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Industrial Labor on the Margins of Capitalism: Precarity, Class, and the Neoliberal Subject

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Over the last 50 years, we have witnessed drastic, pervasive neoliberal political and economic changes affecting people's lives globally. The increasing competition has restructured economic activities, and the manufacturing industry has largely moved to the "Global South" and to postsocialist societies, where labor is cheaper. Nation-states are pushing structural changes, eradicating public services and social welfare, as well as increasing privatization and deregulation. Neoliberal legislations deepened previous inequalities, moved social responsibility from the state to the individual, increased the power of financial institutions, and decreased social and labor protection. Unions became weaker in power, and labor precarity increased. The concept of precarity encompasses the temporary and casual work arrangements and the feelings of vulnerability, displacement, and hopelessness which come from such insecure existential conditions. Uncertainties regarding employment and livelihoods create an atomized, individualized and an isolated workforce with limited rights (Kasmir 2018).

In *Industrial Labor on the Margins of Capitalism*, industrial anthropologists of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology ethnographically examine the casualization of work, laboring conditions, and the diminishing power of unions in the industrial settings of the Global South

and postsocialist societies (referred to in the book as "the margins of capitalism"). These places in Bulgaria, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Philippines, Russia, Trinidad, and Zambia are marginal by their geographic location being set apart from the historical centres of industrial capitalism. Despite being named "marginal", as the book's authors demonstrate, the global neoliberal changes affect the livelihoods of workers in these countries at least as strongly and roughly as those in the West.

The 14 chapters of the book, positioned as autonomous articles, offer diverse ethnographic studies covering issues of class fragmentation, subcontracting, declining power of organized labor, and the role of the nation-state in conjunction with workforce casualization. Thematically, Ching Kwan Lee, Eeva Keskülä, Tommaso Trevisani, Christian Strümpell, Andrew Sanchez, and Michael Peter Hoffman in their chapters explore the formation of two distinct groups of workers, permanent employees, and contract workers, and how this division effects class consciousness and different domains of workers' everyday life. In all workplaces analyzed in this publication, production costs have been reduced by replacing permanent employment with contract workers with curtailed rights and lower pay. Considering this fact, Dimitra Kofti, Dragomir Rudnyckyj, Elisabeth Schober, and I-Chieh Fang in their contributions examine the role of the neoliberal nation-state regarding the weakening power of organized labor and workers' rights, as national legislations and policies promote the flexibility of the labor market and introduce cuts to welfare. Rebecca Prentice, Jeremy Morris and

Sarah Hinz, and Grace Carswell and Geert de Neve in their texts explore the neoliberal discourse accompanying precarious work and how skills alone no longer guarantee employment.

Further, Eeva Kesküla, Tommaso Trevisani, Dimitra Kofti, Jeremy Morris and Sarah Hinz, and I-Chieh Fang's chapters are placed in the postsocialist world, where the whole social, political, and economic order fundamentally changed relatively recently, and the historically guaranteed job security has been declining due to the spread of precarity. The authors investigate how these changes affect workers' class subjectivities, social networks of support, and family dynamics.

In contrast to postsocialist societies, in most industrial sites globally, permanent employment was never the predominant form and precarious work is not a new occurrence. Kesküla, Trevisani, Kofti, Strümpell, Sanchez, Fang, Prentice, Hoffmann, and Dina Makram-Ebeid in this regard challenge Guy Standing's (2011) model of precariat as a distinct class formation. Standing understands precariat as a "class-in-the-making", differentiating itself from permanently employed workers, the *salariat*. While the diverse group clustered together under the term *precariat* shares certain characteristics which greatly differentiate it from the salariat, such as weak labor security and the lack of work-based identity (2011, 8, 9), the socio-political formation of precariat as a distinct class seems questionable. In his chapter, Sanchez shows pertinently that permanent employees and casual workers do not foster different political attitudes and values, while Dimitra Kofti's chapter deals with two types of workers living in the same

household, which makes the formation of different class subjectivities unlikely. A distinct social class needs to develop a certain sense of being as an identifiable group to be able to recognize their own interests in a wider political mobilization.

The above-mentioned authors call Standing's model of precariat as class into question by showing that precarity is not a new phenomenon but has been present in most parts of the world since the introduction of industrial work. The model, as the authors argue, also neglects the disempowerment that precarity brings to workers, workers' experience of struggle, and their understanding of the precarious position. Guy Standing has built his theory on the changes in the labor markets of the US, UK, France, Germany, Japan, and South Korea since the late 1980s, while the majority of laboring people in the Global South never had secure jobs or steady incomes and the capital there had essentially depended on an unprotected and exploited workforce since the beginning of capitalist relations in those countries (Kasmir 2018). The workplaces analyzed in this publication therefore show diverse experiences of precarity and its various consequences in settings different than those where precarity is usually being researched.

In the first chapter, Ching Kwan Lee observes the case of miners in the Zambian Copperbelt, where workers are forced to choose between the stable exploitation of secure permanent employment at low wages or short-term contracts at higher wages. The author also emphasizes that the large number of subcontracting companies makes it impossible for the workers to resist further casualization.

Eeva Kesküla then shows how the new organization of labor in Kazakhstan affects more than just the workplace conditions as the young generation experiences new circumstances radically different to those of their parents. Many other authors in the book (Kesküla, Trevisan, Kofti, and Strümpell) point out that even though they sometimes work side by side, younger generations' earnings as contract workers are considerably lower than those of their parents, who still enjoy permanent employment. As Kesküla's contribution demonstrates, the older generation still perceives themselves as a social class of labor aristocracy, sometimes even referring to themselves as the middle class. But the new conditions of contract workers disrupted the mechanisms of class reproduction and class consciousness of the permanent workforce while the contract workers lead utterly different lifestyles. Not only does this influence the class consciousness of the younger generation, but it also "infantilizes" them, as they often live with their parents well into their mid-twenties. The previously strong mining identity and shared class consciousness is inaccessible to the young generation, as the economic structures are shifting.

In the third chapter, Tommaso Travisani examines Kazakhstan's former steel town Temirtau and describes how the increasing contracting work, safety hazards, deteriorating shop floor conditions, and residential segregation changed the workers' political consciousness and generated two distinct groups of workers. As in the Kazakhstan-based fieldwork presented in Kesküla's chapter, the older permanent employees from Travisani's study still receive many benefits from the previously

nationally owned factory, while the younger contract workers in the now privately owned factory struggle to financially emancipate themselves from their parents. Older permanent employees became passive and alienated from their work while reminiscing about the old days. Permanent and contract workers are also divided by their ability to unionize. While any kind of collective action is almost impossible for the contracting workers, permanent employees are fearful of resisting, as the abundance of available workforce makes them expendable. The shift to casual work also harshly affects female workers, as they are first to be fired and later on rehired as low-paid contract workers.

In the next chapter, Dimitra Kofti describes a comparable situation in Bulgaria, stressing that even though the conditions are similar in all the industrialized world, change arrived more abruptly in the postsocialist states. With the change of the socioeconomic system, socialist party-sponsored unions in Bulgaria were replaced by a number of smaller sectorial unions with decreased funding and declining membership. In the postsocialist times, the role of the unions changed significantly as union representatives encourage policies for "economic restructuring", which often bring job losses, erosion of workers' rights, and factory closings (cf. Stenning 2005, 987–988). As pointed out before, the nation-state is an important actor in the shaping of the landscape of labor, and under the neoliberal governance the labor market gradually heads towards bigger flexibility and casualization of labor. These postsocialist workplace changes also strengthen ethnic discrimination against the Roma people, who are the first to lose

their jobs, as well as gender inequalities in family relations, as women are more likely to be let go.

Both Tommaso Trevisani and Dimitra Kofti point out that in contrast to the postsocialist conditions, in the Soviet times, Bulgarian and Kazakhstani workers had access to benefits such as housing, healthcare, and education, which shows the political aspirations of the state, which aimed to create a modern industrial working class. While unable to diminish class inequalities completely, state-socialist countries confronted many inequalities, such as reducing the wage gap and increasing the status of manual workers and their autonomy (Cepić 2019, 6–7).

Further, Christian Strümpell analyzes in the following chapter the segregation of residential areas in India. The increasing precarity since the 1990s brought about the segregation of residential areas for permanent employees who were made up mostly of migrant workers and the local population working as contract workers. The two groups of workers are further divided by their ethnicity. Certain ethnicities with permanent employment have access to healthcare facilities, civic amenities, and better schools for their children. Others, especially Adivasis, do not have access to education and are left out of employment possibilities on a vast scale.

Next, Dragomir Rudnyckyj explores the role of labor policies and political strategies in foreclosing workers' abilities to unionize in Indonesia. Contract workers and permanent employees are hierarchized and visibly separated by their clothing, break rooms, and even more by their salaries and benefits. This segmentation reduces their ability to realize common interests.

With the inability for political action and the increasing precarious position of contract workers, both groups of workers become docile and passive, which creates a welcoming environment for foreign investments seeking cheaper labor.

Dina Makram-Ebeid then focuses on cosmological beliefs which help workers in precarious positions in Egypt to articulate their lack of control over their lives. The language of religion is used to distinguish permanent employees of the steel factory from the precarious contract workers working elsewhere. Besides exploring the cosmological imaginary of luck and fate underpinning alternative economies, which, as Makram-Ebeid argues, anthropologists mostly overlook, Makram-Ebeid also points out the ongoing police violence that precarity workers experience throughout the Arab world.

In the eight chapter, Elisabeth Schober explores the work conditions of the Hanjin Subic Shipyard in the Philippines and how national laws there are making subcontracting easier. While shipyards represent one of the key nodes in the global economy, the workers there experience the most raw form of precarity, uncertainty, and danger at work with multiple deaths occurring every year.

Andrew Sanchez then describes the seemingly passive political attitudes of precarious workers in Jamshedpur, India. The contract workers of the local scrapyard consist of a rural population that for centuries has been pushed around the country by violence, unemployment, and natural disasters. Their lack of trust in political institutions is a result of the absence of any positive implications previous political changes had in their life. Their misfortune

and their precarity are perceived as a result of an individual and not collective experience.

The tenth chapter, by Jeremy Morris and Sarah Hinz, shows how the general dissatisfaction with the new neoliberal working conditions in the Russian automotive industry engenders a nostalgia for the socialist system as autoworkers covet the previous work pace, personalized production relations, and the autonomy and control they had over the work process in socialism. The workers' understanding of labor, autonomy, and the dignity of the previous system underscores their lack of satisfaction and self-realization in the workplace.

Next, I-Chieh Fang's chapter centres on the importance of the informal economy of rural industrial workers in China and how precarity inhibits workers' rational planning. With the absence of sufficient state welfare provisions, workers have to rely on family and other social networks of support. As the national laws and legislations still deny urban residency to rural migrants, they rely heavily on the social relationships they cultivate in the factory. The older generation, accustomed to stable employment, experiences precarity as a threat. But the young rural minority appreciates the flexibility and ambiguity contract working offers them as they perceive it as a brief time in their life when they could weave new networks before finding a better job or starting their own business in the informal economy.

In the next chapter, Rebecca Prentice's research focuses on Trinidad's garment sector, composed mainly of women, where the discourse of "micro-entrepreneurs" promotes precarious employment in terms

of "being your own boss". The hegemony of global neoliberal thought boosts the orthodox understanding of the private sector as the main mechanism of economic growth. This discourse praises entrepreneurialism over stable employment and fetishizes precarity as freedom. All contract homeworkers who previously worked in factories for minimum wage now have even less benefits and stability, as well as lower pay.

Similar processes are discussed in the next chapter, in the case of Southern Indian garment workers, as presented by Grace Carswell and Geert De Neve, who describe how the discourse of acquired skills obscures the negative impacts of precarious work and is supported by the neoliberal ideology which nurtures the idea that society is made up of autonomous, entrepreneurial individuals. Such a discourse is separated from the reality of social processes which shape peoples' experience in the labor market. In practice, individual success depends on one's ability to utilize networks of support. Such neoliberal discourse also neglects the inequalities of power, gender, caste, and age, which greatly influence the importance of skills and the sociocultural values attached to them.

In the last chapter, Michael Peter Hoffmann investigates the role of Maoist unions in the industrial sector of Western Nepal, where ethnicity plays an important role in securing a permanent job. While the union is responsible for regularizing contract work, it also strengthens intra-ethnic tensions in the workplace. The benefits of the union's activism do not reach ethnicities outside the local community, which shows that ethnic identities in such an environment frequently cause class fragmentation.

In the afterword, Michael Burawoy places the book's ethnographic case studies in the global historical context of the third wave marketization which started in the 1970s. Industrial sites of the Global South and the postsocialist societies in his words therefore demonstrate how "those who have been dispossessed, often violently, of access to the means of existence and locked out of the market" shape the current conditions of production (Burawoy 2018, 361).

In summary, this book offers a wide range of diverse ethnographic studies covering several prominent topics concerning precarity, such as the role of the nation-state, the diminishing power of organized labor, workers' political passivity, and the questions of class formation and class fragmentation. It presents rich ethnographic descriptions of inhumane working conditions and the effects of precarious work on workers' lives. The book's authors also show how previous inequalities of ethnicity, age, and gender are deepening under the increased precarity of work. The book's greatest contribution is the focus on the industrial settings of the Global South, which remain relatively understudied by anthropologists. However, the collection of articles is intended for the knowledgeable reader, as many of the applied concepts are not theorized. Nevertheless, it offers an important insight into the casualization of work and its impact on industrial workers in the Global South and postsocialist societies, which differ greatly from those of the Global North, and therefore establishes a more nuanced anthropological perspective on the issue.

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Nili Belkind *Music in Conflict: Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Aesthetic Production*

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If we take into account the breaking news from spring and summer 2021, when Israeli-Palestinian conflicts slid from hibernation into bilateral open acts of violence, the book by Israeli-American ethnomusicologist Nili Belkind becomes very relevant. The Israel-Palestine region is an example of a very heterogeneous society suffering from a lengthy conflict with regularly recurring outbreaks of violence. Music-making in such a social field, including people with experience of war and occupying powers, represents a complex and multifaceted "web of signs". Multiple significance is embodied in musical sound itself, in repertoires, venues, settings, and contexts of events and their organization processes, as well as in their actors' thinking, agency, and positioning within both the Israeli and the Palestinian communities.