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JIR 2010 52: 11

DOI: 10.1177/0022185609353981

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Journal of Industrial Relations

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SAGE Publications Ltd,

Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC

ISSN 0022-1856, 52(1) 11-25

[DOI: 10.1177/0022185609353981]

Framing Globalization and Work: A Research Agenda

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Abstract: Drawing on vignettes of the contested nature of change at work in a context of globalization, this article presents four contending narratives of this relationship. It argues that such frames open up or close down the possibility for actors to envisage the evolution of work and employment. The first two (overdetermined convergence and the crisis of capitalism) limit our understanding of important features of the processes underway. A third (balancing the economic and the social) opens up more space for varied outcomes and social choices, but is faulted for its problematical assumptions about social engineering and institutional trade-offs. A fourth frame focused on actor capacity and power offers the most interesting analytical avenues for the development of research. Four consequences are envisaged for the development of a research agenda: first, a focus on four types of fault line of deep societal change (internationalization of economic relations, the reorganization of production, the gender contract and decent, socially useful and healthy work) and the intersections of these fault lines; second, identifying and tracking the articulations and hierarchies between sources and sites of social regulation; third, studying the decline and revitalization of existing actors and the emergence of new actors and their capacities and power; finally, making research on work and employment matter through values, a proximity to social actors and a normative dialogue with change.

Keywords: *actor capacity and power; globalization; industrial relations research; work and employment; narrative frames; social regulation*

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Introduction

Take 1: It could be in any country – Spain or Belgium relative to Eastern Europe, Australia relative to the Asian Tigers, Canada relative to Mexico, Mexico relative to Guatemala or China, or even China relative to Vietnam and Bangladesh. At the demand of their employer to be more competitive, a group of workers accepts to change work rules in return for a promise or a hope of investment to secure the future of their jobs.

Take 2: A global running shoe manufacturer faces virulent criticisms of the working conditions in one of its production sites in southern China. The vice-president of this firm insists that it does not have any employees in southern China. The thousands of workers who assemble these running shoes – typically young women between the ages of 16 and 24 – are in fact employees of Korean and Taiwanese intermediary firms. The global company nonetheless faces increasing pressures on its brand from consumer lobbies in countries of the North to allow for independent monitoring of its supply chain and investigation of so-called shadow factories that escape internal monitoring. With the support of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), emerging civil society groups in China engaged in this monitoring exert some influence on the working conditions in these factories. The migrant labourers working in these factories face arbitrary management practice and chronic insecurity. It is an opportunity to be endured – because they can earn so much more than they might otherwise obtain in the informal sector – in the hope of improving their life chances when (and if) they return to their villages (see for example Ngai, 2005).

Take 3: The Government of British Columbia, a province in Canada, is keen to cut health care costs through outsourcing ancillary services such as cleaning and catering to multinational contracting firms. The affected workers reluctantly accept dramatic cuts in wages and benefits and the elimination of choice in scheduling to maintain their jobs. The lives of these workers – all women – are literally shattered by these changes, particularly the inability to manage the time constraints between home and work in their newly marketized workplaces (for a full account, see Stinson et al., 2005). Their health is likely to suffer dramatically, as is their life expectancy. The social policy framework does little to address the effects of this transformation. The same tale may be told, but in more dramatic fashion again, about public sector experiences in Latin America or Africa where state finances are altogether more fragile and the multiplier effects of exclusion from decent jobs in the formal sector all the more devastating.

Take 4: In various mines in Australia, workers are invited to opt for individual contracts rather than union representation (see Ellem, 2006; Peetz, 2006). This reflected changed government labour legislation to enable this type of decollectivizing exercise. Workers nonetheless maintained union contracts at some sites and rejected individual contracts at others, not least because of the solidarity on the part of the affected workers and their union as well

as community and international support in opposition to this assault on their rights. These same ingredients eventually led to a larger national campaign on fairness at work that contributed to the defeat of this government in federal elections in 2007.

An incredible transformation is underway: hundreds of millions of workers in the economies of the South are being integrated into a global labour market and this engenders contradictory effects. At least until the Global Financial Crisis of 2008–9, employment grew but so too did inequality, in both South and North. There is a growing sense of worker insecurity, particularly among workers in the North who see jobs moving offshore, and who seem compelled to offer greater flexibility at work, while not necessarily being supported in these transitions by active social and labour market policies, and seeing their share of national income decline (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2007).

Globalization offers fantastic opportunities to increase living standards, access new technologies that can improve the quality of people's lives, and enhance communications between peoples and cultures. Yet economic and social dislocation means that these trends are riddled with contradictions. Institutions created to protect job quality and employment across the globe seem to be weakened. However, the precise effects are more equivocal because contention over job control, international competitiveness and labour flexibility and the mobilization of power by different actors change outcomes. There is a lack of common narratives that frame what is happening and the possibility to affect that change.

The strength of the common narrative is as a short-form explanation about what is happening and why. When translated into public discourse, it plays a critical role as to whether actors feel empowered or powerless. It is a question of both heuristics and social power to develop alternatives. We therefore present four contending narratives about globalization and work, and then explore their implications for research on work and employment.

Framing Globalization and Work

Over-determined Convergence

Undoubtedly the most prevalent representation of globalization and work is one of overdetermined convergence in which exogenous forces compel common sets of adaptations. Firms follow similar flexibilization strategies. Labour protection inevitably runs counter to market imperatives. Institutions must be scaled back to 'level the playing field'. Some workers will emerge as 'winners' by dint of their association with market leaders or investment in their own skills, but many must do more for less.

This caricatured but powerful narrative lingers not far below the surface of most debates on globalization and work, exerting a tremendous 'common sense' influence on the collective imagination of actors. This frame structures

understandings about what is necessary and what is possible, often disempowering opposition and resistance. In its most neo-liberal incarnations, institutions become obstacles to economic progress; legal traditions that restrict the financial freedom of firms are an obstacle to economic growth (La Porta et al., 1998); and social protection is the result and not the cause of economic progress.

While globalization is undoubtedly wreaking havoc with a wide range of accepted custom and practice on the part of all actors at work, actor strategies and adaptations do not easily conform to this first narrative. First, faced with similar competitive exigencies, companies adopt very different strategies (Berger, 2006) and unions pursue varied patterns of accommodation (Frege and Kelly, 2004). Second, institutions seem to matter a great deal in the ways they develop the resources and capabilities of actors: economies cannot be reduced to simple expression of unit cost (Hollingsworth and Boyer, 1997; Streeck and Thelen, 2005). Third, there are significant asymmetries between North and South: the tremendous growth of some economies of the South comes at a social cost (Harney, 2008). As an ode to the productive potential of such overdetermined convergence as well as a trenchant illustration of the contradictions of this model, Lichtenstein (2009: 259) concludes that the Wal-Mart model's 'relentless growth and Darwinian competitiveness have created a world that is increasingly inhospitable to their own success and to the well-being of countless people who make, sell, or buy products that line their shelves'.

There are many pressures toward convergence in the workplace, sometimes between global regions, often within them (Krings, 2009; Sklair, 2001). Yet the results are uneven, often contradictory, contended and seemingly dependent on many other factors than an impulse to the lowest (or even the highest) common denominator (Lévesque and Murray, forthcoming).

Crisis of Capitalism

For a contrasting narrative, these same trends towards global convergence represent a new phase in the long march of capitalism. This is characterized by its systemic tendency to generate crises because of ever greater capital intensity, the need to counteract the falling rate of profit, and the resulting conflicts between the possessed and the dispossessed. The long period of restructuring over the decades since the mid-1970s has led to a significant internationalization of capital and, with the fall of the former socialist economies or their transformation into capitalist economies in all but name, the triumphant integration of far flung markets across the globe into a single global capitalist system. This translates into formidable contradictions and strategic opportunities as an 'expanding transnational proletariat is the alter ego' of the transnational capitalist class (Robinson and Harris, 2000).

This narrative has generated a wide variety of stimulating contributions to our understanding of work and employment (Faux, 2006; Moody, 1997; Panitch, 2008; Panitch and Leys, 2000; Silver, 2003). Its epistemological focus on tensions and contradictions, its sensitivity to the dialectics of social change

and its attention to the vocabularies of emancipation offer rich seams to explore change at work. Where some might see high-performance workplaces, this narrative points us to issues of conflict, power and sustainability. Where some might see rising living standards in the South, this frame looks to continuing inequalities of development and the subordinated integration of the developing economies into the world economic system.

The fundamental critique of this narrative relates to an ontology that subordinates trajectories of historical change to preordained or universal laws of social development. For many (see for example Edwards, 1986: 96), the directionality of this type of account and the omniscience of crisis leaves little space for agency in relation to inevitable structural overdetermination. Such an account also leaves almost no space for the need for cooperation and the interdependence of power in the labour–capital relationship. Quite mechanistic interpretations can then abound, fuelling the most caricatured portrayals of this account of globalization and work that inhabit the mainstream industrial relations scholarship.

Balancing the Social and the Economic

In contrast to the vision of globalization as a homogenizing juggernaut, a third narrative opens up the possibility of more varied outcomes and social choices. It supposes that social justice is a necessary condition for achieving economic efficiency. The key challenge for most societies is to find the right balance between economic and social performance in promoting ‘best’ practices that enhance human capital and partnership at work. The ‘social’ thus becomes an essential ingredient for productivity and competitiveness.

Notably inspired by third-way social democracy, institutional design – often top-down – is primarily concerned with the search for appropriate social policies that offer functional trade-offs between greater flexibility at work and sufficient social protections. Partnership at work is also an essential part of the recipe for balancing the economic and the social. In emphasizing societal choices and institutional adaptations, this narrative makes space for agency. It is then possible to envisage the transition to a knowledge economy and high-performance work systems, underpinned by social programmes such as access to health care, education from an early age and vocational training and upskilling.

This narrative frame also encounters significant obstacles. First, while researchers are able to identify key principles for more productive and satisfying jobs, these principles run into acute social obstacles from all of the actors at work and suffer major problems of sustainability (Bélanger et al., 2002; Edwards et al., 2002; Godard, 2004; Heckscher and Adler, 2006). Second, there continues to be a significant disconnect between contemporary workplaces and the institutions and public policies created for a previous world of work. This is especially the case for precarious work but also for many new sectors of the economy where traditional forms of collective representation are either

absent or do not appear to provide a good fit (Marchington et al., 2005; Stone, 2004; Vallée, 2005). Third, this is further accentuated by the changing spatial dimensions of the normative playing field and the multiplication and interpenetration of levels and spaces where regulation takes place (Moreau, 2006). International social regulation is currently very weak and not well supported by national state policies. Fourth, the actors at play must develop new capabilities and resources to construct innovative and enduring responses to the challenges of their globalized workplaces (Kristensen and Zeitlin, 2005; Lévesque and Murray, 2002), but they are often at a loss as regards the heuristics of doing so. Finally, the financialization of firms appears to weaken institutions designed to protect job quality.

In other words, while research highlights the importance of the 'social', there is clearly no easy functional equivalency between organizational efficiencies and equity. The fragmentation of production across borders, the unequal and often ill-adapted resources of the actors involved, and the erosion of traditional institutions for work and employment all highlight the nature of the challenge.

Actor Capacity and Power

The problems identified in the previous narratives open up space for framing our object in another way. Globalization is certainly exerting a profound impact on people at work as the rules, norms, institutions and spaces that affect them are being negotiated and renegotiated (Murray et al., 2000). While there is a basis for a more proactive argument about the tensions associated with this process, there is much contestation, dislocation and conflict over the distribution of risks and rewards inside and outside workplaces, in communities and in societies. Expressed in terms of 'winners' and 'losers', the exacerbation of the contradictions between the perils and the potential of globalization at work constitute a central issue for economic and social policy.

This underscores the importance of the role of institutions in mediating social stability and in developing actor and institutional capacity. If institutions are actor-centred, contested and indeterminate, it is essential to focus on actor strategies and capacities within and with regard to institutions. This approach offers some important insights.

First, there can be no easy functional equivalencies for 'good' outcomes in a global context. It is not simply a question of balancing efficiency and equity outcomes through partnership because the mechanisms and mutual understandings underlying such trade-offs are lacking and there is insufficient attention to the theoretical core of these processes. This is a substantial weakness in much of the a- and anti-theoretical contributions to the literature on jointness and partnership at work.

Second, the deep paradox of policies seeking to hybridize the economic and the social into a potent new productive blend is that these efforts run into social barriers. While social performance and economic performance are necessarily

mediated by institutions and collective actors, they are both poorly equipped to deal with the issues at play. The intractable irony of institution-building is that institutions cannot be understood independently of collective actors who are created, evolve and contend within them and for which there are not any readily predetermined outcomes. It is also clear that actors who can better assess the nature of their changing contexts and develop appropriate institutional strategies and capabilities are more likely to develop innovative and sustainable responses to the challenges of globalization (Crouch and Keune, 2005). The account therefore breaks with the notion of completely locked-in institutional trajectories within national economies.

Finally, this narrative suggests that we do not fully comprehend the dynamics at play and that there is a need for sustained comparative enquiry with a view to developing capacity for change. This account therefore opens up the possibility of agency in an age of globalization, where outcomes are indeterminate, where the rules of the game and the institutional contexts in which they are developed are not entirely clear, where innovations are contested, and where collective resources and capabilities are renewed and revitalized fostering new forms for the regulation of work and employment. A period of contested institutional and actor experimentation is likely, even necessary, from which could emerge new forms of social regulation. Drawing on this fourth narrative, critical social science can make an essential contribution to our understanding of social change.

Implications for a Research Agenda

Each of these different ways of framing globalization and work offers some degree of paradigmatic coherence. It is the fourth narrative however that offers, in my view at least, the most theoretically challenging and analytically interesting avenues for the development of our field of study. Although such a bold claim requires a more elaborate demonstration than is possible in this article, I will sketch out four avenues for the development of a research agenda.

1 Charting the Shifting Fault Lines of Deep Change

Researchers prefer to believe that they are interested in deep or transformative as opposed to surface change. All of our globalization narratives profess transformative change. Our research agenda should therefore focus on the shifting fault lines of that change and, in particular, on their intersections. Four such fault lines come to mind.

The *first* concerns the *internationalization of economic activity*. Since the end of the Second World War, with a marked acceleration from the mid-1970s, globalization is seen as the cumulative effect of the technological and institutional changes leading to increased international trade through free trade zones, the integration of new markets into the world economy, and the growth of multinational firms and foreign direct investment. In what Dicken (2003)

labels a 'global shift', the emergence of global production networks that remain nonetheless territorially embedded reconfigure relations of scale in multiple and surprising ways (Herod, 2009). As illustrated by the vignettes in the introduction to this article, actors at work are invited to think differently about their relationship to elsewhere. Both their spatial embeddedness and their links beyond determine whether, where and at what intensity they will work and how that work will change. The connectedness of different parts of the world sparks new waves of migration, be it from east to west in the European Community, from the countryside to the city as in the case of China's manufacturing and services industries, and from the South to the North in the case of 'global care chains' that ensure the care of the young and the old in the most industrialized societies.

The notion of post-Fordism suggests a *second* fault line of still indeterminate direction as regards the *reorganization of production* (Bélanger et al., 2002). First, there is the changing architecture of the workplace in terms of what will be produced within the boundaries of the firm, what happens outside those boundaries, and the links between them. This can mean who has a decent formal-sector job and who has an appalling job or, again, whether and when an appalling or a good job in a low-wage destination can produce to international standards and under what circumstances. Second, the changing design of work increasingly requires greater flexibility, increased mobilization of knowledge and self-supervision. Although workers like many aspects of this change, its promise is often not delivered or is hindered by conflicting sources of regulation. Finally, the employment relationship is increasingly traversed by contradictory but simultaneous requirements for both commitment and insecurity. This is rarely stable in the absence of: particular market niches that allow some firms to square the circle (Lewchuk and Wells, 2006); or stronger forms of institutional support, as for example in the representations of flexicurity that reduce insecurity, ensure professional mobility through skill upgrading and enhance voice through collective representation; or because of the total absence of institutional support, so that workers are committed, despite their insecurity, because of the lack of or overwhelming cost of alternatives (such is often the effect of huge informal sectors, like those of Mexico and China, that discipline employment in the formal sector).

A *third* fault line concerns the *gender contract*. Formal employment relationships in the most industrialized economies were built on a historically circumscribed gender contract or what has been labelled the male breadwinner/female care-giver model in which the majority of women were confined to caring roles. This contract is broken (Lewis, 2001) and the shifts in organizational models evoked above are further intertwined with shifts in relationships between production and social reproduction. The irony of the aspirations of women, as citizens and workers, to play a more equal role in society is that their massive entry into the formal labour force is one of the drivers of the fragilization of labour markets. Women's embeddedness in social reproduction provides a surface rationale for recasting the stability of employment relationships

and generates precariousness, especially in jobs with high concentrations of women. At the same time, in industrialized economies, especially where the institutionalization of parental leave is weak, there is a looming crisis of social reproduction as birthrates decline and national demographics tilt even further towards an aging population, sparking migration – most often women – from the Global South to tend to the young, the elderly and many in between.

A *fourth* and related fault line concerns *decent, socially productive, sustainable and healthy work*. Values about work are shifting: identity, dignity, self- and collective-realization, and balance between work and other spheres of people's lives. The development of employee skills is a source of value creation for organizations but also a key factor in personal development. In contrast to the possibility of virtuous circles of value creation, organizational commitment and self-fulfillment, the reality is often work intensification, an absence of dignity and an inability to give tangible expression to potential synergies between productivity, skill development and individual and collective rights. Fundamental human rights, minimum standards and collective labour laws reinforce expectations about attaining basic dignity and fairness at work. Yet, in the absence or the weakening of mechanisms of voice and procedural justice, there is considerable scepticism about the ability to attain such an objective for all. Increasingly, decent work will also come to entail socially productive and sustainable work.

While each of these four fault lines constitutes an object of research, it is their intersectionality that potentially offers analytical insights. Any combination of these fault lines is likely to yield more penetrating insights: understanding the reorganization of production in relation to the gender contract or vice versa; relating healthy work to the unravelling of the gender contract; linking the reorganization of production to the internationalization of economic relations; or any multiple combination thereof.

2 Connecting Changing Sources and Sites of Social Regulation

Even in the best case scenario when scholars in labour law, industrial and employment relations and human resource management expand their horizons to integrate collective and individual forms of job regulation in unionized and non-unionized settings (Edwards, 2003: 337), their analytical focus is generally confined to formal employment within fairly limited spheres of activity. The national state has traditionally been the main producer of norms and standards for employment in most industrialized societies. During the historical development of the welfare state, private interests were subordinate to public universal values, generally consecrated in state policy. Recent decades have seen a two-fold displacement: from the public or state sphere to private actors and from universal state norms to more particularized norms established by private or less institutionalized actors (Murray and Trudeau, forthcoming). Arthurs (1996) aptly labelled this 'labour law without the state'.

At the same time, the global firm increasingly organizes its production and services on an international basis, in which national boundaries are relevant

but can be leveraged, circumvented or ignored as states engage in a desperate competition to attract direct foreign investment. The global firm is subject to highly fragmented forms of social regulation, the content of which varies according to the geography of its investment strategies, the relative strength of local actors and the presence or absence of state capacity. There is certainly not a global system of social regulation affecting simultaneously all of the component parts of a global firm (Murray and Trudeau, forthcoming).

This weakening of traditional forms sparks a rethinking of the nature of social regulation. Policy and legal analysis identify an important shift in the way that, in the context of globalization, 'disaggregated' states (Slaughter, 2004) or 'decentred' states (Braithwaite and Drahos, 2000) entail a continual reweaving of the regulatory framework, thus opening up a sphere for agency and actor contention in the hybridization of public and private forms of regulation (Picciotto, 1997; Sassen, 2006). Older forms of national social regulation are poorly equipped to deal with this new reality. International social regulation will have a more substantive role to play but its nature remains to be determined. It will likely emerge from a complex interaction between multiple sites and sources of regulation: national and international political institutions; direct and indirect (hard or soft) legislative framing; the actions of trade unions and civil society groups; the direct pressure exercised by consumers preoccupied with the ethical ramifications of their decisions; and other sites and sources yet to emerge.

When the multinational firm is envisaged as a complex set of social relations, research attention should then turn to the different sources and types of regulation of those relations. Labour market social policies must take account of the interface between the household division of labour or gender contracts and the organization of the firm (on the example of care regimes, see Simonazzi, 2009). Social Europe provides an impressive example of the complexity of this new universe of social regulation with its interactions between multiple levels of governance (Marginson and Sisson, 2004); which are further complexified, in a classic conflict of sources of regulation, by the recent *Laval* and *Viking* European Court decisions favouring community-wide, liberal-market principles over national social solidarity principles.

The social regulation of work and employment in a context of globalization is clearly a work in progress. There is a need to track the contending sources of regulation in multiple ways: to identify them; to understand how they are connected and how they interact; to explore the hierarchies, tensions and even synergies between them. The fault lines of change outlined above, the displacement and weakening of existing sources of regulation and the emergence of new forms of regulation further highlight the need for a kind of nodal point methodology that starts from the analysis of the interconnections between different types and sources of regulation. Such an approach is likely to be at the methodological forefront of understanding the evolution of the social regulation of work in a context of globalization.

3 Declining, Revitalized and Emerging Social Actors

The focus on the sources and sites of regulation and their interactions opens up strategic space for collective actors of all kinds. Most researchers observing the tensions and contradictions of globalized workplace will readily conclude that firms, managers, workers, unions and governments operate under conditions of uncertainty. Decisions are contested and contestable. Mimetic processes buck up actors in their quest to keep that uncertainty (and strategic incoherence) at bay. When, as in the fourth narrative presented above, globalization is understood as a process in which actors of all types are renegotiating rules, social norms and institutions about work and employment, then our research agenda must focus on the sources of decline, revitalization and emergence of new social actors and this points to the need to understand their capacity and power.

The study of the multiple interfaces between the power of social actors and the construction and rejuvenation of institutions promises to elucidate how the development of actors, processes of regulation and institutions will enable them to contend with the changes that they are experiencing. Drawing on many insights from the social movement literature where power is interdependent and constituted from a variety of sources (see for example Fox Piven, 2008), we need to understand better how actors come to exercise power. Unions emerged as social actors by developing their power resources and institutionalizing rules, mechanisms and visions of the capital–labour relationship (Lévesque and Murray, 2009). This institutionalization routinized the mobilization of certain resources and capabilities that governed the power of the actors in play: minor variations in resources could inflect outcomes; significant variations, especially at critical moments, could alter institutional arrangements. Institutions in this sense are ‘common sense’ compromises in the power relations between social actors and their relative effectiveness was most often the result of the capacity and willingness of actors to mobilize or exercise their agency therein (Lévesque and Murray, 2009). In a context of deep change, it is the study of the capacity of these actors relative to other actors in existing and emergent sites of regulation that will provide the keys to understanding the emergence of new institutions for the social regulation of work in the context of globalization.

4 Making Work and Employment Studies Matter

With structural inequality on the rise, in both North and South, economic globalization appears to have enlarged the gulf between winners and losers in the realm of work and employment. This gap between the potential and promise of globalization accentuates pressures for a ‘fair globalisation which creates opportunities for all’ (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2004).

The discourse on fair globalization opens an important space for ethics and values with regard to social responsibility and social risks, to sustainable development, and to emancipatory projects for rights, voice and power at work.

Ethics and values are likely to be at the heart of what we might call our capacity for normative dialogue with change. It is the framing of these values and the power to express them that will shape the kind of world of work to which we aspire and the institutions that ensure its stability. For those steeped in industrial relations traditions, this methodological imperative hearkens back to many of the founding values of our field of study. A critical observation is that human beings, be they in the North or the South, can and should develop the same capacity to construct their lives at work.

The pressures for institutional change require a proximity to social actors and their problems, with an acute attention to how research is located in relationships of power (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Experimental pedagogy and learning will be essential to the construction of new forms of social regulation. Industrial relations research traditions again have real resonance in terms of connecting with social actors and looking for solutions to problems, while being attentive to broader social science theoretical traditions.

Conclusion

Different narrative frames offer analytical handles on the impact of globalization on work and employment. We have argued that a narrative focused on the potentiality of actor capacity and power offers the heuristics for social change. For researchers interested in the regulation of work and employment, this approach offers a tremendous opportunity for the renewal of interdisciplinary inquiry in ways that can sharpen theoretical acuity, social relevance and moral economy.

Although this theoretical and normative project is well underway, it would take a more developed contribution than is possible here to explore its multiple strands. The development of the project calls for clearer narrative framings. This has several implications. First, it entails focusing on the different fault lines of deep societal change and, in particular, working on the intersections of these fault lines. Second, given the proliferation and hybridization of the sources and sites of social regulation, research attention must turn to identifying and tracking them and to understanding the articulations and hierarchies between them. Third, the regulation of work and employment, whatever form it takes, requires social actors. It is the capacity and the power, the capacities and the capabilities of these actors – in their interactions – that will determine emerging forms of regulation and the shape of the institutional fields in which they will interact. That is why detailed enquiry on the decline or revitalization of existing actors and on the emergence of new actors must be at the centre of our enquiries. Finally, to borrow a phrase, if social science is to matter, values and proximity to social actors are important and researchers on work and employment can already draw on and renew rich research traditions in this respect.

Acknowledgements

Many of the ideas presented in this text were developed in collaboration with colleagues in the Interuniversity Research Centre on Globalization and Work (<http://www.crimt.org>) and its 'Building Institutions and Capabilities for Work and Employment in a Global Era: The Social Dynamics of Labour Regulation' research programme. I am deeply indebted to Jacques Bélanger, Adelle Blackett, Jean Charest, Michel Coutu, Christian Dufour, Paul Edwards, Ann Frost, Francine Jacques, Judy Fudge, Patrice Jalette, Christian Lévesque, Marie-Ange Moreau, Nicolas Roby, Gilles Trudeau, Guylaine Vallée, Pierre Verge, Charlotte Yates, and many others for their insights. Of course, they cannot be held responsible for this particular set of arguments. I would also like to thank the organizers of this special issue for the opportunity to participate in the 2009 AIRAANZ conference at the University of Newcastle.

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