Introduction to Special Issue
Labour and Resistance Across Global Spaces

What are the patterns of labour, organisation and resistance six years after the start of a global financial crisis that throated the basis of worldwide capital accumulation? National governments of the global North have sought to shore up their positions through a combination of expansionary monetary policy, wage compression and austerity. What little momentum there initially appeared to be for international financial reforms now seems largely dissipated; instead, the crisis has been exploited in the now-typical fashion of 'disaster capitalism' (Klein, 2007), enabling renewed assaults on labour and the public sphere. Vast and dispossessed populations of the South continue to migrate in worsening conditions, by boat and on foot in the face of enormous risks, towards the borders of the former colonial centres, where they encounter violence, imprisonment, dehumanising immigration policies or years of struggle as hyper-exploited 'undocumented' labourers. Within the citadel, a prominent response to economic collapse has been renewed far-right populisms—for example in Italy, the United States and the United Kingdom—targeting those racialised populations who have managed to breach the 'fortress' (Carr, 2012) and whose essential labour is castigated as surplus even as it continues to underwrite swathes of the industrialised economies.

People and spaces in the global South, meanwhile, are juxtaposed between a celebratory narrative of progress and growth on the one hand and a re-entrenchment of lived poverty for the majority on the other. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rates have risen in several African and Asian countries—encapsulated in the narratives of 'emerging markets' and 'rising Asia'. At the same time, new patterns are emerging in which South-South trade has dramatically increased has renewed discussion of 'South-South Cooperation' as a developmentalist tool. However, these relationships continue to be built within the confines of a global capitalist economy in which sclerotic hierarchies of production, labour and value dominate. The exports of Least Developed Countries (LDC) to other Southern countries remain dominated by agricultural, fuel and mining goods (Hochstetler, 2013). James Ferguson (2006) describes Africa's participation in globalisation as 'highly selective and spatially encapsulated forms of global connection combined with widespread disconnection and exclusion'. In the spaces and places disconnected and excluded from capital flows, people struggle under the weight of mounting impoverishment and state militarisms. Extractive enclaves, demarcated by multinational corporations in collusion with local elites, remain spatially segregated and violently policed (Ferguson, 2006: 38-40). This is the new face of Fanon's colonial city.

Meanwhile, the developmental model that was widely adopted in the pre-crisis era South—cheaply producing export goods for the consumer markets of the North, and attracting multinational production sites by combining 'Third World wages with First World infrastructure', in the words of the *Financial Times* (Jacob & Waldmeir 2011)—has been shaken by the sharp drop in consumer demand and the prospect of intensifying competition between poor countries based on wage and labour repression. The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) warned last year that,

‘reverting to pre-crisis growth strategies cannot be an option. Rather, in order to adjust to what now appears to be a structural shift in the world economy, many developing and transition economies are obliged to review their development strategies that have been overly dependent on exports for growth’ (UNCTAD, 2013). Yet the prospects for a major shift in thinking on this issue appear slim in the context of a global economy increasingly staffed by an elite and mobile technocracy that migrates between sectors—job hopping from government ministry, to IMF, to Goldman Sachs or from World Bank, to INGO, to academic research centre—trained in the myopic and self-referential neoliberal economic ‘science’ (Escobar, 1995; Egypt’s technocrats).

At the centres of imperium, a process of deindustrialisation has led to increasingly service-based economies, an acceleration in the rise of prisonfare and the re-appropriation of the city and its resources (Harvey, 2012). The dismantlement of public and welfare services, perfected in the South during the 1980s debt crisis restructuring, is linked to the high rate of credit card debt among low-income groups in the North, which function both as a costly replacement safety net for workers and as an effective disciplinary tool for capital (Soederberg, 2013). In a mirroring and combined process, again, the dismantlement of universal public provision in the North reflects the individualised models that were first imposed in the South, as witnessed with the proliferation of conditional cash transfer programmes that target the poor and demand they assume individualised responsibility, thus ‘working to diminish social solidarity and cohesion’ (Lavinas, 2013: 38). The neoliberalised ethics of individual responsibility for what amounts to structural immiseration is spread from its traditional roaming ground of the formerly colonised world northwards into the working-class hinterlands of the imperial centres.

This special edition arose from a collaborative student-led conference at the University of Oxford titled, Neoliberalism and Resistance After the Crisis: Violence, the State and Labour. The articles here continue the conversations begun at the event, which emphasised more broadly the importance of ‘naming… the destructiveness and violence of neoliberal geopolitics’ in projects to ‘unify the political and the analytical in meaningful—and even audacious—ways’ (Murrey 2013: n.p.). The articles begin with the struggles, resistances and everyday lives of working people—whether they are labouring within the waged sector, the domestic sphere or prisons. These patterns of work create a precarity of labour, which can be traced as a global process. By paying close attention to these patterns within local spaces, the articles within uncover interconnected elements of the global mechanisms and processes (outsourcing, policing, labour repression) within which localised exploitation can operate.

Summary of the Issue

Jamie Woodcock’s article discusses precarious workers in London with the aim of considering the particular challenges and possibilities for resistance. By addressing the theoretical questions of precarity and its significance in post-Fordist capitalism through the theoretical innovations of the Operaismo, Woodcock draws on examples of recent struggles on university campuses—organising casual teaching staff and cleaners—to

highlight the benefits of a method inspired by the tradition of the worker's inquiry, which can combine knowledge production and a project of organisation in important ways. Looking at the experience of the cleaners' campaigns at University of London, Woodcock explores how precarity of work can be framed by drawing on Henri Lefebvre's (1968) notion of 'the right to the city'. As labour adjusts to the post-industrial terrain, in which workers become increasingly fractured and vulnerable, Woodcock explores the prospect of cross-sector solidarity within neoliberalised academic institutions. He considers the effectiveness of industrial action in rebalancing the power relations between capital and labour. The job scarcity in post-crisis North privileges the needs of capital as manufacturing remains established in the more-readily exploitable labour regimes of the South. In order for us to begin to unpack the commonalities between the socio-economic constructs which seek to divide the agricultural, industrial and post-industrial workforce, we must turn our attention to the emergent forms of worker resistance in the South. Retail markets are central to capitalist growth in the Global North, which rely on the production of goods in the manufacturing sectors in regions like the Indian subcontinent, for example, where labour is structured to ensure the availability of cheap items for consumption in the North.

The drive to lower manufacturing costs continues as investors seek growing returns on their capital and thus are preoccupied with keeping wage costs low and reducing them—often at enormous social cost to the labourers—wherever and whenever possible. The outcome of this process is the repression of union organising, particularly in key spaces of production. As Ashok Kumar explains in this issue, for the industrialising global South the shift from rural to urban and from peasant to proletariat has led to incalculable misery at the same time as it has witnessed the emergence of new forms of social and economic struggle. Traditional trade unions in the feminized garment sector have failed to make in-roads, explains Kumar, leading to contracting wages and ineffective bargaining in the sector. These shortcomings have opened up spaces for innovations in organising beyond tackling material reproduction into the spheres of social reproduction.

Since 1991, an inflow of capital and labor has resulted in a dramatic transformation of the social and economic geography of Bangalore, India, and its surrounding areas. The Garment and Textile Workers Union (GATWU) of Bangalore is a new and independent union run by former garment workers which has made significant inroads and dramatic membership gains in Bangalore's garment sector. Subcontracting factory owners and managers have, however, intensified their retaliation against member activists and organisers. Kumar analyses the structure and strategies of GATWU to suggest that their sharp deviation from traditional Indian trade unions has enabled them to make strides in a global sector that has traditionally remained impervious to union activity.

This solidarity that emerges from within the global South presents opportunities for renewed resistance elsewhere, including in Britain. Following the destruction of British labour union power by government legislative action since the 1980s, workers have struggled to make sense of the post-industrial age, marked by precarity and atomisation, in which the 'trade union' has in many areas become invisible and the tacit knowledge of broad-based worker organising is being lost. In this context, everyday resistance through individual

acts of dissent remain common, although they are countered by the disciplinary pressures of job competition.

As we know from the important work of Neil Smith, social relations impress themselves indelibly upon their environments; nature is not dominated by human beings but is *produced* on a global scale: this 'also implies the production of the meaning, concepts and consciousness of space which are inseparably linked to its physical production' (Smith 2008: 77). With the relocation of industrial forms of capital accumulation away from the North, we have witnessed the propagation of self-censoring and self-effacing attitudes among subordinated groups. Encouraged to compete among themselves for shrinking pools of work, the poor and racialised remain useful targets for a wave of unfocused anger over a housing crisis across much of Europe. Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities have absorbed much of this violence from the proto-fascist response to capital's limitation on land.

Gaja Maestri writes about the Roma in Italy who experience high levels of discrimination and segregation, including serious housing inequalities within the municipality of Rome. Following a series of violent incidents that allegedly involved Romani people in 2008, the Italian government adopted a Nomads Emergency Decree, implementing special measures in several cities, Rome among them. This decree created exceptional measures that enhanced the state's controlling powers over Roma sites and entailed the refurbishment and enlargement of regular sites in the outer periphery of the city. The Decree has been criticised by many groups for exacerbating the disempowerment of Romani communities, worsening housing segregation and heightening social tensions. Maestri's analysis illustrates one of the complex ways in which the frustrations spilled over from the global financial crisis in 2008 were transferred onto marginalised groups.

Neoliberal capitalism exploited surplus labour through a number of interrelated mechanisms, none of which have been more daunting than the rise of the prison industrial complex in the North, particularly the US. As outsourcing led to rising job scarcity in the 1990s, the policies of neoliberal governments simultaneously criminalised, controlled and incarcerated growing sections of the population, particularly poor, Black, Latino and Muslim men—and increasingly women (Alexander 2010). The building and filling of prisons, where people work for wages far below the minimum wage of the non-incarcerated, is a source of wealth for the private sector whose role in managing and profiting from prisons becomes prominent in the US and, increasingly, in a neoliberalising Europe. The prison industry is a central point of analysis as we expand the scope of labour analysis to include the various ways in which labouring bodies are included within and exploited by neoliberal capitalism.

Karen Graham explores this question in this issue through a careful analysis of the school-prison connection, exploring inmates' experiences of school using data from more than 200 interviews. Narratives from these accounts vividly bring to life the exclusionary practices that characterise prisoners' memories and experiences of schooling. Graham explores the features and changes of the modern educational superstructure: increased surveillance and restrictions and the introduction to physical spaces of isolation and the segregation from peers. Many prisoners view their prison lives as an extension of their prior institutional experiences. This unique

schooling, typified by negative labelling, segregation, isolation and restriction of immediate and future opportunities, is potentially the ideal preparation for a future as a prisoner: a role that for many was publicly predicted by teaching staff, explains Graham. Graham's analysis provides an important counter-narrative to the calls to increase sentence limits to lower crime rates by showing that the roots of an enormous prison population go much deeper. Instead, her analysis reveals that men's educational experiences in US public schools—rather than socialising men to be hard working, prompt, honest or fair (behaviours traditionally instilled in public education to produce the labourers necessary for factory or office work)—seems to be preparing them for life as an inmate. In this paradigm, resisting criminalisation must begin in reorienting public education.

By reading the industrial and post-industrial side-by-side, we can make significant links between varying forms of resistance being formulated against an interlinked globalised capitalism. This issue seeks to unpack the multiple repressions forced upon working people and their institutions by capital in order to maximise output. We argue that this approach takes a bold step in positioning thoroughly researched scholarship from different sides of the North-South divide: juxtaposing the office custodian and the garment factory; gentrification and the modern prison; state-led repression enabled by transnational corporations and the emerging forms of anti-capitalist resistance.

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