Conceptualizing Global Class Formation In An Era Of Precarity

Abstract
Guy Standing's *The Precariat: A New and Dangerous Class,* establishes both a temporal and geographic link between various 'social movements' across the globe. Standing asserts that 2005's EuroMayDay protests were connected to May Day protests in Japan that same year and to 2011's Arab Spring (demonstrations in the Middle East), the Occupy Movement (demonstrations/protests in the United States), the indignados (in Spain and Portugal), and the tentifada actions (in Tel Aviv). This amalgamation of people – a floating, rudderless and potentially angry group, capable of veering to the extreme right or extreme left politically and backing populist demagoguery that plays on their fears or phobias if they were not given agency – from different countries and mostly different socio-economic backgrounds shared one thing in common: their "minimal trust relationships with capital or the state". Standing argues that these groups across the globe had the characteristics of a class-in-the-making but was not yet a class-for-itself. This paper pushes Standing's discussion of the precariat and precariat class formation further by conceptualizing global class formation in this era of precarity. We contend that the precariat has always existed as part of the structure of capitalism; that the precariat has become more prominent and observable in highly developed economies because of the growing fundamental contradiction in capitalism which activate the inherent tensions between capital and labor; and through Katznelson's concept of class formation we expose the challenges in creating a global precariat class if that is at all possible.

Keywords: precariat, class formation, globalization

Introduction

In the 'Preface' of the first edition of Guy Standing's *The Precariat: A New and Dangerous Class,* the author raises the issue of the dramatic increase in the EuroMayDay protesters between 2001 and 2005 and immediately proclaims a connection to the various 'social movements' occurring across the globe. In Standing's logic, the large numbers of EuroMayDay protesters in 2005 could be connected to the May Day protests in Japan that same year. In the 2011 edition of the book, Standing continues that line of reasoning and links the May Day protests of Europe and Japan beginning in 2005, to that of the Arab Spring (demonstrations in the Middle East) starting December 2010, the indignados (in Spain and Portugal) starting May 2011, the tentifada actions (in Tel Aviv) starting July 2011, and the Occupy Movement (demonstrations/protests in the United States) starting September 2011. These protest movements were the expression of what he calls 'globalization's child' - an amalgamation of people across the globe who were "a floating, rudderless and potentially angry [group], capable of veering to the extreme right or extreme

left politically and backing populist demagoguery that plays on their fears or phobias" if they were not given agency (Standing, [2011] 2014: p. 6).

These groups from different countries, and belonging to mostly different socio-economic backgrounds shared one thing in common – their "minimal trust relationships with capital or the state" (Standing, [2011] 2014: p. 14). Standing names them the precariat. He saw the precariat as possessing the characteristics of a class-in-the-making but not yet a class-for-itself. In Marxist terms, it was a class-in-itself but not yet for-itself. The purpose of this paper is to push Standing's discussion of the precariat and precariat class formation further by conceptualizing global class formation in this era of precarity. First, the paper will discuss the history of the idea of the precariat (although the word is a neologism the concept is not new) and the fact that the precariat has always existed as part of the structure of capitalism. Then we will illustrate how what Standing calls the precariat has become more prominent and observable in highly developed economies because of the growing fundamental contradiction in capitalism which activate the inherent tensions between capital and labor. Finally, through Katznelson's concept of class formation we will illustrate the challenges in creating a global precariat class if that is at all possible.

Lineage of the precariat

The popularity of *The Precariat: A New and Dangerous Class* has allowed the idea of the precariat to become part of the day-to-day lexicon of academics and non-academics alike. It is now firmly planted in our social psyche. Yet, this notion of the economically marginalized, disenfranchised, and thoroughly insecure denizens has its roots in the writings of Karl Marx. More specifically, it can be associated with Marx's discussion on the *absolute general law of capitalist accumulation* – increasing productivity leads to increasing labor vulnerability. He writes, "the greater the social wealth, …the greater is the industrial reserve army. …The higher the productivity of labour, the greater the pressure of the workers on the means of

employment, the more precarious therefore becomes the condition for their existence, namely the sale of their own labour-power for the increase of alien wealth, or in other words the self valorization of capital" (Marx, [1867] 1990: p. 798). Therefore, according to Marxist theory, worker insecurity is an integral feature and/or consequence of a properly functioning capitalist system.

Marx's concept of the *relative surplus population* has an even more direct and concrete connection to Standing's idea of the precariat. According to Marx ([1867] 1990), "every worker belongs to [the relative surplus population] … during the time when he is only partially employed or wholly employed" (p. 794). Marx develops four categories of his *relative surplus population*: floating, latent, stagnant, and the lumpenproletariat. Standing (2011) uses the example of the "old agers – groaners and grinners" precarian, in part, to describe the pervasiveness of worker-insecurity in the world today. But, the idea of worker-precarity in old age was also a point raised by Marx (1867] 1990: p. 794-795) in his discussion of the *floating relative surplus population* (a large percent of the working population regularly dismissed upon reaching mature adulthood) and the impact of age on the labor structure.

Marx writes, "the consumption of labour-power by capital is so rapid that the worker has already more or less completely lived himself out when he is only half-way through his life. He falls into the ranks of surplus population" (1867] 1990: 795). Marx points to the low life expectancy amongst those who have aged out of the work-force whereas Standing points to the continued exploitation of the older member of the workforce by the capitalists. Standing argues that the older working population is forced into early retirement to make way for a younger generation of workers who can be paid at a lower rate. The pensions of many of these early retirees are not enough to support retirement. Out of necessity then, they are forced to take low-wage and highly insecure jobs to support themselves. In other cases, when outright forced retirement is not

inflicted on the older working population, some are simply phased out of the *salariat.*[1] However, these older, now non-salariat workers, are still willing and able to work and of course find themselves in temporary, and mostly insecure jobs.

For Standing, the precariat is predominantly made up of temporary workers and denizens, and again there is an explicit link to Marx's *stagnant relative surplus population* and the *lumpenproletariat.* Marx's *stagnant relative surplus population* is part of the active labour army, but with extremely irregular employment. The *lumpenproletariat* – the paupers whose numbers increase in times of crisis; children and orphans of paupers who are employed during booms; and those unable to adapt to their changing circumstances) is identified by Marx as the "dead weight of the industrial reserve army". In other words, the temporary workers and denizens. However, Standing ([2011] 2014) was very clear that the *lumpenproletariat* is not what he has in mind when describing the precariat and to some extent, he is correct. In a strict Marxist interpretation, the precariat is not just the *lumpenproletariat.* The various groups that Standing discuss in his work could fall, in some way, shape, or form, into any one of Marx's three categories of the relative surplus population (inclusive of the *lumpenproletariat*). It is important to reiterate, that the phenomenon of the precariat as defined by Standing is not totally new and that Marx wrote Volume 1 of *Capital* as England was undergoing industrialization - the quintessential example of an emerging capitalist economy.

Standing ([2011] 2014) contends that there has been a major increase in the number of precarians globally. However, John Walton and Charles Ragin (1990) had already documented increasing worker precarity in the less developed regions of the world since the late 1980s. They established that International Monetary Fund-imposed structural adjustment programs (SAPs) – a result of the Washington Consensus and the

[1] The *salariat* according to Standing are those people who are *compensated for service* and are expected to be closer to managers, bosses, and owners. Conversely, *wage workers* are piece-rate and time-rate suppliers of labor who are given *money for effort* (Standing, [2011] 2014: p. 13).

pursuit of *labor-market flexibility*[2] – had created severe hardships in the less developed countries leading to "unprecedented protests in debtor countries, ranging from mass demonstrations to organized strikes and riots" (Ragin 1990). As per the authors, these SAPs impacted real-wages, and undermined social institutions put in place to buffer the negative impacts of capitalism. Walton and Ragin (1990) pointed out that SAPs meant a reduction in labor's share of national income, greater income inequality, increasing consumer prices. Furthermore, SAPs had a generally negative impact on the middle classes and bourgeoisies of these countries. In other words, SAPs created and increased precariousness in the less developed and developing world. Therefore, capitalism-derived precarity and insecurity existed and was felt on a daily basis in the Global South long before it began to manifest itself as an acute problem in the Global North.

In 1998, a full twelve years before Guy Standing's *The Precariat,* Pierre Bourdieu wrote: "It is clear that precariousness is everywhere nowadays. Precariousness profoundly affects anyone who is besieged by it; it renders their future uncertain, it denies all rational expectations, and, in particular, the minimal amount of faith and hope in the future which is needed in order to revolt, above all, collectively, against the present…"[3] (Bourdieu, 1997). The precariousness that Bourdieu is describing is "at the heart of a highly developed economy"[4] (Bourdieu, 1997) and not in the developing world. He finds that this is a new form of domination and like Walton and Ragin, assign some blame to *labor-market flexibility*. He notes, "we begin to suspect that precarity is a product, not of an economic inevitability, identified with the famous *globalization* but of a political will,"[5] which Bourdieu reasons, is linked to an institutionally accepted form

[2] Pierre Bourdieu would later name this *flexploitation* (Bourdieu, 1998).
[3] Author's translation.
[4] Author's translation.
[5] Author's translation.

of insecurity.[6] This has caused labor to fight for its survival. Thus, Bourdieu subscribes to the "race to the bottom theory."

Essentially, according to the "race to the bottom theory," capitalists seek to reduce the cost of labor by engaging in certain actions that pit workers against each other for an ever decreasing number of full time positions and ever decreasing earnings, real or potential.[7] For example, capitalists might increase temporary workers or increase part time work or even outsource certain types of gainful activity. As the total number of full time jobs decrease, workers – desperate for jobs – give in more and more to the demands of capitalists and engage in extreme competition amongst themselves for the few remaining jobs. At the root of this infighting amongst workers which ultimately also results in weaker bargaining power and even lower wages for workers, are the actions by the capitalists resolute on reducing their labour costs. In a way, labor is forced to participate in its own destruction. For Standing, globalization produces similar results which, like Bourdieu, he links to labor market flexibility. According to Standing, the socioeconomic changes that occurred in the Italian city of Prato from 1989 to 2010 – the spread of inequalities, and the undermining of the class structure underpinning that industrial society – exemplifies the ills of globalization and labor market flexibility.

Standing's concept of the global precariat is not only fairly similar to Bourdieu's but also strongly resembles Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's (2000) definition of proletariat, albeit one extended to the entire world. Hardt and Negri (2002) define proletariat as a "broad category that includes all those whose labor is directly or indirectly exploited by and subjected to capitalist norms of production and reproduction" (p. 52). They

[6] R. Jamil Jonna and John Bellamy Foster (2016) point out that Bourdieu's concept and use of the idea of precarity can actually be traced back to *Travail et Travailleurs en Algérie* (1963). I would argue, however, that Bourdieu advanced the notion that precarity exists in the industrialized/developed world in *Contre-feux* (1998).
[7] For further reading and elaboration of the *race to the bottom theory*, see: Silver ([2003] 2008: p. 3-6; p. 168-179).

also further explain in their notes that this definition is closely tied to Karl Marx's but that the proletariat should be understood not just in economic terms (à la Marx) but also as a political category (Hardt and Negri, 2002: pp. 427-428). One of the main ideas of *The Precariat* is that as globalization took hold in the 1990s, millions of people fell into some type of insecurity – job insecurity, work insecurity, skill reproduction insecurity, and/or representation insecurity. It appears that for Standing, the fact that so many of these insecure people were found in emerging and affluent economies is a new phenomenon. But again, some amount of generalized worker insecurity is an underlying structural element of capitalism.

Capital's contradiction

If, as per Marxist theory, worker insecurity is fundamental to the proper functioning of a capitalist system and precarity is the norm, then what makes this current iteration different from the past? Obviously, economies are more closely tied than they were during Marx's era.[8] That is, the scope of the capitalist system has changed. For Standing, the new-ness of today's precarity lies in the fact that the various precariat groups around the globe are somehow acting in concert with each other to resist the ills of modern day capitalism. Hence Standing's continued references to the connectedness of the various May Day protest. However, the precariat phenomenon is more than the simultaneous protests around the globe (not that they are irrelevant). It is not so much that these groups are working together and in doing so might render some kind of class consciousness unto themselves. That is debatable and will be addressed in the next section. What is significant about the phenomenon of the precariat is its simultaneous emergence as an urgent crisis for capitalists and workers in the developed and underdeveloped world. It is the sheer conspicuousness and acuteness of the precariat situation across both the Global North and Global South -

[8] Even if we were to understand globalization as a recent phenomenon or as an acceleration of connectivity between different regions of the world, this statement remains true.

cutting across time and space. The challenge then, is to try to understand why the precariat is manifesting itself in this way now.

Beverly Silver's analysis of the waves of social movements across the globe at the start of the Great Recession gives us a conceptual framework from which to work (2013). Standing's insight that globalization plays a role in the current state of the precariat is in part true. Globalization does play a significant role in high levels of worker precariousness. Silver (2013), explains that based on historical capitalism's inherent conflict with labour, capitalists have responded to any increasing power of labour by simply pursuing various strategies to "increase control at the point of production" (p. 49). In very direct terms, capital seeks to reproduce itself and increase profit; in order to increase profit, capitalists seek to reduce the costs of labour and employ various means to do so. Silver identifies four strategies with which capitalists do this: the spatial fix – relocation of capital to a cheaper geographical location such as outsourcing; the technological fix – such as the introduction of the assembly line to increase production; the product fix – such as transferring capital into new industries (for example, moving capital away from the automotive sector to the retail sector) with higher profit margins; and finally, the financial fix – such as the complete removal of capital out of trade and production and to the total reinvestment into financial products such as derivatives. Of course, each fix has been employed throughout capital's history including the financial fix. Silver discusses the various fixes in detail throughout *Forces of Labor* (2003).

A result of the combination of all these fixes has been the intensification of worker precariousness throughout the globe. However, I would argue that the most recent financial fix is the primary reason, for the intensification and visibility of exceedingly high numbers of precarians in the more developed world and emerging economies, as well as the less developed regions of the globe. Silver (2013) argues quite convincingly that previous iteration of capitalist fixes had produced a quasi-balance between capital and

labor. The spatial, technological and product fixes all weakened labour on some level but also strengthened its bargaining power.

For example, with the spatial fix, capitalists moved labour and production away from the United States to China in an effort to reduce the costs of labour. However, as demonstrated by the labour unrest in China in the mid and late 1990s, worker unrest and agitation basically followed capitalists to their new Chinese locations. This resulted in capitalist concessions to labour. With the technological fix, the introduction of the assembly line allowed capitalists to reduce the physical number of workers and decrease cost of labour and production. But, the fix itself allowed workers to directly interrupt the flow of production (for example, through sabotage) thereby increasing their bargaining power. The product fix, like the spatial fix, submits to the maxim *where labour goes, labour unrest follows*, meaning that even if labour is weakened temporarily in one sector, labour will resist in any other sector given enough time.

Still, the most recent financial fix unlike the other fixes unmade established working classes without creating any new significant ones (Silver, 2013: p. 66). Most importantly, it did not allow for any strengthening of labor power. In the late 1970s capitalists doubled-down on their attempt at weakening labour by "accumulating capital in liquid form in proliferating offshore tax havens" (Silver, 2003: p. 163) as a way of ignoring the demands of workers. Silver argues that initially the financial fix had strengthened the bargaining power of workers in the Second and Third World States (2003: p. 164) because of the loan capital flows of the early 1970s. The excess amount of petrodollars allowed capitalists in the First World to make easy and accessible loans to Second and Third World governments. These loans made rapid industrialization possible for Second and Third World countries and made it easier for governments to accommodate the demands of their workers. However, by the 1980s the United States (a major developed country) was also in the competition with the rest of the world to attract capital flows to support its

domestic tax policies (Arrighi, 2010: p. 326-328). Arrighi argues that in the 1980s because the US government cut domestic taxes and spent significant amounts of money on its Cold War campaign, it competed with everyone else (and won) for the available liquid capital. This changed the very character of the financial fix, creating deep and lasting precariousness within the advanced economies as well as the rest of the world (Arrighi, 2010).

Underlying all of this is the fundamental contradiction of historical capitalism. In order for capitalist production to progress smoothly, concessions have to be made to labor. This means that labor cannot be completely repressed. At the same time in order to maintain increasing profit margins, capitalists cannot make continued concessions to labor, at the expense of their profit margins. Capitalists can therefore find themselves torn between a crisis of legitimacy and a crisis of profitability. With precariousness on the rise, as a result of the multiple 'fixes' put in place by capitalists to decrease the bargaining power of labor, it is clear that capital now faces a crisis of legitimacy. Capitalists have squeezed the workers (increasing their profits to inordinate amounts) to the point of precarity, but now worker unrest is high. Workers will accept their exploitation by capitalists if they can afford to consume the products of their labor or earn wages above the costs of living. This was the case during the Fordist era. Today, workers are barely earning enough to support themselves and their families. Based on Silver's theoretical framework then, we can make the argument that the acute presence of the precariat amongst both the developed and the underdeveloped world was partly due to historical capitalism's current crisis of legitimacy. The precariat is a result of the inability of capitalists to successfully reduce labor cost without obliterating labor's bargaining power.

How then, can increasing worker precarity across the globe translate into class formation, which Standing believes to be a necessary transformation? Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg (1986) provide a useful

model on which to assess class formation. In their classic edited volume *Working-Class Formation*, they discuss and examine the emergence of the working-class in France, the United States, and Germany. In each case, a class emerged in a distinct way that was particular to each country. Katznelson explains, "working-class formation as a process is not identical from country to country (or [even] from place to place within countries)" (Katznelson, 1986: p. 9). This is an especially useful insight because it highlights the exceptional challenges for global class formation.

For Katznelson, one of the key objects of analysis should be the way the newly emerging class expresses their claims to their employers and to the the state. The working classes of the mid-nineteenth century in France, Germany and the United States had to make sense of and deal with a cluster of fundamental changes in the organization of production, conditions of work, community organization, and politics. This meant that each country had different responses to these changes. Therein lies the challenge with Standing's claim that the precariate is potentially a global class or global class-in-the-making. Class formation is unique in each country. While the argument can be made that Katznelson's approach is state-centric, the fact is that nation-state based differences such as varying governmental responses to social problems do exert a significant influence on class formation and therefore, must not be overlooked. Identifying groups with similar characteristics – such as some form of insecurity brought on by changes in the structure of capital – from different countries does not make them a potential global class.

Global precariat class?

The increasing precariousness within the world population and capitalism's crisis of legitimacy manifests itself through Standing's four A's – anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation which precarians constantly experience. The idea that many people in the world are experiencing all these feelings of betrayal by capitalism and undergoing severe precarity is not untrue. However, Standing's assessment that given

agency and their collective feelings of insecurity people across the globe can be aggregated into a potential global class is problematic. Standing's precariat class is such a mishmash of elements and peoples that it is hard to tell where to draw the line between say, working class and proletariat (which I would admit is a rather non-existent group), or the precariat. How do you give agency to people whom you cannot in actuality call a group because of the level of contradictions and divisions amongst them? Even Standing himself acknowledges the internal challenges by noting, "tensions within the precariat are setting people against each other, preventing them from recognizing the social and economic structure is producing their common vulnerabilities" (Standing, [2011] 2014: p. 42). Standing is certain that left to its own devices, the precariat as a global class in the making has a highly destructive potential. But in reality, the very fact that the precariat is so deeply self contradictory can reduce its latent destructive power! Uncoordinated even to the point of being a potential-class-in-itself, Standing's global precariat simply allows capitalists the time to devise a new "fix" for their crisis of legitimacy.

In order to confront Standing's claim of the global precariat as a "class-in-itself" but "not a class-for-itself," (Standing, [2011] 2014: p. 42) we begin by engaging E.P. Thompson's (1978) concept of class, which also serves as the basis of Katznelson's (1986). For Thompson, "class formation arises at the intersection of determination and self-activity" (Thompson, 1978: p. 299). This means that one cannot think of class and class consciousness as two separate concepts. You cannot even begin to think of a *class-in-the-making* without the members of the potential class self-identifying as such. Thompson's notion of class formation is at the core of Sean Wilentz's (1984) definition of 'class'.

Wilentz sees 'class' as a "dynamic social relation… determined largely by changing relations of production but shaped by cultural and political factors (including ethnicity and religion) without apparent logic of economic interest" (1984: p. 10). Wilentz's explanation of class also highlights a predicament that would be

challenging for Standing's global precariat class – the issue of linkage between cultural and political factors which must be very strong for a class to emerge. That is to say, there must be an apparent coalescing factor in addition to or in spite of economic self interest. The various groups of people that Standing refer to that up make up the precariat (old, young, unemployed, women, incarcerated, students etc.) appear only to connected by some effect of or form of economic domination. Thompson's view (at least in *The Making of the English Working Class)*, which is not necessarily unlike Wilentz's, is that classes can be made (class-in-itself) by the impact of external conditions. This means that members of the class will share a particular fate, and that this very fact will force the class to evolve to the point where it is capable of affecting history (a class-for-itself) ([1963] 1966: p. 711-832). Katznelson, in discussing Thompson's concept of class, warns that Thompson's observation is very specific to his case study – that of the English working class (Katznelson, 1986: pp. 10-11) and thus not easily generalizable.

Based on Standing's definition of precariat, many minority groups (migrants, immigrants, Blacks) in the United States, as well as many white Americans (unemployed and underemployed due to the Great Recession), would fall into the precariat group as they all suffer from the impact of the commodification of labor. One only need to look at the followers of Donald Trump's campaign for the office of the 45th President of the United States, to understand that the formation of a precariat class, based primarily on economic factors would not get very far even within the United States. Many of Trump's followers are people who have suffered by the hands of capitalist (victims of the spatial fix, for example). However, they rail against other low-wage workers and not the capitalists who took the jobs away.[9] As stated before class formation varies from country to country and even from place to place within countries.

[9] This is in no way an analysis of the "Trump phenomenon". This is a simple illustration of the challenges to coordinating class-based action amongst the precariat.

An exception to this rule, and as a response to transnationalization, has been the emergence of the Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC) as explained and analyzed by William Robinson. Robinson (2004) writes that, "by *class* I mean a group of people who share a common relationship to the process of social production and reproduction and are constituted relationally on the basis of the social power struggles" (p. 37). Robinson (2004) highlights the fact that Marx's concept of class focused on a "collective position vis-à-vis the means of production and the production process;" but also that class formation is contingent on the "mutual constitution of antagonistic classes" (p. 38). For Robinson, the TCC submits to this definition of class. Despite being in competition for cheap labor, and access to the means of production, the TCC members continue to work in concert with each other to maximize their profit. Robinson points to the increasing number of transnational corporations, cross-border mergers and acquisitions, transnationally interlocking positions within the global corporate structure, and the extraordinary growth of the strategic alliances amongst transnational corporations as strong indicators and markers of TCC member cooperation. More specifically, he writes that "an inner circle of the TCC has become increasingly organized… and seeks to secure the fundamental class interest of the TCC as a whole. At the level of agency, the TCC, is represented by its inner circle… is class conscious" (p. 48). Robinson's argument that transnational capitalists are increasingly behaving as a class-in-itself-for-itself is quite convincing as the TCC members objectively share a similar position in the economic structure but also enjoy agency that allows them to shape social processes.

The descriptive, "precariat" is an appropriate narrative for the various groups throughout the globe. It captures the zeitgeist of the late nineties and 2000's. Bourdieu (1984) noted that *naming* a group gave it political power. He was accurate when, in elucidating further on the power of *naming*, he asserted that *naming* had the capacity to bring into unambiguous existence, to make public, that is to say, to make concrete, visible, and make official, by taking what would typically fall under the purview of common

sense to create an incredible social power (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu writes, "we understand that one of the forms of elementary political power has resided, as in many archaic societies, in the quasi-magical power of *naming* and the creation of something's existence by the virtue of its naming/designation" (Bourdieu, 1984: p. 6).[10]

By naming the various groups across the globe as *the global precariat*, Standing is bringing them to life, potentially giving them political power, and bringing legitimacy to their plight. Governments across the globe can make policy directed at 'the precariat' within their borders. In Europe, for example, where the designation/label has become noteworthy, the precariat can be addressed as an entity. However, there does not appear is to be group cohesiveness across or within countries and to call it a global class-in-the-making seems to be a stretch.[11] But *naming* alone, does not a class make. Other than the economics, what could make this a cohesive class acting in its own interest and affecting the socio-political-economic landscape of their time? Standing himself acknowledges part of problem. "The precariat does not consist of people with identical backgrounds" (p. 151). But the lack of identical background has not held back other established or institutionalized 'class'-es such as the American 'working class' or 'middle class'. In fact, as Robinson (2004) implied, the ability of a group to coalesce and organize itself regardless of potentially conflicting backgrounds is what helps propel the group from a class-in-itself to a class-for-itself.

Up until now, we have examined the precariat in terms of 'a class-in-itself – for-itself' and that is in part driven by Standing's own dynamic in describing, and his analysis of, the global precariat. He writes, "the

[10] Author's translation.

[11] Social scientists have been alluding to and speculating the emergence of a single global working class (Moody 1997, Cowie 1999, Hardt and Negri 2000), but this has not yet manifested itself. Even Robinson (2004) in his discussion on the transnational capitalist class call attention to a potential global working class which he calls a global proletariat or transnational working class (pp. 42-44). He quickly states however, that this class is not a class-for-itself for "reasons bound up with the continued existence of the nation-state and uneven development" (Robinson pp. 42-43). Are we then to understand that to date, this global working class described by these authors is still languishing in this "class-in-itself" phase?

precariat is a class-in-the-making, in that the global market system wants most workers to be flexible and insecure even if it is not yet a class-for-itself, having a clear vision of what type of society it wishes to see emerge" (2012: p. 588). Katznelson notes that focusing on this formulation of class "makes thinking about links between the social organization of class, class dispositions, and collective action superfluous" (1986: p. 20). He extends Thompsons attempts at defining class as a junction term and suggests that class is concerned with the conditional, but not random, process of connection between levels of class relations – a multilayer phenomenon of theory and history. The levels of class relations are that of structure, patterns of life, dispositions, and collective action and the connections are made through all these relational levels.

Standing ([2011] 2014) rarely discusses class formation per se. *The Precariat* is highly descriptive of the current precariat phenomenon but I would argue that the work remains at the first level of analysis described by Katznelson – the level of structure. For Katznelson, that 'first level' is based on the "structure of capitalist economic development whose main elements include an economy based on privately owned autonomous firms that seek to make profit-maximizing decision. …[And] as Marx observed… capitalism is impossible without a quite specific mechanism of exploitation" (1986: p. 14). These mechanisms of exploitation, are shared by capitalists regardless of geographical location and so we can talk about workers in capitalist systems as having similar plights. "Each specific national history of capitalist development is shaped by the shared impulses and boundaries of all capitalisms; but each national economy is shaped not only by these tendencies. Family patterns, demography, cultural traditions, inherited practices… help determine the specific empirical contours of macroscopic economic development" (1986: p. 15). Katznelson warns though that remaining at this structural-level-type of analysis neglects what is happening at the second level – the lived experiences of "actual people in real social formations" (1986: p. 16) at their workplace and in their communities of residence.

Neither the first or second level of social relation is a purely economic one. The third level is that of groups of people disposed to act in 'class ways'. At this third level, we can start to talk about class formation as people come to share an understanding of the social system they live in; share values of justice and goodness; share an understanding of particular social experiences and traditions; and define themselves and their actions in relation to other groups within society. At the fourth relational level of class relations, these groups organize and act through organizations that affect both their position within society and society as a whole. In other words, we can talk about class formation when these groups begin to take class-based collective action. However, we must keep in mind that Katznelson's view, class formation happens only when all these levels of social interactions and relations are active.

This is a fairly high-bar for class formation but is probably the most apt. This framework includes an appropriate amount of fuzzy-ness and structure-ness. As Katznelson (1986) himself notes, "the scheme of four levels of class does not imply a series of necessary stages or a natural progression (after all, ways of life are not independent of thought or action)" (p. 17). This four-level approach gives us the appropriate tool to to properly evaluate how, when, and where class formation is occurring. Still, it also highlights just how difficult it is for class formation to occur at the national level, let alone on a global scale. Standing's concept of the global precariat class is what I would describe in French as a 'concept flou' in every sense of the expression (fuzzy, vague, hard to pin down). What Standing gets right is that in each of these countries, the group he calls the precariat is unstable. It has the potential to force radical and dramatic change either to the left or to the right of the political spectrum.

Future Research Trajectories

The above discussion highlights that it is not so much the right-ness or wrong-ness of the concept of the precariat or whether or not we have a "global precariat class" but rather, that there is a need for further in-

depth research into the precariat as a 'proper' class in specific countries. Moreover, it is more likely that cogent arguments can be made for precariat class formation at the nation state level despite the fact that we live in a more "globalized" world. In 1973, Samuel Huntington argued that the ever increasing number of transnational corporations and the growing integrated-ness of nation-states would eventually force a reaction by organized labor – that of global unions. Several decades later, while a Transnational Capitalist Class (as explained by Robinson (1996, 2004)) has emerged, there has been no transition to an organized global working class with global unions.

Instead, we have seen efforts stymied not only by rising nationalist movements pursuing their own interests but also a widening of the Global North-South divide amongst the working class based on the confused perception that their interests are dissimilar. Furthermore, contrary to Standing's (2012) new internationalism necessary to combat globalization's ills, continuing immigration of political asylum seekers, refugees and others in search of economic freedom, from the Global South have been meet with xenophobic nationalist movements in the Global North. Chase-Dunn and Lio (2010) lament that "the socialist and communist claims that the working class would be the agent of the transformation of capitalism to a more cooperative and humane social logic has fallen on hard times…" And, ultimately they are right when they pronounce that the global labor movement has entirely failed to gain real traction and power across the globe (Chase-Dunn and Lio 2010). Still, despite living in a heavily integrated world, there is a lot to be said for in-depth research studies of the precariat within the nation-state framework.

A call for further research on precarity and the precarious from a nation-state perspective does not mean that there is a dearth in the literature on precarity. For example, there has been advanced contributions to the literature on how to define and measure precarity (Budowski et al, 2008; Paugam, 1996, 2005; Whelan and Maitre, 2005(a)), on the relationship of different social groups to precarity (Whelan and Maitre, 2005(b),

2006), and how that relates to the type of governmental structure present in the countries (Whelan and Maitre, 2010, Paugam and Russell, 2003). However, there is a paucity in the literature on country-specific precariat class formation which, in the end can benefit from the contributions by the aforementioned authors.

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