Leah Vosko, Martha MacDonald and Iain Campbell (eds) (2009) ***Gender and the Contours of Precarious Employment***, Routledge, London and New York, IAFFE Advances in Feminist Economics series, 296 pp., Paperback, $71.00

For both its empirical and its theoretical content, this book is an essential addition to the libraries of scholars of gender, of work/life balance, and of what the editors prefer to call 'precariousness in employment' (p. 1). Originating in workshop contributions to the Comparative Perspectives component of the Toronto-based Gender and Work Database (www.genderwork.ca), the book consists of eleven country case study chapters, followed by four chapters providing multidisciplinary theorisations of some spatial, longitudinal and sectoral dimensions of gendered work insecurity.

In the introductory conceptual chapter (pp. 1–25), the editors define the book's coordinating theme as the relationship between precariousness and the security provided by the standard employment relationship (SER). Both security and its absence are '... established through a diffuse set of institutional constraints, comprising systems such as labour law and policy, social security, family policy, taxation and employment policy' (p. 10). The editors argue that precariousness extends beyond job tenure and income to include limited social benefits and entitlements, and high risks of ill-health (p. 2). It has at least four facets:

- Temporal (limited duration or high termination risk);
- Social (lack of rights and protections through industrial instruments, legislation, or custom and practice);
- Economic (income close to the poverty line; limited social security access); and
- Work-organisational/industrial (lack of control over working conditions, work intensity and wages).

The problem for women is that the SER and its protections are androcentric, being based on an 'ideal worker' with 'ample opportunities for leisure', 'freed of caring responsibilities and readily available for the employer to use in flexible schedules and overtime' (p. 11). The SER is currently 'in the throes of fundamental changes', resulting on the one hand from neoliberal economic pressures for labour market and welfare state restructuring, and on the other from social pressures for a new gender regime based on 'shared work, valued care' (Appelbaum 2002, cited on p. 12). In various countries, struggles continue over whether a new, secure, non-gendered employment standard is achievable, or whether we will see a continuation of flexible concessions to the old SER, all involving varying degrees of precariousness. The country cases thus address historical and institutional issues that shape and elaborate both patterns of precarious employment, and current responses to it.

The concept of *précarité* is traced by Gagnani and Letablier (pp. 143–158) to the term *précarité de l'emploi*, first used in the 1970s, when fixed-term contracts

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(*contrats à durée determiné*, CDD) emerged to complement standard ongoing contracts (*contrats à durée indeterminé,* CDI*)* (p. 143). France is one of several countries in the book in which temporary employment is the dominant model of insecurity, and the policy debate hinges on whether temporary jobs provide a stepping stone into work with 'permanent' or ongoing tenure. The key issue is the insider/outsider gap, with many young people trapped in low-quality jobs outside mainstream protection. In January 2008, a French national agreement on labour market 'modernisation', signed by employer organisations and most union federations, retained a commitment to indefinite employment as the 'normal and general form of the labour contract' but exchanged easier termination, particularly of probationary employees, for a youth allowance paid from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (p. 155).

Similarly in Spain, MacInnes (pp. 159–176) argues that temporary employment has been used as the chief labour market adjustment mechanism facilitating Spanish integration into the European Union. Temporary contracts in Spain, however, take the very precarious form of short term or intermittent work, based on involuntary short hours. In 2006–07, 32 per cent of men and 43 per cent of women in the Spanish labour market were precariously employed, mainly on temporary contracts, with half of such contracts being of less than three months' duration (p. 165). Precarious employment was running at 70 per cent among migrant workers who had been in Spain for less than five years (p. 166). MacInnes suggests that any solution must start, as in France, with greater insider/outsider solidarity.

Temporary employment is also a dominant form of precariousness in Canada (Vosko and Clark, pp. 26–42). Focusing on workers aged 25–44, these authors demonstrate the role of neoliberal social policies in the feminisation of both temporary and part time employment in this age group. Vosko and Clark argue that to define departures from full time ongoing employment simply as 'non-standard employment' is to miss the role of the SER in shaping familial forms, household obligations, government policies and programs and union policies (p. 27). In 2007, 56 per cent of fixed term jobs were held by women, with part time work and self employment being over 70 per cent female (pp. 31–32). As an instance of the impact of government policies on the quality of non-standard work, the authors note that the 1996 shift from unemployment insurance (UI) to employment insurance (EI) made it harder for people working fewer than 35 hours a week to gain access to unemployment, maternity and paternity benefits (p. 33–35). The authors link the gendering of poor quality part time work to the dearth, outside Québec, of affordable quality child care places, with availability running at 20 per cent of children aged under 5. Privatised places are accessed through a tax credit system and cost containment pressures contribute to the precarity of child care workers (pp. 35–37).

It is clear that precarity involves more than limited job duration. In the United States, Carré and Heintz (pp. 43–59) point out that even so-called standard employment may be precarious in terms of pay and security. Further, they identify '… a mosaic of arrangements and pockets' of precarious employment, and note a further layer of 'underground employment' of unknown extent (p. 43).

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Precarious jobs are concentrated among women with caring responsibilities, Hispanic, Afro-American and non-citizen workers, with temporary work and involuntary part time contracts the predominant forms (p. 49). Only 17 per cent of workers in temporary employment are covered by any kind of employer-provided health benefit, compared with 72 per cent of full time workers in long term employment (p. 52). Dependent contracting and multiple part time job holding are significant issues in the US.

In addition to the duration of tenure, a second temporal element of jobs — their extensiveness in terms of number of paid working hours per week — is a crucial temporal determinant of security or precarity. Part time jobs tend to be heavily gendered, because they provide the main alternative to male breadwinner hours that are incompatible with care responsibilities. A number of the book's chapters grapple with the issue of whether part time work is necessarily precarious, or whether it can be integrated into the mainstream of social protection (p. 15). At one end of the spectrum, Australia and Japan provide examples of poor quality part time jobs. Writing on Australia, Campbell, Whitehouse and Baxter (pp. 60–75) note that the inability of the SER to cope with new family models and social risks was compounded after 1996 by neo-liberal political agendas, resulting in increasingly fragmented employment arrangements (p. 61). The dominant form of part time work in Australia is the 'casual' job, which the authors describe as a 'particularly degraded form of temporary employment' (p. 62). It offers few protections against dismissal and its loaded hourly rate provides inadequate compensation for lack of basic leave entitlements. Thus in Australia, work offering part time hours 'often stands uneasily at the edges of social protection'. The forced choice between casual part time work and long-hours full time work leads the authors to add 'working time insecurity' to the typology of precariousness.

Japanese part time work is clearly precarious. Gottfried (pp. 76–91) analyses it within the context of the 'reproductive bargain' through which a society assigns public and private responsibility for organising care and social reproduction. In Japan, parties to this bargain are dichotomised between dependent wife/mother and individual worker/citizen (p. 78). The insecurity of Japanese part time work does not lie in its temporary nature: as many as 35 per cent of female part timers in Japan have been with the same employer for five years or more. But part time jobs do not offer pay increments or career ladders (p. 81). Indirectly, Gottfried's analysis points to a hierarchy of esteem for forms of women's work in Japan, with 87 per cent of single mothers in full time work, and middle class women withdrawing from the labour market or working part time: indeed, married Japanese women's employment rates are inversely related to education level (p. 82). Despite the 1993 Part Time Labour Law, part time work remains outside regulation by equal opportunity law, by union coverage, through corporatist industrial relations negotiations, or by firm-specific skill development policies. Gottfried doubts that change is likely under neo-liberal regimes (pp. 79, 85–89).

By contrast, the European Employment Strategy, implementing policies formulated at the 2000 Lisbon Council, sets high targets for the integration

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of women into labour markets as individual worker/citizens. The issue is — on what basis? To what extent are member countries extending to women the Lisbon Council's ten criteria of job quality, which include skill and career path development, gender equality, flexibility and security? (O'Connor, pp. 94–95). In several chapters of the book, there is muted speculation that EU provisions for equal treatment of part time and fixed term work may have prompted employers to seek other, more precarious forms of flexibility. In Ireland, O'Connor notes that part time work, while under-researched, is known to employ a third of women — a figure which she links to the high cost of non-familial childcare (pp. 96–97). Whilst fixed term contracts have declined, O'Connor notes that outsourced and agency temporary jobs and black-market work have increased. Inflows of migrant labour (up to 10 per cent of the workforce in 2006), particularly from the new EU member states, resulted in an Irish Congress of Trade Unions campaign for the regulation of domestic work (pp. 97–101), overtaken by the 2008 EU Directive on Agency Workers.

The multiple facets of precarity are picked up in the concept of 'vulnerable' employment, outlined in the United Kingdom chapter (O'Reilly, MacInnes, Nazio and Roche, pp. 108–126). The UK Trades Union Congress defines vulnerable work in terms of low pay, illegal and unfair pay deductions, unsafe conditions, limited leave rights and insecurity (p. 109). Noting the high incidence of precarity suggested by the statistic that 20 per cent of UK children are living in poverty, O'Reilly et al consider the crucial issue of labour market transitions. They analyse country differences in sequences of household structures following the birth of a child. UK arrangements are 'eclectic', compared with the Spanish and Italian male breadwinner model and the Danish dual full time model. Highly qualified childless women are integrated into paid work in the standard male way, though less successfully, especially in high-skill occupations. A larger group of women are piecing together care and work in low-paid occupations with interrupted careers and pension penalties. Like the writers on Australia, O'Reilly et al argue that work-life policies focused solely on mothers have left long hours unchallenged, resulting in a modified male breadwinner model (pp. 120–123).

The German study (Weinkopf, pp. 177–193) picks up the link between very precarious work and the residual male breadwinner model. Particularly in West Germany, 'mini-jobs', differentiated from regular part time work, are widespread and increasing. In 2005 main-job mini-jobs accounted for the employment of 27.5 women for every 100 women in an insurable job, and side-job mini-jobs accounted for a further 8.8 female jobs to every 100 regular female jobs (p. 183). Developed in the 1960s to supply 'housewives' to industries suffering labour shortages, mini-jobs are exempt from tax and social insurance contributions. Although employers are required to contribute 30 per cent of the pay of each mini-job to cover health and pension insurance and a 2 per cent flat-rate tax, they still find such employment arrangements attractive, because 92 per cent of such jobs are very low paid, and it is easy to avoid paid leave obligations (pp. 181–182). Weinkopf argues that mini-jobs help perpetuate the male breadwinner family by allowing married women to avoid the tax obliga-

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tions of individual earners through income-splitting in tax returns (p. 182). As in France, fixed term contracts are on the rise in Germany, particularly in the employment of young people (pp. 186–187). Germany does not have a minimum wage, and Weinkopf suggests an equal pay floor as one way of preventing the further fragmentation of regular employment (p. 190).

Are there any cases, then, where part time work or some other arrangement is providing a non-gendered integration of paid work and care, within the mainstream of social protection? The Netherlands has been held up as a model of 'flexicurity'—labour market flexibility that averts precarity. Burri (pp. 127–142) confirms that in the Netherlands, most part time work offers standard open-ended contracts with statutory protections and social security benefits (pp. 127–8, 131–2). In addition, flexicurity legislation such as the *Act on Flexibility and Security 1999*, and amendments to working time legislation, are all designed to support gender equality by helping balance work and private/family life (pp. 128–9). The *1999 Act* ensures that end-to-end temporary contracts must be converted to ongoing employment. But, as we have seen elsewhere, poor forms of work are developing outside this framework. About 20 per cent of the workforce is now precariously employed in 'flexible' fixed-term, temporary, dependent contract or on-call jobs, with limited employment protection and reduced social security benefits (p. 127). Like German 'mini-jobs', much of this work is for less than 12 hours a week and operates under the radar of labour statisticians and regulators: women and young people are over-represented in it (p. 128).

Jonsson and Nyberg (pp. 194–225) argue that part time work in Sweden is well-regulated and not precarious. In particular, they cite the right of parents of children aged under eight to request a temporary reduction to 75 per cent of full time hours (pp. 194–5). More contentiously, they also argue that the concept of precarity should not be applied in cases where temporary and own-account jobs or multiple jobholding represent genuine choices. They thus argue that precarity is over-estimated in official statistics. On the other hand, they also argue that precarity is under-reported, because of subtle gender biases still in play. For example a woman involuntarily employed part time may suffer unrecognised pay precarity. Jonsson and Nyberg thus define precarious unemployment as lack of access to social security, and part time unemployment as lack of access to desired levels of hours and pay (p. 202). In Sweden, benefits are currently available to cover hours lost in involuntary part time work, up to a ceiling of 75 days, but this is a reduction from the former ceiling of 300 days (p. 202). Whilst men can claim full time unemployment benefit, women may be locked for years into involuntary part time work without benefits.

The final four chapters conceptualise spatial, temporal, longitudinal and regional dimensions of gendered precarious employment. The authors in these chapters seek to clarify research issues and improve policy responses. MacDonald (pp. 211–225) comments on ongoing regional disparities, for example in Italy, Germany, UK and Canada, in the incidence and impacts of precarity, despite some national convergence in approaches to addressing it (p. 214). Noting that precarity is higher in high unemployment regions, she

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argues that it needs to be addressed as a labour market issue, not simply as an issue of job quality. There may be regional differences in the mix of forms of non-standard employment, with permanent part time work less available and less attractive in rural settings than seasonal work (pp. 216–7). There may be intra-urban differences as well — for example, temporary agencies may target surplus labour in inner cities (p. 219). Women's immobility, and the mobility of migrant labour, may also be affected by policies ranging from housing and transport to child care. Thus MacDonald argues for disaggregated study of precarious employment types. Fuller (pp. 226–239) argues the importance of longitudinal studies for clarifying the impact of precarity on lifecourse trajectories. Individual trajectories are embedded in the social institutions that open and close career pathways. She expands the 'precarious work: bridge or trap?' debate by suggesting an analytical methodology of causal sequencing.

Clement, Mathieu, Prus and Uckardesler (pp. 240–255) address a critical issue — the risk of conceptual confusions in international comparative analysis. They apply an intersectional analysis of class, gender and ethnicity, in compiling comparative statistics to create measures of dispersion, such as the gender pay gap. Finally Armstrong and Armstrong (pp. 256–270) illustrate the wide ranging issues and complex patterns of causation that can be opened up by focusing on an industry sector. For example, health care, which 'encompasses the entire range of women's work' (p. 267), can be used to contrast the treatment of women's work in medical and social models: who comes to be defined as a 'professional', who is defined as a 'support' worker; and how roles such as record-keeper and carer, paid or unpaid, are seen in the two models. They argue that the more marginal the role is seen to be, the more likely it is to be precarious (p. 260). They then show how a study of policies such as privatisation and service off-shoring can shed light on effective approaches to regulating precarity.

These glimpses of sometimes embryonic approaches to fuller theory development indicate the complexity and multidimensionality of gendered precarious work and the dangers of foreclosing on policy solutions. The main lessons are that precarious work must be disaggregated into a wide range of forms, that these forms are embedded in different institutional frameworks. Part time work can take the form of an exploited casual or mini-job, a source of bourgeois respectability, or an egalitarian entitlement to a gendered sharing of careers and care. Setting an agenda for future research, this book demonstrates that approaches to regulating precarity must address its causes and effects, not its forms, considering its causal chains through individual lifecourses and its embeddedness in broader social systems.

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