)].

<sup>25</sup> Torben Krings, *Von der „Ausländerbeschäftigung“ zur Rot-Weiß-Rot-Karte: Sozialpartnerschaft und Migrationspolitik in Österreich*, in: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, 42 (2013), 3, pp. 263–278, pp. 269 et seq.

in both countries, restrictive rules on entry from third countries and the right of asylum are more or less directly linked to an expansion of informalized employment and undocumented work.<sup>26</sup>

Clearly, border regimes, the welfare state, and labor and residence laws are all factors that need to be considered in studying the transnational fragmentation of the movements of capital and labor. Accordingly, Hürtgen, among those who have long proposed a transnationalization of labor studies, has pointed to the strong connection between economic integration and social fragmentation. The “splitting of the production process into a multitude of internal and external elements, which in turn are flexibly combined according to the current market situation,”<sup>27</sup> presupposes a transnational distribution of production as well as a transnational recruitment of labor. This ‘cuts through’ nation-state modes of regulation. It is therefore one of the essential elements of the renewal of the social division of labor. We consider this understanding of migration as part of a broader dynamics of transnational labor recruitment to be extremely important.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, we would argue that, with respect to the rich body of research on GPNs and

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<sup>26</sup> As Trimikliniotis and Fulas-Souroulla show on the basis of interviews conducted in eleven EU countries, female migrants are particularly affected by this situation. Undocumented migrants of both sexes mostly work in low-skilled sectors, such as construction, agriculture, catering or cleaning and housekeeping services: Nicos Trimikliniotis / Mihaela Fulas-Souroulla, *Informalisation and Flexibilisation at Work: The Migrant Woman Precariat Speaks*, in: Maria Kontos et al. (eds.), *Paradoxes of Integration: Female Migrants in Europe. International Perspectives on Migration*, vol 4., Dordrecht 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Stefanie Hürtgen, *Zur Politischen Ökonomie transnational fragmentierter Arbeitskraft*, in: *Zeitschrift für gesellschafts-, wirtschafts- und umweltpolitische Alternativen*, 3 (2019), pp. 23–31, p. 25 (our translation).

<sup>28</sup> Recent works in the tradition of “global labor history” discuss migrant labor as part of vulnerable arrangements in global commodity chains and production networks: Karin Fischer, *Global Labor and Labor Studies—Breaking the Chains*, in: Andrea Komlosy / Goran Musić (eds.), *Global Commodity Chains and Labor Relations*, Leiden 2021, p. 367. For a recent overview of the state of research, see Komlosy / Musić, *Global Commodity Chains and Labor Relations*, *ibid.* In addition, research that focuses on the concept of the “new international division of labor,” which was already established in the 1970s, offers valuable insights; see Folker Fröbel / Jürgen Heinrichs / Otto Kreye, *Die neue internationale Arbeitsteilung. Strukturelle Arbeitslosigkeit in den Industrieländern und die Industrialisierung der Entwicklungsländer*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1977.

GPVs,<sup>29</sup> migration should be theorized more systematically, as a driving force of fragmentation and thus of the division of labor. Although globalization has meant that labor markets are no longer exclusively national and employment has become increasingly transnational, the regulation of migration and labor law continues to take place mainly within a national framework. However, state migration policies are to be understood “less as consistent policies than as an unstable web of compromises between different political, social and economic interests.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, migration labor policies are socially contested and historically develop very different and sometimes contradictory manifestations.

### 3. Differential Inclusion

One of the reasons why migration is insufficiently addressed in the literature on precarization and fragmentation processes is that the sociology of work and the field of migration studies often operate without referring to each other. We therefore suggest that the analytical interest of the sociology of work in the social division of labor at the workplace and beyond should be related to perspectives from migration studies. This seems obvious insofar as the observation of the emergence of a precarious world of work, which operates beyond the social demands that otherwise (continue to) prevail in Western Europe, does not surprise anyone who has dealt empirically with migration relations in recent years. In this respect, too, the COVID-19 crisis has merely made existing tendencies visible and increasingly public. Even outside an academic audience, the observation that there is a ‘migrantized’ precarity in parcel services or 24-hour care is common sense. These are areas in which hardly any people with German/Austrian passports work anymore. From our point of view, the question is therefore not so much whether migration and precarity have a (quantitatively) regular connec-

<sup>29</sup> I. e. “Global Production Networks” and “Global Value Chains.”

<sup>30</sup> Altenried, *Logistische Grenzlandschaften* (see note 9), p. 47.

tion – we consider this to be sufficiently proven. Rather, we are concerned with the question of how this connection is constituted within the social division of labor and how it is related to strategies of capitalist exploitation on the one hand and state regulation on the other.

If one aims at conceptualizing labor and migration together, reference can also be made to another strand of research. As early as the 1970s, the question of the segmentation of labor relations was explicitly related to the connection between migration and the under-stratification of labor.<sup>31</sup> As Piore emphasizes in his standard work on the U.S. context, segmentation is to be understood as an expression of alternative capital valorization strategies. In addition to rationalization or social compromises with core workforces, Piore argues that a central strategy of corporate management is to recruit new underclasses on the basis of unequal access to rights and resources defined by citizenship.<sup>32</sup> By taking over the unstable jobs at the bottom of the social hierarchy that are shunned by local workers, immigrants (and other workers ‘new’ to some specific labor market) cushion economic fluctuations and implicitly secure more stable working conditions in the primary segment of the labor market. Due to the low social status of so-called ‘migrant jobs,’ this does not change much even in times of greater labor surpluses. In this respect, segmentation theory approaches can explain well why, even in times of crisis, migrants (women, black people, etc.) do not (necessarily) compete with non-migrants for the same jobs and why there are hardly any workers with German/Austrian passports in certain sectors and areas of activity.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the valuable insights provided by classical segmentation theories, their focus has to be extended to labor relations beyond production

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Piore, *Birds of Passage: Migrant labor and industrial societies*, Cambridge 1979, Stephan Castles / Godula Kosack, *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*. London 1973, for a more detailed discussion, see Johanna Neuhauser, *Die Funktion migrantischer Arbeit – Zur Aktualität klassischer Segmentationstheorien*, in: *Kurswechsel: Zeitschrift für gesellschafts-, wirtschafts- und umweltpolitische Alternativen*, 3 (2019), pp. 13–22.

<sup>32</sup> Piore, *Birds of Passage* (see note 31), pp. 36, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Ruhs / Bridget Anderson, *Who Needs Migrant Workers? Labour shortages, immigration, and public policy*, Oxford 2010, pp. 44 et seq.

and the (assumed) temporariness of migration as the most dynamic factor of segmentation by citizenship or ethnicity.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, segmentation theories – despite their extension to migration – tend to remain within the nation-state framework, neglecting transnational processes of the regulation of labor and migration. While Piore still assumes individual capitalists, who choose between different capital valorization strategies, the fragmentation and globalization of value chains have today produced models of labor exploitation that are less based on individual (intentional) capitalist corporate strategies, but are, as outlined, a systematic part of increasingly transnationalized capital valorization structures. Devalued migrant employment finds its place in the realm of ‘newly’ valorized services. This is equally true for 24-hour care, for the new ‘hubs’ of the food industry as well as for parcel services and online commerce. Thus, what appears, in the labor-sociological debate on ‘Digital Taylorism,’ as a new form of management and control evident in, for example, distribution centers and warehouses, can hardly be understood without considering the social re-composition of the working class as a whole and thus also the new forms of ‘migrantized’ segmentation. Entire branches and industries are thereby being removed from what used to be considered ‘normal employment relations’ and are being brought closer to what is the international standard of informalized employment relations.<sup>35</sup>

It is striking that the perspectives of the sociology of work, which have been gradually broadened in recent decades, as discussed here with regard to the concept of fragmentation, have also been addressed in migration research. For example, Mezzadra and Neilson emphasize the ‘differential inclusion’ of new migrants, which assumes a pluralization of legal forms and a differentiation into various categories for which the borders of states and confederations, as well as the borders of labor markets, are more or less penetrable or impenetrable.<sup>36</sup> The idea that the

<sup>34</sup> Neuhauser, Segmentationstheorien (see note 31).

<sup>35</sup> Birke, Grenzen, (see note 3), pp. 75–103.

<sup>36</sup> Sandro Mezzadra / Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*: New York 2013; Sandro Mezzadra, *The Gaze of Autonomy: Capitalism, migration and social struggles*,

aim of current border and migration regimes is not simply to exclude migrants, but to filter, select, and hierarchize transnational mobilities, seems central to us.<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, the concept captures the fact that under the pressure of the flexibilization of labor markets, processes of fragmentation and precarization have become part of migration management and thus of the definition of citizenship on a global scale (for example, points systems, green cards, residence on probation, etc.). On the other hand, the stratification and multiplication of systems of entry, residence, and social rights promotes the diversification of migrant subject positions and leads to a ‘multiplication of labor.’<sup>38</sup> Mezzadra and Neilson prefer this concept to that of an (international) division of labor, as it allows them to emphasize the increasing heterogeneity of labor relations, which cannot be contained within simple hierarchies such as North-South or center-periphery. By contrast, we argue in favor of keeping the concept of the division of labor as a theoretical horizon in order not to lose sight of structural relations of inequality and dependency. At the same time, the perspective of ‘differential inclusion’ draws attention to the tensions and frictions between the (autonomous) practices and movements of migrants and the migratory regime, rather than one-sidedly resolving them.<sup>39</sup>

This debate in migration studies, which has been developing steadily since the 2000s, is particularly useful for broadening the perspectives of the sociology of work in that it highlights the importance of citizenship for the fragmentation and precarity of labor and employment relationships.<sup>40</sup> Thus, an increasingly “exploitation-oriented migration regime”

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in: Vicky Squire (ed.), *The Contested Politics of Mobility: Borderzones and irregularity*, London 2011, pp. 121–142; Emmanuel Terray, *Illegale Arbeit ist rentabel*, in: *Archipel* 9 (2002), 3, pp. 1–2.

<sup>37</sup> Mezzadra / Neilson, *Border as Method*, (see note 36), p. 165.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 164 et seq.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* See also Squire, *Contested Politics* (see note 36).

<sup>40</sup> Migrants’ vulnerability is amplified by their legal and political status, even when they formally acquire social entitlements in the context of their employment relationships: Hannah Lewis et al., *Hyper-precarius Lives: Migrants, work and forced labour in the Global North*, in: *Progress in Human Geography*, 39 (2015), 5, pp. 580–600. This produces a situation in which labor rights, even when they exist on paper, are often ignored (e. g. when working hours exceed the legally defined measure of a ten-hour day).

and the “marketization of citizenship” are mutually complementary.<sup>41</sup> Our thesis is that the connection between research on the (transnational) fragmentation of labor, which focuses on political-economic restructuring, and the concept of ‘differential inclusion’, which is primarily based on migratory movements and migration regimes, contributes to a better understanding of the increasing ‘migrantization’ of particularly precarious sectors. And this in turn is one of the preconditions for any qualified discussion of the consequences of ‘migrantization’ for the (re-)composition of the working class in general, and the scope for collective organization.

#### 4. Valorization and Racialization<sup>42</sup>

In this context, racializing attributions must be seen as a constitutive element of fragmentation policies. In the U.S. debate, the concept of racialization of labor was introduced thirty years ago from the perspective of the ‘long history’ of postcolonial class societies, and primarily intended to mean the use and naturalization of ascribed ethnic differences in labor processes to divide workers.<sup>43</sup> In particular, authors of postcolonial studies have drawn attention to the fact that colonial relations such as slavery “rather than an aberration that can be addressed through strategies of criminalization by protective statecraft, [are ...] part of how capitalism advances across uneven terrain.”<sup>44</sup> Despite the rich body of work by intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz

<sup>41</sup> The term “marketization of citizenship” has been coined mainly in Anglo-Saxon citizenship studies: Ayelet Shachar, *The Marketization of Citizenship in an Age of Restrictionism*, in: *Ethics & International Affairs*, 32 (2018), 1, pp. 3–13.

<sup>42</sup> With the concept of racialization we refer to Robert Miles, *Racism*, London / New York 2002 [1989], who defines it as a dialectical process by which meaning is assigned to certain markers (conceived as ‘biological,’ ‘cultural,’ etc.) through which individuals become a generalized category of persons (ibid., p. 76). Racialization and racism are thus historically variable but not random: on the one hand, it is important to identify the dynamic content of racism, its fluidity, but on the other hand, it cannot be understood without reference to historical continuities (ibid., p. 84).

<sup>43</sup> David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the making of the American working class*. Rev. ed., London / New York 2007. Edna Bonacich / Sabrina Alimahomed / Jake B. Wilson, *The Racialization of Global Labor*, in: *American Behavioral Scientist*, 52 (2008), 3, pp. 342–355.

Fanon, Stuart Hall, Angela Davis or Cedric Robinson, “the examination of how race functions in structural and agential ways, integrally reproducing raced markets and social conditions,”<sup>45</sup> has accorded relatively less critical attention in mainstream labor relations research than gender and class.<sup>46</sup> In this context, labor research could benefit from precisely those studies that reveal how capitalism deploys strategies for extraction or accumulation based on ethnic or racial hierarchies.<sup>47</sup> Such a perspective could contribute to dismantling Eurocentric sociologies by demonstrating how colonial legacies have always informed labor relations and migration policies.

Racialization is part of a set of strategies of capital valorization that, from an intersectional perspective, must be linked to other strategies associated with the social division of labor. Feminist approaches to social reproduction have shown in numerous ways that feminization and devaluation of work domains are mutually dependent.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, particularly feminists of color have analyzed the interlocking of race and gender in the division of labor.<sup>49</sup> In terms of reproductive labor, Evelyn Nakano Glenn points, for example, to a hierarchization between so-called emotional labor on people, which is valued more highly and performed by a majority of ‘white’ women, and physical labor on things/spaces, such as cleaning, which is mostly performed by black

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<sup>44</sup> Adelle Blackett, *Slavery is not a Metaphor*, Review of Bunting / Quirk, *Contemporary Slavery*, in: *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 66 (2018), 4, pp. 927–35, p. 933.

<sup>45</sup> Lisa Tilley / Robbie Shilliam, *Raced markets: An introduction*, in: *New political economy*, 23 (2018), 5, pp. 534–543.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* As Virdee argues for the British context, this marginalization of black scholars and racism studies is not only true for labor studies, but is actually characteristic of the genesis of the discipline of sociology: Satnam Virdee, *Racialized capitalism: An account of its contested origins and consolidation*, in: *The Sociological Review*, 67 (2019), 1, pp. 3–27, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism: South Pasadena 2018*; Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Rethinking Racial Capitalism*, Lanham, MD 2018; Virdee, *Racialized capitalism* (see note 42).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Barbara Laslett / Johanna Brenner, *Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives*, in: *Annual Review of Sociology*, 15 (1989), pp. 381–404; V. Spike Peterson, *Global Householding Amid Global Crises*, in: *Politics & Gender*, 6 (2010), 2, pp. 271–281.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping class, recentring oppression*, London 2017.



women.<sup>50</sup> Patterns of gender classification of labor ('feminization')<sup>51</sup> are thus structurally related to racializing or ethnicizing constructions, although they do not merge. In this vein, qualitative studies show that the specific 'suitability' of migrants for certain jobs is often justified by employers in terms of their particularly 'flexible attitude,' which functions as an ethnicized and also gendered construction of a special 'migrant work capacity.'<sup>52</sup> Migrants are often stylized as paradigmatic neoliberal subjects who embody values such as flexibility, competitiveness and discipline and are thus particularly well suited to the demands of liberalized labor markets.<sup>53</sup>

For employers, these constructions serve to legitimize segmentation-oriented recruitment strategies and differences in pay and conditions for different groups of workers. They are thus a constitutive component of divide-and-rule strategies in capitalism.<sup>54</sup> Since classical theories of segmentation – and recent works on fragmentation – focus on political economy, they often neglect the very processes by which certain groups of workers are distributed among different employment relationships.<sup>55</sup> In this context, the attribution of certain characteristics on the basis of citizenship, so-called ethnic origin or gender is closely linked to the question of the evaluation (recognition/denial) of qualifications.<sup>56</sup> The recognition of a particular ability of certain groups can also be a form of

<sup>50</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *From Servitude to Service Work: Historical continuities in the racial division of paid reproductive labor*, in: *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 18 (1992), 1, pp. 1–43.

<sup>51</sup> With Peterson, *Global Householding* (see note 48), p. 274, we understand feminization as a classification and hierarchization principle through which certain work is devalued as reproductive / unskilled / of lower economic value. Cf. Johanna Neuhauser / Johanna Sittel / Niko Weinmann, *Frühes Plädoyer für eine relationale Analyse von Arbeit und Geschlecht*. in: Johanna Neuhauser et al., *Arbeit und Geschlecht im Wandel. Impulse aus Lateinamerika*, Frankfurt am Main et al. 2019, pp. 21–30.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Roger Waldinger / Michael I. Lichter, *How the Other Half Works: Immigration and the social organisation of labor*, Los Angeles 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Olena Fedjuk / Paul Stewart, *Inclusion and Exclusion in Europe: Migration, work and employment perspectives*. Rowman & Littlefield International, London 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Harald Bauder, *Origin, Employment Status and Attitudes Towards Work: Immigrants in Vancouver, Canada*, *Work, Employment and Society*, 20 (2006), 4, pp. 709–729.

<sup>55</sup> Neuhauser, *Segmentationstheorien* (see note 31).

racism, for example, when it is emphasized that certain groups of migrants are particularly hard workers, extremely nimble or particularly kind in their dealings with the elderly, etc., and are thus constructed as particularly suitable for certain precarious areas of work. While the perspective of ‘differential inclusion’ focuses in particular on hierarchizations through citizenship – and thus on the level of government – we argue for taking greater account of the social processes of racialization and feminization as crucial moments of the exploitation of migrant labor, and thus of a relevance for the division of labor at the micro-level and at the point-of-production (or, of course, point-of-service).

On this basis, racification is much more than just an individual ‘attribution,’ but an organized, structured phenomenon, here for example as part of the management of labor relations. The observation that both ethnicizing devaluations and supposed valorizations are part of racial management is also central to our analysis of the COVID-19 crisis: It makes clear that it is merely a further variant of invisibilization, namely the disappearance of working people and their rights in the construction of their supposedly special, personal characteristics. At this point, a correction, or rather, a differentiated assessment, of the image of the ‘visibility’ of migration after March 2020 must also be made. In a seemingly paradoxical way, the short-term recognition and thus ‘visibility’ of ‘essential’ migrants had, in its consequences, a doubly invisibilizing effect: public attention was focused only on a specific (because in the short-term ‘useful’) part of precarious and migrant employment, while others remained out of view. The emphasis on the ‘essential necessity’ of these workers simultaneously confirmed (and still confirms) the functionality of their permanent downgrading and allocation to devalued areas of work.

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<sup>56</sup> In their case study of a London hotel, Dyer et al. found that certain activities are assigned to certain groups. In this context, racialized attributions change permanently and can also contradict each other immanently: Sarah Dyer / Linda McDowell / Adina Batnitzky, *The Impact of Migration on the Gendering of Service Work: The Case of a West London Hotel*, in: *Gender, Work and Organization*, 17 (2010), 6, pp. 635–657.

## 5. Migrant Labor in the COVID-19 Crisis

If we consider the quantitative empirical evidence on migrant work in the COVID-19 crisis, an ambivalent picture emerges. On the one hand, it can be said that migrants are more at risk of unemployment and relative impoverishment.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, there are studies that point to numerous examples of high workloads, increased stress in work processes as well as a greater risk of infection in view of the impossibility of working from a home office.<sup>58</sup> In the following, we will show that this observation is not surprising with regard to the structures of the social division of labor, since the ‘roller coaster’ of unemployment and overwork is one of the results of the fragmentation of labor we spoke of in section 2 of this article. Within this fragmentation of labor, exploitation and devaluation complement each other.<sup>59</sup> Unemployment is thus a reflection of overexploitation. However, the specific situation of migrants only becomes visible if one considers their ‘differential inclusion’ in devalued fields of work on the basis of the racialization processes described above and their ‘multiple precarity’ (precarious

<sup>57</sup> Quantitative data confirm that migrant workers are particularly affected by the disastrous consequences of the pandemic on the labor market, as they are more likely to have unstable employment conditions. This is particularly the case in sectors such as hospitality and food services, which have seen a sharp drop in employment during the pandemic. At the same time, migrants are at significantly higher risk of COVID-19 infection due to their structural vulnerabilities (higher poverty rates, precarious housing and employment conditions in which social distancing is not possible, cf. OECD, What is the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Immigrants and their Children? OECD policy responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19), Paris 2020, [<http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de/>].

<sup>58</sup> Bridget Anderson / Bernd Poeschel / Michael Ruhs, Rethinking Labour Migration: Covid-19, essential work, and systemic resilience, in: Comparative migration studies, 9 (2021), 1, pp. 1–19; Hajo Holst / Agnes Fessler / Steffen Niehoff, Covid-19, Social Class and Work Experience in Germany: Inequalities in work-related health and economic risks, in: European Societies, 23 (2021), pp. 495–512; see too the vast global data collection published by the IOM: [<https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/migration-data-relevant-covid-19-pandemic/>].

<sup>59</sup> Karl Marx, Capital: a critique of political economy, New York 1906, section 25 (“The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation”).

residential status, precarious housing situation, precarious social security).

Data collected in Germany show that precarious employment increases the likelihood of contracting COVID-19 and losing income, including for non-migrants. Those who suffer most from the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis belonged and belong to the lower social classes. Health and economic risks intersect at the lower end of the employment hierarchy and reinforce existing class inequalities. Moreover, international research has shown that migrants are particularly affected by pandemics. On a global scale, COVID-19 has caused migrants even greater hardship, evidenced in a variety of ways, from increased discrimination and xenophobia to food insecurity, layoffs, worsening working conditions including wage reductions or loss, cramped or inadequate housing, and increasing restrictions on movement or forced return.<sup>60</sup> Since migrants often represent a disproportionate share of workers in essential (public and private) services, their role in contributing to the continued satisfaction of fundamental needs of the population ('systemic resilience') has to be considered.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the crisis has made visible gaps in the social protection of non-standard and self-employed workers,<sup>62</sup> but also for workers crossing international borders and thereby labor and migration regimes. As we have argued, precarity in terms of employment and migration status often overlap. The challenge that arises in this context is that of understanding precarity and fragmentation as general dynamics of the labor market ("precarity is everywhere"),<sup>63</sup> without either failing to consider

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<sup>60</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), *Protecting Migrant Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Recommendations for policy-makers and constituents*. Geneva 2020, [[www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed\\_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms\\_743268.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_743268.pdf)].

<sup>61</sup> Anderson, *Rethinking* (see note 58).

<sup>62</sup> Slavina Spasova / Dalila Ghailani / Sebastiano Sabato / Stéphanie Coster / Boris Fronteddu / Bart Vanhercke, *Non-standard Workers and the Self-employed in the EU: Social Protection During the Covid-19 Pandemic*, in: ETUI Research Paper 02, Brussels 2021, [[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3802372](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3802372)].

<sup>63</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Prekarität ist überall*, in: id., *Gegenfeuer*, Hamburg 1998, pp. 96–102.

the specifics of the ‘migrantization’ of precarity or confusing the effects of the pandemic with long standing tendencies that structure neoliberal capitalism.

Since structural contradictions intensify during crises,<sup>64</sup> multiple lines of social division are deepening, as they have done during previous crises. Research suggests, for example, that even in pandemic-free times, there is a connection between low-paid, precarious work, insecure living conditions and health risks.<sup>65</sup> This crisis, like other crises in the past, has only exacerbated this connection. The concept of the ‘permanent crisis’ of feminized and migrant employment,<sup>66</sup> which experienced a brief boom in the social sciences in the aftermath of 2007/8, seems particularly revealing with regard to migrant labor in essential but precarious areas of work. It could be explored in three ways: in terms of the connection between shocks in different social fields (‘multiple crisis’),<sup>67</sup> in terms of the development of insecure working and living conditions, and in terms of the return, under altered circumstances, of ‘historical’ experiences of crisis. With regard to the question of labor migration,

<sup>64</sup> Alex Demirović / Andrea Maihofer, *Vielfachkrise und Geschlecht – Überlegungen zu einigen gesellschaftstheoretischen Herausforderungen*, in: Hildegard Nickel / Andreas Heilmann (eds.), *Krise, Kritik, Allianzen. Arbeits- und geschlechtersoziologische Perspektiven*, Weinheim 2013, pp. 30–48, pp. 31 et seq.

<sup>65</sup> Michal Quinlan / Claire Mayhew / Philip Bohle, *The Global Expansion of Precarious Employment, Work Disorganization, and Consequences for Occupational Health: a review of recent research*, in: *International journal of health services*, 31 (2001), 2, pp. 335–414.

<sup>66</sup> Sara Farris, *Femotionalism and the ‘Regular’ Army of Labor Called Migrant Women*, in: *History of the Present*, 2 (2012), 2, pp. 184–199; Johanna Neuhauser, *Die Dauerkrise migrantischer Arbeit. Eine gendertheoretische Analyse von Krisenwahrnehmungen lateinamerikanischer Arbeitsmigrant\_innen in Spanien*, in: *Assoziation kritische Gesellschaftsforschung* (eds.), *Alltägliche Grenzziehungen. Das Konzept der imperialen Lebensweise, Externalisierung und exklusive Solidarität*, Münster 2019, pp. 186–205. The 2007/8 crisis led to an increased externalization of crisis costs to the reproductive sphere. Migrant and feminized care work is not only rendered more precarious during crises, but – as feminist work on social reproduction in particular shows – this externalization is constitutive of capitalist socialization as such: Brigitte Aulenbacher, *Reproduktionskrise, Geschlechterverhältnis und Herrschaftswandel. Von der Frage nach Krisenherden über die Gesellschaftskritik zum Problem der Allianzen*, in: Hildegard Nickel / Andreas Heilmann (eds.), *Krise, Kritik, Allianzen. Arbeits- und geschlechtersoziologische Perspektiven*, Weinheim 2013, pp. 14–29; Silvia Federici, *Aufstand aus der Küche. Reproduktionsarbeit im globalen Kapitalismus und die unvollendete feministische Revolution*, Münster 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Demirović / Maihofer, *Vielfachkrise* (see note 63).

such a debate would have to examine which concrete forms the outlined empirical observation of a ‘combined’ exploitation / devaluation of migrantized labor assumes within (and after) the crisis.

The current COVID-19 crisis has further exacerbated this problem. The permanent shortage of labor in precarious areas of work, which has become particularly apparent in the course of border closures and travel restrictions, indicates that – in line with the ‘differential inclusion’ outlined above – there will be less of a halt to migration in the future than a further differentiation of the entry, residence and employment conditions of migrants – with the effect of a permanent downgrading of the status of migrant labor, and especially of ‘newcomers,’ be they skilled workers or not.<sup>68</sup> As a consequence, since the fragmentation of labor and employment is a key cost-cutting strategy, it is likely that dynamics of precarization and informalization of work will continue to intensify, despite political lip service being paid to combating temporary employment or contract-for-work relationships. In the following, we will illustrate this using the examples of the care work sector in Austria and the meat industry in Germany.

## Care work in Austria

Studies have shown that considerable hazards are associated with health care and nursing.<sup>69</sup> Both the risk of infection and the high workload of employees must be considered. The staff shortage in hospitals and nursing homes has been acute for a long time,<sup>70</sup> but the COVID-19

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<sup>68</sup> The current debate in the EU, for example, shows this. Rather than the formulation of a consensus on migration, it is an expression of a struggle between the option of closing inner and outer borders and the need for the labor power of newly arriving migrants, especially in north-west European countries, cf. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, EU-Kommission: Mehr Arbeitsmigration gegen Fachkräftemangel, 17.4.2022, [<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/eu-eu-kommission-mehr-arbeitsmigration-gegen-fachkraeftemangel-dpa.urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-220427-99-65297>].

<sup>69</sup> Wolfgang Hien / Hubertus von Schwarzkopf, *Corona-Gefährdung im Erleben von Pflegekräften – eine explorative Studie mit Hinweisen auf erweiterte Gesundheitsschutzkonzepte*. Working Paper, Bremen 2020, [<http://www.wolfgang-hien.de/download/Pflege-2020.pdf>].

<sup>70</sup> For Germany: Jutta Mohr / Gabriele Fischer / Nora Lämmel / Tanja Höß / Karin Reiber, *Pflege im Spannungsfeld von Professionalisierung und Ökonomisierung*, in: Bundeszentrale für

crisis has exacerbated this.<sup>71</sup> A kind of vicious circle is emerging: where social needs are greatest, the burden is greatest – a situation that reveals a fundamental and long-term need for reform vis-à-vis a privatized and capitalized care economy.<sup>72</sup> There has been a tendency in care labor, not only but particularly in Austria, to fragment the workforce, with an increasing differentiation between ‘qualified’ and ‘unqualified’ (or ‘semi-skilled’) activities.<sup>73</sup> Those areas in which the share of migrants is particularly high, such as 24-hour care, are especially precarious.<sup>74</sup> Since they have officially counted as self-employed one-person businesses in Austria since 2007, the protective standards of labor law, such as a minimum wage under collective bargaining agreements, paid sick leave and union representation, do not apply to this category of workers.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, self-employment is only a pretense, as there is a high degree of dependence on private and often non-transparent placement agencies.<sup>76</sup> As demanded by the representatives of 24-hour care workers, these developments must be countered with increased regulation of the agencies and the improvement of working conditions. Moreover, the

politische Bildung (ed.), *Pflege. Praxis – Geschichte – Politik*. Bonn, pp. 203–213; for Austria: Peter Bleses / Britta Busse, *Digitalisierung der Pflegearbeit in der ambulanten Pflege: Herausforderungen und Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten guter Arbeitsqualität*, in: Peter Bleses / Britta Busse / Andreas Friemer (eds.), *Digitalisierung der Arbeit in der Langzeitpflege als Veränderungsprojekt*, Berlin / Heidelberg 2020, pp. 49–64.

<sup>71</sup> BMSGPK (ed.), *COVID-19 in Alten- und Pflegeheimen, 2020*, [[https://goeg.at/COVID-19\\_APH](https://goeg.at/COVID-19_APH)].

<sup>72</sup> Hildegard Theobald / Marta Szebehely / Maren Preuß, *Arbeitsbedingungen in der Altenpflege*, Berlin 2013.

<sup>73</sup> Brigitte Aulenbacher / Maria Dammayr, *Zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit: Zur Ganzheitlichkeit und Rationalisierung des Sorgens und der Sorgearbeit*, in: Brigitte Aulenbacher / Birgit Riegraf / Hildegard Theobald, *Sorge: Arbeit, Verhältnisse, Regime*, Baden-Baden 2014, pp. 129–146.

<sup>74</sup> Brigitte Aulenbacher / Helma Lutz / Karin Schwiter (ed.), *Gute Sorge ohne gute Arbeit? Live-in-Care in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz*. Weinheim 2021.

<sup>75</sup> Almut Bachinger, *24-Stunden-Betreuung in Österreich – Die Nutzung migrantisierter Arbeitskraft. Vorzeigemodell oder Arbeitsausbeutung?*, in: *Femina Politica*, 25 (2016), 1, pp. 39–51.

<sup>76</sup> In the care sector in Germany, too, a targeted recruitment of migrants reminiscent of the guest worker regime has been evident in recent years, as has a sectoral hierarchization within which a disproportionate share of migrant workers are to be found in particularly unpopular jobs (e. g. privatized nursing homes). For details, see Robert Pütz / Maria Kontos / Christa Larsen / Sigrid Rand / Minna-Kristiina Ruokonen-Engler, *Betriebliche Integration von Pflegefachkräften aus dem Ausland*, Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, 416 (February 2019).

transfer of workers, as salaried employees, to the public sector is demanded.<sup>77</sup> As shown by the association of Romanian and Slovakian 24-hour care workers – the so-called Interest Group of 24-hour Care Workers (IG24), founded during the pandemics –, the crisis has not only increased the vulnerability of care workers, but also their collective articulations and political organization.

## Meat processing in Germany

In other areas, too, an increase in the visibility of labor relations in the media is not synonymous with a general improvement of working and living conditions. This is true even for sectors that were at the center of public debate for weeks during the crisis. For example, the abolition of subcontracting [Werkverträge] for the slaughter and carving of meat, effective since January 1, 2021, and agreed by the German parliament as a result of mass infections in the spring and summer of 2020, is certainly a step forward.<sup>78</sup> However, it is at the same time only ‘half’ a reform, because it refers only to the core area of slaughter and carving of meat in companies with more than fifty employees. Activities such as removal of the animal from chicken coops or industrial cleaning are excluded. It should also be asked why, in sectors with comparably poor working conditions (parcel services, catering, etc.), subcontracts are allowed to continue to play a central role. With regard to the social division of labor, a result of the reform might be that women are more likely to be employed in ‘nimble’ and ‘auxiliary’ work, while men are more likely to be employed in rough-cutting and controlling activities, which tend to be considered ‘indispensable.’<sup>79</sup> A revaluation of the latter activities could correspond to a further devaluation of the former and thus further promote divisions based on gender. In addition, a new under-

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<sup>77</sup> Magdalena Miedl, 24-Stunden-Pflege: Auf die Füße stellen, laut werden, solidarisch sein, 10.08.2020, [<https://www.arbeit-wirtschaft.at/reportage-24-stunden-pflege/>].

<sup>78</sup> Gerhard Bosch / Frederic Hüttenhoff / Claudia Weinkopf, Corona-Hotspot Fleischindustrie: Das Scheitern der Selbstverpflichtung, Institut Arbeit und Qualifikation: IAQ-Report 2020–07, Duisburg-Essen. Cf. Birke, Fleischindustrie (see note 2), Grenzen (see note 3).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 272–292.



stratification can be seen in the replacement of established workers by newcomers from third countries and/or refugees.<sup>80</sup> In this vein, recruitment of Ukrainian women at the Polish-Ukrainian border by German meat processing companies in April 2022 has led to a significant public discourse about the ethical dubiousness of this undertaking.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, regulation in a sub-sector of production – as much as it is to be welcomed – can foster an intensification of pressure, and this can lead to an increased reshaping (in terms of ‘migrantization’ as well as ‘feminization’) of the upstream and downstream sectors.<sup>82</sup>

The example of meat processing in Germany shows that current labor regulations do not dissolve fragmentation policies, but often merely shift them, in conjunction with the ‘differential inclusion’ of new workers from third countries, into particularly devalued areas of work. This also shows how important it is to think about combining labor law reforms with the regulation of migration, and in particular residence law, in order to effectively combat the precarization of labor.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>80</sup> The fight against a re-stratification is also an issue in attempts at a systematic collective organization and at collective bargaining (especially in spring 2021) by trade unions and NGOs. Ibid., and Birke, *Fleischindustrie* (see note 2), pp. 45–47. A detailed discussion of industrial relations and union organizing in the meat industry is given elsewhere, cf. Serife Erol / Torsten Schulten, *Neuordnung der Arbeitsbeziehungen in der Fleischindustrie. Das Ende der ‚organisierten Verantwortungslosigkeit‘?*, in: WSI-Report, 61 (2020), [<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/226165/1/1737450135.pdf>].

<sup>81</sup> Eiken Bruhn, *Tönnies wirbt ukrainische Geflüchtete an: Aus der Not Profit schlagen*, in: *Tageszeitung*, 31.3.2022, [<https://taz.de/Toennies-wirbt-ukrainische-Gefluechtete-an/!5845384/>].

<sup>82</sup> Contrary to official statements contrasting the Austrian meat industry with “German conditions,” exploitation in this industry is also an Austrian problem. As trade union representatives have long pointed out, up to 90 percent of the workforce is not employed by the companies themselves, but by so-called temporary employment agencies. In addition, many also work as “self-employed” workers on the basis of special-order contracts and are therefore not entitled to paid vacation, unemployment benefits or statutory sick leave, cf. Veronika Bohrn Mena, *Ausbeutung in der Fleischindustrie: Der Profit steht über Tier und Mensch*, in: *Kontrast.at*, 7.7.2020, [<https://kontrast.at/fleischindustrie-schlachthoefe-arbeitsbedingungen/>].

<sup>83</sup> Both examples also show that it is not only state policy which structured the social conflicts over labor during the pandemic: the prehistory of the regulation of the meat industry also includes the massive protest of workers against their working and living conditions, actions at Romanian airports, on German asparagus fields, and wildcat strikes in meatpacking: Birke, *Coesfeld* (see note 2). Last but not least, the self-organization of workers (e. g. in the I-24 in Austria) as well as solidarity-based consultation (e. g. through *Faire Mobilität / Fair Mobility in Germany*) is the

## Migrant work and austerity politics

It is to be expected that austerity policies, which are usually implemented in the aftermath of crises, will lead to further aggravation of precarious employment in general and migrant employment in particular. Clearly this is a phenomenon which is deeply connected to the above-mentioned ‘multiple’ and ‘overlapping’ character of the crisis of capitalist reproduction: today, austerity politics is a neoliberal ‘custom,’ widely disregarded in the present, but a seemingly unavoidable feature of a future that is sharpened by the costs of ecological crisis and militarization. As for the crisis, there seems to be no ‘aftermath’ anymore. Currently, millions of people fleeing the war on Ukraine are perceived as a new sub-strata of the working classes in the center of Europe. There are demands on the part of employers and their representatives to specifically integrate Ukrainian refugees in sectors with labor shortages, such as hospitality, care work / social services or food production.<sup>84</sup> These developments reveal that the connection between migration and labor regimes and exploitation will increasingly gain in importance. And the current development shows that ‘migrantization’ might remain a central feature of industrial relations and working conditions in expanding (service) sectors of the economy of the global north.

What the examples of care work and the meat industry have in common is that, in both, a continuous demand for (migrant) labor coincides with a fragmentation of workforces. This has constituted a specific mode of labor exploitation which depends on both aspects, on the continuity of demand as well as on the ‘multiple precarity’ that affects

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starting point for today’s heated debate about the financing and working conditions of outpatient care for the elderly, e. g. Jennifer Steiner, Räume des Widerstands in der Live-in-Betreuung: Care-Arbeiter\* innen organisieren sich, in: Aulenbacher, Gute Sorge (see note 74), pp. 174–193.

<sup>84</sup> For Austria, see e. g. Der Standard, Hoffnung auf 10.000 Jobs in IT, Gastro und Sozialdiensten für ukrainische Flüchtlinge in Österreich, 4.4.2022, [<https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000134662718/hoffnung-auf-10-000-jobs-in-it-gastro-und-sozialem>]; for Germany: Bruhn, Gerangel (see note 81); cf. Julia Dahm / Nikolaus J. Kurmayer, Das große Gerangel um ukrainische Arbeitskräfte, in: Euractiv, 20.4.2022, [<https://www.euractiv.de/section/finanzen-und-wirtschaft/news/das-grosse-gerangel-um-ukrainische-arbeitskraefte/>].

work / employment and housing conditions and is characterized by a lack of access to general social entitlements and residence rights. The persistence of demand for migrant labor in these sectors is caused, on the one hand, by an increased demand for certain goods and services during the crisis and, on the other hand, by the permanent ‘fundamental economic’ need to provide certain services. What is at stake are empirical perspectives that analyze the relationship between processes of valorization, the reproduction of labor power, and what we call the ‘migrantization’ of precarious labor.

## Conclusion

Many of the conceptual issues discussed here have yet to be empirically investigated. Nevertheless, as we have argued in this paper, it is already possible to identify some tendencies that are evident in the COVID-19 crisis, such as the significantly different ways in which people without German / Austrian passports are affected by processes of overexploitation and impoverishment. Other questions, however, such as the precise significance of border closures and emergent new border regimes for the mobility and agency of migrants, have still to be explored, also given the fact that the war on Ukraine is a major event that might change and shape new border regimes in the present and the very near future. In addition, the ‘migrantization’ of precarious jobs, which we have outlined as a constitutive part of a fragmented labor policy, would have to be examined against the background of an evaluation of the longer-term consequences of the crisis.

Against this background, the present paper is to be understood first and foremost as an invitation to reflect on conceptual questions and identify desiderata. In our view, combining the perspectives of critical sociologies of labor and migration in empirical studies is a necessary step toward pointing out the blind spots of a social science that is primarily interested in the regulatory context of the nation-state; the approach we propose might help with the development of alternative

research programs. For an integrated analysis of work and migration, it seems crucial to us to consider how inequalities induced by citizenship – as highlighted in migration studies – are constitutive of a fragmenting labor policy. The aim would be to better understand how processes of workforce fragmentation and the ‘differential inclusion’ of migrants are mediated, and how both are simultaneously deployed and shaped in labor processes. We have also argued that it is necessary to look at the social processes of racialization and feminization through which workers are allocated to different positions, qualifications are constructed, and areas of activity are valorized or devalued – and, of course, how and why those tendencies are permanently contested by the struggles of (migrant) workers.

Our perspective is also linked to a political concern. Until exploitation shaped by the fragmentation of employment relations and the associated ‘migrantization’ of particularly devalued sectors is abolished, reform initiatives in the field of precarious employment will only be short-term symbolic shifts. In this context, the general recognition of a part of migrant workers as ‘essential’ remains a double-edged sword. The (limited) visibility of these workers can go hand in hand with an attribution that only this group of workers is able to perform the corresponding activities, and consequently specific – usually precarious – positions are established. In this way, discursive valorizations of migrant labor can also ultimately be part of racializing attributions, which, as experience has shown, only have a positive connotation for significant parts of the public as long as these workers quietly fulfill their role and do not make any demands for social rights and entitlements. Thus, the valorization and devaluation of migrant labor remain two sides of the same ‘othering’ construction of a special ‘migrant labor capacity,’ which supports the processes of fragmentation and segregation we have described. The assertion of social rights and claims, on the other hand, is a long, contested process in which migrant self-organization plays as important a role as trade union and anti-racist struggles. This also calls for an academic and political critique of the social division of labor

that goes beyond national borders. For only if we succeed in changing the unequal distribution of labor on a global scale and in revaluing migrantized and feminized industries will the recognition of ‘essential’ workers not fizzle out in a short burst of applause.

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**ARBEIT – BEWEGUNG – GESCHICHTE** erscheint dreimal jährlich (Januar, Mai und September) im Berliner Metropol Verlag. ISSN: 2366-2387 • Einzelheft 14 €, zzgl. Porto • Jahresabonnement (3 Hefte): 35 € (Ausland 45 €) • Ab 1. 1. 2022: 39 € (49 €) einschl. Porto • Bestellungen an den Metropol Verlag: [veitl@metropol-verlag.de](mailto:veitl@metropol-verlag.de)

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**DOI:** 10.17185/duepublico/77537

**URN:** urn:nbn:de:hbz:465-20230405-131920-7

Erschienen in: Sozial.Geschichte Online 34 (2023), S. 159-187



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