



How is workers' education responding to the rising precariousness of work? Some international and South African examples

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ABSTRACT

Consistent with the large-scale re-emergence of precarious forms of work, in recent years literature on precarious workers and their working conditions has become one of the main strands in labour studies. However, the literature on the nexus between precarious workers and workers' education is almost non-existent; and yet precarious work is probably the future of labour at least under global capitalism. In an attempt to fill the gap and make a contribution to the emerging literature on precarious workers and workers' education, the article argues that the emerging workers' education that has tended to be ignored by the literature on precarious work is beginning to respond to the fact that the workforce within South African borders has been fundamentally restructured by the current phase of capitalism. The decline of the trade union movement in South Africa in the 2000s meant that precarious workers have limited resources to advance their workers' education agenda, but interestingly non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and advice centres are gradually filling the gap by engaging with precarious workers in education that is dialogical and emancipatory. There is a similar trend in other countries, where precarious workers are also defining their educational programmes to improve their working conditions.

KEYWORDS

Workers' education; precarious workers; black women; migrant workers; organising

Introduction

Precarious work, previously known as “atypical” forms of work in the 1980s, became the typical form of work in the 1990s and the 2000s (Kenny and Webster 1998). Citing case studies of the mining and retail sectors of the South African economy in the early 1990s and during the transition to democracy, to which the labour movement contributed immensely, Bridget Kenny and Edward Webster conclude:

Flexi-work [or precarious forms of work] is being introduced at the same time as South Africa's first democratically elected government is trying to extend basic core rights and standards to large sectors of the workforce that have in the past been excluded from the core labour regulation regime. (Kenny and Webster 1998, 216)

The rise of precarious forms of work has not been accompanied by the requisite discussions and debates on how to make sure that precarious workers, who tend not to be unionised, are able to access workers' education to advance their interests and rights (Cooper 2005; Vally, Bofelo, and Treat 2013). Linda Cooper (2005) recognises that workers' education is broad and includes organised and formal programmes as well as experiential and non-formal learning. The standard conception of *workers' education* espoused by its proponents, which is endorsed in this article, is that it should be "partisan and political and should adopt a working-class view of the world; that workers should control their own education programmes; and that the purpose of such education is to empower the oppressed and transform society" (Cooper 2005, 5). Unlike other forms of education provided by the state and employers, workers' education is meant to defend and advance the rights and interests of workers and by extension their families and broader working-class communities. Workers' education in the South African context was historically an important tool used to educate workers, left-wing academics, activists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the struggle against racial capitalism and for social and economic justice. Freirean principles of popular education, which viewed workers and working-class communities as co-creators of knowledge, were adopted as the dominant approach to education within trade unions and working-class community organisations during the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1970s and 1980s (Lockett, Walters, and von Kotze 2017; Freire 2018).

During the early 1970s, black workers and activists used workers' education in the form of strikes, workshops, meetings, study circles and other cultural activities to build a labour movement which confronted racial capitalism, a racialised system that relegated black workers to migrant workers who earned low wages and lived under extremely poor conditions. Workers' education during the struggle against apartheid rested on a massive industrial working class that was spatially concentrated in specific workspaces, enabling trade unions, workers, labour support organisations (LSOs) or NGOs, student activists and academics to be educated in a manner that was dialogical to the context of workplaces and residential areas (Webster 1985).

Workers' education was lively and driven by workers, trade unions and NGOs since the 1970s. To elaborate on this point, the paper further contends that workers' education during the struggle against apartheid was, to a large extent, vibrant. It was anchored by the industrial working class that was massive and concentrated in the mines and factories – under the same roof – making it possible to conduct dynamic educational programmes. The restructuring of the economy, which was unmistakably pronounced from the 1990s, led to the decline of industrial workers, causing fragmentation of workers and the rise of insecure forms of work.

Massive retrenchments which began in the 1980s, changes in the labour process, the introduction of new technologies, privatisation, outsourcing and labour brokerage led to the fragmentation of workers into a small core of permanent workers and ever-increasing layers of precarious workers and the unemployed. Precarious workers do not have organised workers' education programmes to help them build organisations to struggle for their rights and interests. Therefore, workers' education under these conditions may have to be reimagined so that it can help precarious workers, who are the most oppressed section of workers and the most unorganised (Buhlungu 2010; Vally, Bofelo, and Treat 2013). Precarious workers are often marginalised within their workplaces, have less tenuous ties (at least in

law) than the “core of permanent workers,” and some tend to frequently move between workplaces or between being employed and unemployed. The central argument of this article is that despite the generalised failure of the unions in South Africa to organise and educate precarious workers, there are some initiatives that are showing that precarious workers can be educated dialogically to advance their social and economic rights and interests.

This atomisation and fragmentation is real in the sense that these different segments of workers tend not to interact physically and socially, and in the context of generalised unemployment, especially in South Africa, permanent workers are also increasingly precarious because new technologies are likely to replace them, or their jobs may be taken over by externalised workers. Another important point is that fragmentation is not just between the so-called precarious workers and permanent workers but is also at the level of trade union federations. The expulsion of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) in 2015, arguably the biggest union in South Africa, from COSATU, the biggest trade union federation in South Africa, and the subsequent formation of a new trade union federation called the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) in 2017, are indicators that divisions run deep, even within the ranks of organised workers and between their formations (Bezuidenhout and Tshoedi 2017; Southall and Satgar 2015; Hlatshwayo and Buhlungu 2017; Kenny 2018). The weakening of trade unions, as mentioned above, also led to the general decline of workers’ education within the trade unions.

To advance its arguments, this paper begins by examining the role of workers’ education during the struggle against apartheid. It then discusses the potential role of workers’ education as an intervention seeking to challenge the precariousness of work. This is then followed by a catalogue of examples showing how some organisations – international and locally – are using workers’ education to advance the interests and rights of precarious workers.

Historical situation of trade union formation and the role of workers’ education

On March 21 1960, the apartheid police shot at approximately 7,000 people who were protesting against the pass laws and apartheid policies in general in Sharpeville, a township in the Vaal Triangle south of Johannesburg, resulting in the death of 69 people and the injuring of 180 others (Friedman 1987). Because of the economic expansion led by the manufacturing sector that was taking place at this time, the size of the national workforce increased. This was particularly evident in the manufacturing sector where the number of workers employed increased by 63% between 1960 and 1970 (Innes 1984).

The common experience of economic hardship shared by workers whose numbers were expanded and who were increasingly consolidated in large factories laid the foundations for the rise of the labour movements in the early 1970s. According to Salim Vally, Mphutlane wa Bofelo and John Treat,

The peak of strike activity in the period was reached in 1973 when an estimated 100,000 workers participated in a series of short but widespread industrial strikes mainly in the then Natal province. In the first three months, 61,000 workers were involved in 160 strikes. (Vally, Bofelo, and Treat 2013, 473)

The Durban strikes spread to other parts of the country, leading to a rebirth of the labour movement with a shop-floor base, challenging a cheap black labour system and, later, apartheid policies in communities and in the workplace (Friedman 1987; Webster 1985).

The rise of worker militancy, according to Vally, Bofelo, and Treat (2013), led to a renewal and the resurgence of workers' education. Several LSOs which focused on promoting workers' education within the labour movement emerged with the objective of raising consciousness amongst workers and strengthening trade unions to continue struggling for better wages and improved working conditions. Formed in 1971, the Urban Training Project (UTP), which was influenced by progressive Christian ideas and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), conducted workers' education programmes leading to, among other things, the formation of trade unions like the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA), which was the largest commercial, retail, and catering union in South Africa's history up to that point (Vally, Bofelo, and Treat 2013). Various political traditions ranging from BCM to white left-wing academics and students who were influenced by student uprisings in Paris in 1968 formed different structures with broadly the same role, which was, namely, to deliver educational programmes. The purpose of these programmes was to mobilise black workers against low wages and other forms of oppression in the workplace.

Black workers gained confidence from struggles they waged in the early 1970s. Working with LSOs and progressive academics, trade unions promoted workers' education in the form of informal discussions, debates and singing in transit on trains and buses; cultural activities, such as theatre and poetry, and more structured and formal educational activities, such as meetings, study circles, strikes, workshops and night vigils, to challenge oppression and to craft a vision for an egalitarian society (Cooper 2005).

As unions became stronger, they established their own fora which ran well-thought-out non-formal education programmes. In the 1980s, there was a debate about the role of LSOs within the labour movement (Hlatshwayo 2009). Some of the leaders in the movement felt that professionals who were not accountable to structures of trade union-staffed LSOs and that this general trend was undemocratic and undesirable. The counter-argument to this position was that LSOs did not have to be subsumed under the authority of trade union leadership, and their accountability had to be understood broadly. In the context where trade unions had formal education structures, others argued that there was nothing stopping some LSOs from theorising and promoting an alternative society, for example (Walters 1988). The fact that there were debates on the role of LSOs in workers' education is one of the indicators that workers' education was dynamic and vibrant, to an extent that it also played a role in shaping the direction of the labour movement and the rebuilding of structures in the workplace and in communities where workers lived.

One of the fundamental issues not explicitly explored or discussed in the literature on workers' education in South Africa, is the fact that workers' education of the 1970s and the 1980s rested on a united industrial force of workers concentrated in specific large-scale workspaces like factories and the mines. The sheer size of this industrial workforce made it possible for it to produce workers' education characterised by vibrancy and creativity. There were also common struggles waged by workers and communities against racial capitalism, which was punctuated by a cheap black labour system – a migrant labour system based on low wages for black workers, poor living and working conditions

and a separation of black men from their family members who lived in what was called “Bantustans” or places that were designed to entrench ethnic divisions amongst black people (Wolpe 1972; Legassick 1974).

The education taking place within trade unions, which are primarily composed of permanent workers, is not geared towards supporting those employed in precarious work, for it tends to be more concerned with upward social mobility of individual permanent workers. For example, the Third Educational Conference of COSATU, held in 1991, introduced ideas pertaining to skills development, individual qualification, grading and using education for upward mobility of individual workers in the workplace. The emphasis on individual advancement became dominant, as the trade union understanding of workers’ education was increasingly shaped by the skills development discourse (Hamilton 2014). This is not to say that there was no education which sought to build unions as collectives of workers. For example, NUMSA continued to convene sessions focusing on themes such as Marxism, the sociology of trade unions and a critique of neoliberalism (Chirwa 2014).

New conditions characterised by the division of workers according to their employment or citizenship status as well as whether “foreign” workers are documented or not, together with unemployment, poverty, retrenchments and generalised de-industrialisation pose serious challenges to workers’ education. There is, however, a paucity of global and South African literature on workers’ education under conditions of precarious work (Patel 2017; Hamilton 2017). Thus, whilst the general literature on precarious work has been expanding, elucidating the various forms of precariousness, scholarship on precarious workers and workers’ education is sparse (Englert and Runciman 2019; Orr 2020; Hlatshwayo 2020a). This is despite the rise in precarious work, a trend that is likely to continue in the foreseeable future.

The potential role of education in these new circumstances

As one of the few contributions to workers’ education under conditions of precarious work, Saliem Patel (2017) reports on initiatives in the Western Cape that seek to introduce non-formal programmes of workers’ education amongst farmworkers and community health care workers. Given the feminisation of work, the majority of the participants are women and there are facilitators who co-ordinate study circles and online learning activities. Sheri Hamilton (2017) reflects on how the “Outsourcing Must Fall” (OMF) campaign had an educational impact on both precarious workers employed as cleaners, gardeners, and security guards and on activists who supported the campaign. Hamilton (2017) argues that strikes and protests against outsourcing in 2015 and 2017 can be conceptualised as educational events, and meetings, pickets, songs and demands written by workers on placards are activities which educate workers about their conditions. In addition, strikes, according to Hamilton (2017), show that many of these problems can be resolved through collective action and solidarity, rather than individual approaches that tend to undermine solidarity.

While contributions by Patel (2017) and Hamilton (2017) have helped other scholars to understand that structured workers’ education, albeit in a limited form, does take place among precarious workers, and activists and NGOs play a major role in facilitating workers’ education, there is an absence of reflection on issues and themes that should

form part of workers' education curricula for precarious workers. Another neglected area is the form that such workers' education should take. Despite weaknesses in workers' education delivered by trade unions, unions have collective agreements which grant shop stewards paid time off, enabling them to attend events related to workers' education (Cooper 2005; Forrest 2011). Precarious workers are generally not organised, and therefore tend to lack the time or structured spaces to share experiences and learn more about the need to challenge their conditions of precariousness as workers (Hlatshwayo 2018).

I have identified (2020a) several themes, such as wages, working conditions and literacy, as core issues to be included in workers' education in the context of precarious work. In addition, workshops, meetings, informal learning and social media are suggested as suitable platforms for workers' education for precarious workers who tend not to be organised. However, as argued below, workers' education needs to go beyond identifying themes and the various forms in which they can be delivered. It must be radically transformed to consider how South African capitalism has fundamentally changed the social composition of the workforce.

International scholarship has recognised that trade unions and NGOs have a crucial role to play in organising precarious workers and educating them about their rights. However, these organisations need to acknowledge that precarious workers themselves are part of the solution to their problems. This is discussed in more detail below.

Workers' education and precariousness: some international examples

As alluded to previously, since precarious workers are particularly vulnerable, as employees they need to be informed about their rights and how they are legally protected from their employers. According to Jan Theron (2014), knowledge about the rights of workers as enshrined in the Labour Law must be accompanied by organisation if workers are to realise their rights. In other words, there must be an inextricable link between workers' education and organisation, which entails bringing together precarious workers so that they can mobilise through marches, strikes, and protests to make those rights a reality. For example, Unia, the largest Swiss trade union, conducted educational events to enlighten and inform Eastern European migrant workers during the female workers' strike of 2014 at Primula, a small care company in Switzerland. One of the lessons from the strike is that established unions can educate and organise precarious workers to exercise their collective agency through workshops, publications and media (Hlatshwayo 2020b).

Founded in 2000, the Canadian-based Immigrant Workers' Centre (IWC) has been instrumental in supporting migrants and migrant workers individually and collectively. With limited funding and employees, and relying mostly on volunteers, the IWC acts as an education, advocacy and organising centre for immigrants and migrants who are precarious workers. Workshops on topics such as the history of the trade unions, labour laws in Canada and the need to build the organisational power of migrants and immigrant workers, have been organised by the IWC. Using the knowledge of workers, educators and academics, educational fliers are distributed to migrant and immigrant workers in various cities and towns. Some of the learning happens during concrete struggles like campaigns against deportation that reinforce often successful collective resistance. The work of the IWC was catalytic in the formation of two worker-led

associations, namely: the Temporary Agency Workers' Association (TAWA) and the Temporary Foreign Workers' Association (TFWA). All these organisational and educational efforts have contributed to improved working conditions and better wages for migrant and immigrant workers (Choudry, Henaway, and Shragge 2020).

The Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (IMWU), a migrant union operating in Hong Kong, was formed in 1999 to struggle for the rights of domestic workers from Indonesia. The union and its members challenge unfair termination of contracts, refusal by employers to grant legitimate leave, long hours of work, low wages and various forms of abuse. The IMWU has 9 executive committees tasked with, *inter alia*, workers' education. Non-formal education programmes target domestic workers from Indonesia working in Hong Kong who are taught about human and worker rights in Indonesia and Hong Kong. The migrant workers who participated in these programmes also learn about the history and aims of the IMWU, the conditions of migrant workers in Hong Kong, the history of Indonesian migrant workers and labour laws in Hong Kong. As soon as members have completed this three-month course and have proven that they are active members of the organisation, they are then encouraged to participate in the leadership programme of the union, English lessons, public speaking and advanced labour law and human rights courses. The next phase of training is about paralegal work and skills that help the leading members to interact with government and other stakeholders in their localities. In all these training programmes, trainees use WhatsApp, a communications platform, to communicate with union members and programme facilitators (Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants 2016).

Education programmes have not been without obstacles and challenges. According to the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants – an organisation of migrants in Asia Pacific – training materials, education programme activities and rent are covered by membership fees. The union also pays affiliation fees to other unions in the country. All these activities are costly, and the union does not have enough resources to cover the welfare of its members. Other problems include the fact that some domestic workers do not have time to participate in education programmes, because they work long hours. Sixty percent of domestic workers do not enjoy one rest day per week. Some members of the union are not allowed by employers to use cell phones. The union does not have a full-time representative who could make sure that the education programmes are able to reach out to more members. However, the educational activities have yielded positive results in that the IMWU has won 90% of the cases taken to the labour tribunal in Hong Kong. Another important victory is that domestic workers are allowed to exit contracts and sign new ones before the expiration of the original contract (Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants 2016).

Another example is the International Federation of Workers' Education Associations (IFWEA), an international association for workers' organisation, that supports the work of its affiliates located on all continents of the world. Through working with its affiliates, the IFWEA promotes face-to-face and online popular education approaches to education that seek to give precarious workers in various countries a voice (IFWEA 2019).

One of the educational programmes of the IFWEA is to support the formation of study circles that are comprised of 5 to 10 precarious workers belonging to trade unions and some not. These groups run online and face-to-face learning activities, and precarious workers are given space to design the form and content of study circles. Study circles

discuss and debate, *inter alia*, the conditions of precarious workers and how to organise these workers. Nevertheless, in Africa, Asia and South America, participants of the study circles tend to face challenges pertaining to poor Internet connectivity and electricity cut-offs, disrupting some learning activities. However, participants find creative ways to participate in study circles by using union and community centres or government facilities to access computers and the Internet (Patel 2017). The Covid-19 pandemic has provided the IFWEA with an opportunity to extend the online programme and some of its affiliates have approached the organisation to facilitate online learning for established unions and precarious workers (IFWEA 2021).

Workers' education in the context of precariousness: a South African case

Organising workers, especially precarious workers who are migrants from other African countries and black women, entails dialogically educating these workers about their interests and rights. According to Nkosinathi Zuma (2016), workers' education in the context of the work of the Casual Workers Advice Office (CWAO) is inextricably linked to organising to improve the conditions of precarious workers. Education is combined with organising and happens during meetings, legal advice sessions and the writings of popular media, such as fliers, protests and other actions. In these sessions, precarious workers and organisers educate each other about the laws, working conditions and strategies and tactics to be adopted to realise the rights and interests of precarious workers. Consistent with principles of popular education, organisers learn from workers, and vice versa.

The point here is that black female precarious workers more than likely do not have the time to participate in educational activities, such as workshops, meetings and rallies, because their time, as mentioned previously, is monopolised by travelling to or from work and by their commitments at work and at home. The conundrum is that they are in desperate need of workers' education to help them improve their working and living conditions. Organisations like the CWAO have attempted to deal with this challenge by using social media platforms to reach out to these workers. For example, the rights of female workers, such as the right to maternity leave and workers' rights, are shared by the CWAO through short videos via platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. Social media is not a panacea as the South African working class has poor access to data and connectivity, making it challenging for workers to access education.

It is worth noting that like the above-mentioned case in Canada, in 2016, the CWAO also helped form the Simunye [We are united] Workers Forum (SWF), an organisation largely dominated by precarious black female workers who have benefited educationally from the workshops, writing retreats, meetings, discussions and debates and strikes organised by the SWF and CWAO. The idea behind promoting female leaders stems from the fact that both organisations have come to the realisation that black women tend to be the majority of the workers needing assistance due to the precariousness of their working conditions (Hlatshwayo 2020a).

Together with the forming of organisations to educate and organise precarious workers, protests and strikes have been another source of education for precarious workers at universities. Following nationwide student protests against fee increments in higher education in 2015, students entered the struggle against the outsourcing of university

services that began in the 1990s. Cleaning, work done largely by black women in these universities, gardening and other services, had been generally outsourced, with workers earning low wages and having far less protection and benefits. The OMF campaign gained momentum when students and workers in universities based in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, the Western Cape and other provinces demanded an end to outsourcing the direct employment of the workers by universities. After that, workers were insourced, leading to wage agreements which exceeded 100% increases in some instances. The organising of this campaign came after many years of workers' education, dating back to the late 1990s and the 2000s. Some academics, NGOs, lawyers and the affected workers were involved in running workshops that had non-formal courses, sometimes organised with the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA, a state organ whose duty is to resolve labour disputes), on the handling of grievances in the workplace, workers' individual and organisational rights and the role of shop stewards. When the OMF took off in 2015 and 2016, outsourced workers had received much education about their rights and had been involved in several isolated campaigns against outsourcing at several universities.

As was the case with the Canadian workers mentioned earlier, protesting workers during the OMF campaign used meetings, demonstrations, strikes, songs, dance and chants to raise awareness of the rights of workers. This led to wage increases and the precarious workers becoming permanent workers (Hamilton 2017).

The examples of the CWAO, SWF and OMF show that the feminisation of work requires the organising of workers' education to respond directly to the needs of black women. This is an issue that requires further exploration by the women themselves as well as by educators and organisers. A reimagined workers' education cannot afford to ignore the social and economic burden carried by black women in the workplace and in residential areas. Demands need to be directed to the private sector that employs these workers and the state whose main mandate is to deliver education, health care, public transport and other social services that help lighten the burden on black women. NGOs and other organisations providing education ought to ensure the safety of women when they attend the workshops and arranged educational activities. Childcare and other needs of women must be factored in when designing educational activities. Women may have to meet separately to discuss these questions pertaining to their conditions of work as women. It can also be argued that it is time for men to do more listening than speaking in workshops and meetings as female workers carry most of the social and economic burden.

Concerning the educating of migrant workers and immigrant workers from other African countries, several initiatives have been launched in South Africa. COSATU, however, has been severely criticised for not recognising that the world of work has been fundamentally restructured, to the extent that precarious workers need to be organised and educated as they represent the future labour force. However, some of the COSATU affiliates and regions participated in anti-xenophobia campaigns when South Africa witnessed massive xenophobic attacks on migrants and immigrants in 2008 (Lehulere 2008). As one of the responses to the xenophobic attacks in 2009 and 2010, COSATU, NGOs and organisations of migrants and immigrants in the Western Cape ran educational workshops in search of solutions to address the xenophobia and build solidarity between the African migrants and immigrants. One of the outcomes of these workshops was the

raising of awareness of the rights and issues of workers from other African countries and the building of social and organisational relations between these individuals and the South African workers who participated in these workshops (Hlatshwayo 2019).

Similarly, COSATU's Vulnerable Workers Task Team has been holding meetings and workshops on the conditions of domestic workers, farmworkers and other precarious workers, resulting, *inter alia*, in COSATU making a submission of grievances and demands to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), a state institution that is meant to protect human and workers' rights in South Africa. After that, in 2017, COSATU staged nationwide protests and marches, highlighting the plight of precarious workers by organising marches that targeted the head office of the SAHRC, which had received countless testimonies collected at the educational workshops and meetings of female workers and other workers who had been victimised by employers. COSATU categorically stated during the march that the SAHRC had done nothing to protect the rights of many precarious workers who had made a very concrete submission to the Commission (COSATU 2017).

Besides COSATU's educational and organisational initiatives, in 2019, the West Rand Community Advice Centre (WCAC), a Gauteng-based advice centre involved in human and workers' rights education, and the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation, a University of Johannesburg-based research centre, partnered to organise workshops that brought together immigrant and migrant workers working on the farms in the North-West and Gauteng provinces. Attended by 101 participants, mostly farmworkers, domestics workers and unemployed youths, three workshops focusing on access to documentation for migrant and immigrant workers, workers' rights and the need to combat xenophobia, were held. Key issues discussed at the workshops included specific laws, such as the Constitution, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the Labour Relations Act, and the rights they grant to migrant and immigrant workers, especially female migrants. One of the key challenges highlighted by the participants of the workshops was a generalised violation of the workers' rights, poor access to education of the children of migrants and immigrant workers and challenges in accessing documentation, such as work permits and permanent residency in South Africa. An official from the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) who manages the documentation of migrants and immigrants was invited to inform the workshop participants about how to "normalise" their stay in South Africa and how to access work permits and other documents. What impact did the activity have on the targeted community? Through the workshops, the community had an opportunity to interact with and pose direct questions to the WCAC and DHA officials, and ask direct questions regarding their documentation challenges and other issues. Another positive outcome of the workshops was that participants were able to also interact with the human rights lawyers from two human rights organisations, namely: the Socio-Economic Rights Institute (SERI) and the Lawyers for Human Rights (Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) 2019).

Organisations for workers' education in the context of precariousness

The fragmentation of labour and the rise of precarious forms of work means that organisations for workers' education will be diverse and will include unions and NGOs servicing precarious workers. Like the LSOs of the early 1970s, NGOs such as Khanya

College, CWAO and the Workers' World Media Productions (WWMP) are directly involved in organising precarious workers and providing education activities for organisations of precarious workers and precarious workers in general. Since 2009, Khanya College, a Johannesburg-based NGO, has been facilitating educational workshops, meetings and protest action with and for community health care workers, one of the biggest segments of precarious workers, who are predominantly black women. All these activities led to the formation of the Gauteng Health Care Forum (GHCF) which contributed immensely to the formal recognition of community health workers (CHWs) in South Africa (Khanya College 2020).

One of the interventions made by Khanya College and the GHCF was the publication of a book titled, *Our Lives, Our Communities: Life Stories of Community Health Workers in Gauteng*. Sixteen female health workers in Gauteng who had been part of various precarious workers' education programmes of the college came together to tell their personal stories from their own perspectives – something which rarely happens in South Africa as writing tends to be dominated by the elite classes. Using a life history method, the book captures the stories of the health workers from their childhood up to the time they became activists of the GHCF. From an educational perspective, through the process of writing the book the women learnt how to construct their life histories in a written form to educate others about their struggles and work as activists. What is also important about the book is that the women talk explicitly about their role as CHWs who have to serve communities in the context of government budget cuts and the generalised precariousness of work in the public sector (Khanya College and GHCF 2018).

The WWMP uses radio, Internet, newsletters, workshops, campaigns and meetings to educate “marginalised workers” or precarious workers who are farmworkers, community health care workers, call centre workers and waste pickers about their rights. In 2016, the WWMP organised a workshop, the purpose of which was to develop a strategy for organising and educating precarious workers (WWMP 2016). Concretely speaking, the Labour Advice Media and Education Centres (LAMECs) that are located in working-class townships in Cape Town, Johannesburg and East London act as labour advice centres that organise and educate vulnerable workers (WWMP 2015).

Khanyisa Education and Development Trust (KEDT) was founded in 1990 to improve access to education in rural and farming communities of Port Elizabeth, now known as Gqebeha. Vulnerable groups and workers serviced by the organisation in the Eastern Cape include farmworkers, migrant farm workers, casual farmworkers, seasonal farmworkers, rural communities and farm dwellers. The Trust helps farmworkers who face illegal evictions and whose rights as workers are violated. In addition, the Trust also works with precarious workers who live or work on the farm to improve their living and working conditions. Workshops and publications such as fliers and booklets are used to raise awareness amongst the precarious workers so that they build organisations that can challenge systematically their precarious conditions. For example, the Sundays Valley Farmworkers Forum, which is comprised of farmworkers, has been working with the Trust to build its capacity to organisationally defend farmworkers. The leadership and organisational development workshops cover topics, such as labour laws, the role of technology in farming, problems of pesticides on farms,

writing skills and workshop facilitation skills. The education programmes have been bearing fruit because the leadership of the Trust has been able to contribute to some level of unity amongst farmworkers, and the organisations of farmworkers in the area have been receiving support, solidarity and media coverage, promoting them as a vibrant organisation. However, the challenge is that like all NGOs in South Africa, the Trust is unable to reach out to many farming communities and farmworkers in the Eastern Cape. That is why capacity building facilitated by the education programme of the Trust is meant to build leadership and organisations that can organise farmworkers independently (Dada 2018).

Chris Bonner, a veteran union educator who is now involved in educating and organising precarious informal sector workers, argued that innovative and transformative education initiatives are not being found within the unions. In actual fact, in South Africa, for example, it is street vendors and waste pickers who are constantly campaigning in the sphere of local government for access to trading spaces, sale of recycled products and other issues. Bonner (2019) further explains that the educational work conducted by the South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) and Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising (WIEGO) in the form of meetings, workshops and collective bargaining sessions have strengthened advocacy for informal sector workers and waste pickers.

These aforementioned organisations, funded largely by international donors and some local agencies, were at the forefront of educating various precarious workers. However, the decline of foreign funding requires these organisations to look for local sources, such as individual donations, to fund their educational activities.

Another challenge pertains to the method of work and responding to the educational demands of precarious workers. As a response to the challenge, Saliem Patel who works as an educator for IFWEA suggested the use of information technologies and study circles. Patel narrated:

In a sense, it [self-learning] introduces and allows us to understand how solidarity can be built under current conditions where workers are working different hours and in different places, especially if you look at construction workers, and workers in the retail sector . . . They are often not in one fixed space. How we organise them in different spaces is very difficult. How do you keep them connected? How do you keep them learning . . . ? It's something that the online education can assist with. (Patel, personal communication, November 29 2016)

According to Patel, workers working for labour brokers are deployed from one place to another, and that means they are always moving around, making it extremely difficult to pin down their workplace. Promoting self-learning amongst precarious workers, noted Patel, and using new information technology may help educate the ever-mobile workers, as they can organise their own education to suit their conditions. In addition, study circles run by workers themselves with topics selected by a group of five to seven workers living in the same geographic area may help respond to the challenges of workers who are dispersed. Patel's proposal will require support by NGOs and trade unions as they can work with community centres and local activists to organise access to the Internet and study materials for study circles.

Conclusion

In concluding the task for workers' education, and indirectly echoing the sentiments expressed by Bonner (2019), Michael Koen et al. assert:

If WE (workers education) is to have the transformative impact intended and identified in its historical practice and contemporary interpretation, it simply has to overcome the traditional barriers to worker organisation, that is, to organise the unorganised, wherever they may be. (Koen et al. 2018, 13)

This article has contended that changes in the social composition of the workforce in South Africa have compelled some NGOs to focus on responding to the educational needs of precarious workers. A new form of workers' education driven by precarious workers and NGOs is emerging as the traditional trade unions are weakened and disintegrating. There is a realisation that it is difficult to conduct workers' education in the context where precarious workers are generally not unionised and therefore have no resources and formal structure to run their educational programmes. Despite all these difficulties and the weaknesses of trade unions, some NGOs and precarious workers have crafted workers' education seeking to respond to the conditions of precariousness of work by organising transformative, non-formal education programmes that tend to be ignored by mainstream scholarship on education and precarious work.

The weakening and fragmentation of the unions and their inability to focus on educating and organising precarious workers necessitates that NGOs be involved in workers' education programmes targeting black women, migrants from other African countries and other precarious workers. Although access to the activities of these NGOs is not generalised due to limited resources, it can be asserted that a new form of workers' education is emerging outside the traditional union space. This is evident in the education work of CWAO, Khanya College and the WWMP, for example, who have been combining organising with workers education, and in the process of campaigning, organisations of precarious workers have been formed (Hlatshwayo 2019). Another issue raised by the paper is that trade unions in South Africa can learn from Unia, a union that integrates the organising and education of precarious workers on a daily basis.

To close, this article has made a valuable contribution to the scant literature that exists on precarious work and workers' education in South Africa by identifying key themes, issues and platforms that can be used to advance workers' education in the context of precarious work. However, future research will need to investigate how precariousness with its long hours and very limited space for activities beyond work (sometimes individuals have more than one precarious job) and its absorption by basic issues of survival hinders workers' education (Hlatshwayo 2018). Furthermore, there is the need to investigate forms of workers' education that help unite precarious workers and permanent workers who tend to be unionised. This is precisely because in the context of technological changes and work, restructuring permanent workers also face precariousness in the form of retrenchments and the lowering of labour standards.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

National Research Foundation (South Africa) and the International Center for Development and Decent Work (Germany) funded the research leading to the production of this article.

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