

## Classified Transformation from Proletariat to Precariat

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**Abstract:** One of the strictest realities of social life is class structure. Therefore, Karl Marx based his analysis of social structure on the labour form of the class that constantly produces itself and its opponent. He speaks of a class structure based on material labour determined by means of production and production relations. This class is known as the proletariat. However, in this cycle, which progresses continuously on the axis of change and transformation, the class has become flexible and labour has moved away from its material state. In Marx's words, the solid has evaporated. In other words, the new social class that has adapted to the flexible life and labour process and was stuck between the continuous work and life changes is the precariat. The basis of the precariat class is not only the proletarian workers and their labour, but also their identity, colour, religious affiliations. Those who are outside the wall of equality aim to achieve the digital era and somehow their whole life has been cognitive, and they are living new fluid human's states resulting in alienation from their labour. In this study, the class transformation will be emphasized that Marx went through while evolving into precariat in the informatics society of the proletariat, which he put forward for the industrial society. The class transformation in question will be discussed in the context of Hard and Negri's class components and Guy Standing's precariat concept. This study will include the fluid course of class transformation. In addition to these, this study is important as it aims to analyze the contexts of human life, post-human and trans-human processes by including digitalization.

**Keywords:** Class, Proletariat, Precariat, Fluidity

### Introduction

*The nature of the class is hidden not in the class conflict itself but in the propensity to conflict.*

Throughout the historical and social adventures of human beings, there have been many forms of conflicts. The conflict has been the driving force of social change since the beginning of humanity. All actions that present themselves as rebellion, resistance, revolt, or social movement show that social relations rise based on conflict; as a matter of fact, Marx, explains the history of society within dialectic of this conflict. Marx in his studies, utilizes the concept of class conflict to describe societies, especially to explain the post-industrial revolution production society and to make sense of the hierarchical form of society. The concept of class conflict is based on political sovereignty with its economic influences. It is also based on material labour, surplus product, and surplus value, depending on the relations of production. Basically, it focuses on unequal and unfair distribution processes in property and production relations.

According to Marxist theory, class movements have pursued one goal, which is the rule of the working class against the class of bourgeois. In Gramsci studies, the axis has begun to shift towards social classes and non-governmental organizations while Touraine has argued that the central role in sociology to social movements with cultural and identity characteristics that developed with the post-industrial society. As it is known, the workers' movements based on economy and politics were focusing on the class consciousness, industrial unions, and the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. This was a relatively autonomous and revolutionary enterprise movement whereas new social movements are based on ethnic and cultural identity and also encompass all marginalized sexual identities.

Hence, after the Industrial Revolution, the proletarian (working) class whose boundaries became clear, sharpened and generally comprised of workers became flexible as a result of digitization, business production

processes and transformation of the means of production. They have also moved away from the form of material labour and commodities. In the aforementioned story, the new class concept includes identities based on inequalities that cannot be defined as workers by their limits, immigrants whose future cannot be predicted as well as a new form of flexible, housewifized workers whose labour has also been digitized. In other words, this new class form, whose scope has expanded, and the form of labour has become intangible, is a class form that includes all humanity except for the limitless people and a minority segment which is relatively rich.

This study will firstly focus on the boundaries, scope and conceptual framework of the Proletarian Class conceptualized by Marx. After this argument, creating the conceptual and theoretical text of the new class, broad and fluid class labour will be discussed through Hardt and Negri's 'Intangible Labour', C. Fuchs' 'Digital Labour' thesis. In addition, this new class will be discussed over sub-discussion areas such as the forms of appearance, which the class covers, its limitlessness. And also, this study will try to explain the perspective of precariat by studying Guy Standing's 'Precariat, New Dangerous Class' study and Z. Bauman's 'Fluid Born' thesis. In the light of the foregoing findings, this study has been considered as an important paper to explain these components of the history of class that occur in the new, online and digital society.

### **Proletariat: The Limits of the Working Class**

One of the most comprehensive class analyses belongs to Marx. He treats society through class conceptualization and evaluates history as the history of class conflicts. In his Communist Manifesto, Marx explains history as the history of class struggles. According to him, the history of conflict which was based on material labour have taken in different forms, for instance, free men and slaves, practitioners and plebs, barons and serfs, guild citizens and men. Although the historical process is the scene of various classes and forms of labour, the class reaches its climax with the industrial revolution. The proletariat is the highest and strictest class format in Marx's dialectic of history. In other words, for him, the proletariat is the ultimate form of class that history has witnessed. In Marx's dialectic, the capitalist bourgeois class, which is characterized as the most extreme, most radical, and ultimate class structure of history, is in place opposite the proletarian class. The bourgeois class which has owned capital (material capital) and means of production is the class that has the most advantageous position in production and distribution relations (Marx & Engels, 2018).

This class is the ruling class that usurps the surplus product and surplus-value produced by the proletarians. Thanks to the superstructure institutions, it exploits the labour of the worker, alienates him from his place, his labour, society, and nature. It converts the proletarian to a mechanical and soulless phenomenon. According to Marx, the socialist revolution will be inevitable because the proletarians, who are exploited by the capitalist bourgeoisie, have nothing to lose but their chains (Marx & Engels, 2018). Yet at this stage, when revolutionary consciousness and class consciousness have not yet developed, there is no common sentiment. For these workers, Marx proposes professional revolutionaries. According to him, the revolution can only be carried out by the professional revolutionaries, not by the masses.

The proletarian class has been mostly determined by the Marxist way of thinking. And it is considered a structure made up of workers working on the production line after the industrial revolution. Engels defines the working class as follows: the working class is the class that has no means of production and also, their only material resource is their own labours (Marx, & Engels, 2008). Marx bases such an analysis on the proletarian class. He explains that the potential labour force is employed by the persons who uses his labour power, makes a profit from his labour for living and takes labourers and turns them into a worker in this mutual trade which forms the basis of the proletariat (Marx, & Engels, 2008). In both definitions, explaining the limits of the proletarian class, the main element is labour.

Marx built the class on material labour. The form of capital that he took as a base was naturally tangible capital but over time, the types of capital differed and diversified. Depending on the diversification of capital, different class forms have emerged and the need for a redefinition of the class was felt. One of the first names to criticize Marx was Ralf Dahrendorf, who introduced a new definition and type of social class. According to Dahrendorf, Marx did not take the middle class into consideration. The middle class, which consists of labourers from different business fields and includes large segments of the social, is the new address of the proletariat (Güçlü, 2014). P. Bourdieu, on the other hand, draws attention to the forms of labour that Marx skipped and attracts attention to the types of human, cultural and symbolic capital as well as material (economic) capital. As a matter of fact, many phenomena and reasons such as capitalist production relations, social division of labour, technology-based developing work structure and flow processes, change of labour forms, loss of material commodity have changed the form of the class (Kaplan&Yardımcıoğlu, 2020). This transformation is of course

not a simple conceptual (descriptive) transformation. It is a change and transformation in the structure of the class as a result of the swelling of concepts such as labour processes, the concept of labour, production processes, and the production line, and the melting of their sharp boundaries especially mentioned at the beginning of the study. The class's hard boundaries have been subjected to evaporation in its historical journey and the class has structurally transformed into a new, vast environment.

As a matter of fact, such expansion has been the first step of the discussion that the phenomenon of class does not consist solely of boundaries based on labour and production processes, as mentioned above. In this context, especially some of the contemporary Marxists discuss that in the classical Marxism, there is not enough research conducted to understand the laws of motion of labour processes. Also, the political consequences that will emerge as results of these processes are approached with a more limited perspective included Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and Christian Fuchs. These thinkers provide a new framework for the concept of class and the framework in question is cognitive capitalism.

### **Melting at the Boundaries of the Labour Form, Structural Transformation of the Class**

Cognitive capitalism which is conceptualized as the third link of capitalist production processes after the industrial and mercantile phases based on a classical form of labour consists of digital forms of labour for which no material commodity is produced in return but rather based on cognitive labour. This stage is characterised by the digitalization of labour and production processes on platforms with unsure borders, capital firms, and next-generation internet infrastructure. In this phase, the class consists of digital workers seeking intellectual property rights and producing intangible commodities using information and communication technologies. This defined cognitive class form; the emergence of an up-to-date digital accumulation regime includes intangible assets. And also, this form of the regime is based on intangible and digital products produced as a result of cognitive labour.

In the age of cognitive capitalism which is accepted as the most encompassing link of capitalism's production processes, despite common belief, work/ and labour processes arise from practices that are not fun and that require being necessitate, being involved 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In this concept, the power holders use an unlimited exploitation and tactics of retaliation (Terranova, 2015). In this new society where, capital is based on a fluidized, timeless form of labour, the class form is also undergoing change. This change in the structure of the class causes the work/labour processes to emerge from the industry-based factories and transform into a social factory where a complex system of order is operated in a fluid state in the whole society (Virno & Hardt, 2006).

The class, on the other hand, can be reached in a very broad range at this stage. The classical concept of worker (factory worker based on manual labour) has lost its content, to the class; lawyers, service personnel, poets, literati, policy makers, and even middle-class business people were involved (Badiou, 2020). As a result of the fragmentation of the rigid walls of the working class, the concept of labour has dominated a much wider area as mentioned above. Although all these fields are gathered under the concept of labour, the mentioned labour has gone beyond its classical meaning. It has been digitized and transformed into a new form of labour, the majority consisted of mental labour. By mental labour "immaterial labour" is meant, which is the main charge of informatized production processes. The dimensions of the melting and everlasting that occur in the boundaries of labour also fluidize the substance of the concept of class. The strict class of Marx evaporates. The Class includes identities as well as workers.

With the substantial expansion of the class phenomenon, mental labour has replaced with material labour and class; social classes have begun to work in the collective puzzle based on the relation of production. Identities are brought to the forefront with the contributions of neo-Marxists. At this stage, broad-based class structures emerge, spanning belief, ethnicity, and gender, as well as climate, ecology, and animal rights. Here, the old class structure turns into fluid social mobility and the mode of operation of power become rational. Instead of the labour movement and manual labour, new forms of organization and mental labour gain importance, such as student movements, identity, and cultural movements, gender movements, ecological, environmental and green movements, hippie and counter-culture movements (Sustam, 2009).

It would be appropriate to conceptualize cognitive capitalism and identity-based class movements, especially based on the works of the contemporary Marxist theorists Hardt and Negri. Hardt and Negri define labour in question as immaterial labour since it does not produce a material and permanent commodity as a result of service production (Hardt&Negri, 2018). According to them, the labour and production scene has turned into a

hegemonic network of relations from material labour to immaterial. In other words, the intangible labour society is the transformative force. For this reason, drafting the characteristics of resistance requires taking into account immaterial labour and forms of production. Labour conditions depend not only on economic differences but also on differences in race, ethnic group, geography, gender, sexuality, and so on (Savaş, 2009). These are classes that labour defines along lines of collective struggle. Marx's economic-based political class struggle focused on the labour-capital dualism. Whereas the 'Multitude' refers to figures of labour traditionally excluded from the working class

It is necessary to include service labour, intellectual labour, cognitive labour, peasant labour, agricultural labour, the unemployed, as actors and subjects in the class struggle on the basis of poverty to the new class. Therefore, going beyond Marx's concepts of material labour, working-class, alienation, and bourgeois exploitation, we can design value production as a common denominator. So we should consider exploitation as the usurpation of the common denominator. The perception of labour and value have shifted to biopolitics. Especially in the era of biopolitical production, with the intertwining of social, cultural, economic, and political, there is a need for a network organization type based on new forms of subjectivity and new multiplicity. Environmentalists, trade unionists, anarchists, church groups, gays, lesbians, prison protests, and finally labour struggle can be counted among these new singularities and forms of subjectivity (Hardt & Negri, 2011).

In this context, the concept of the Multitude of Hardt and Negri represents the new forms of social and opposition organization shaped around the slogan of opposition and the new world. Those who acted on the roots of Marxism were involved in the labour-capital conflict. For this reason, problems and contradictions that do not result from labour-capital conflict have always been ignored. These contradictions; social gender, generation, ethnic identity, race, sexuality, and so on the demands of other specific identities that are organized with their demands, and whose class identities are left in the background against the rulers have created new class movements. When it comes to new class movements, feminism, the environmental movement, the green movement, the anti-nuclear movement, the anti-racist movement, the minority movement, etc. comes to mind (Çoban, 2009). The new class movements differ from previous social movements in that they are identity-based, emphasize the concepts of pluralism and difference, see action as a mixture of individual and collective identities, rely on reconciliation instead of violence, and have flexible and decentralized structures.

As a result, although it has its roots in Marx's work, it is accepted in many discussions that the form of "immaterial labour" is the most appropriate concept for the new and digital age. Obviously, this acceptance is based on the cybernetic feature of the age, cultural products (fashion products, art products) behaviours that would not normally be considered work (opening an account in a social media company) are produced as a result of mental labour, have no material side, but are considered commodities in terms of pricing. This acceptance may also be the presumption of the existence of a new cognitive class that is suitable for the age, whose boundaries have melted and whose repertoire has expanded greatly. This form of identity has caused the melting of the definitions loaded on the concept of class and the emergence of a new, fluid and very broad class form in terms of scope. This class form is distinct from the proletarian class form in its conventional meaning and is the "precariat class" with its new name, a term more appropriate for the digital age.

### **Precariat: Class of Common Feelings**

For the first time, the concept of precarity was used to define the distinction between salaried, permanent workers and irregular workers by Pierre Bourdieu. Precariat concept has turned into an established social class rather than a form of work in recent years. Guy Standing, 'the precariat class' which is rapidly becoming a new social class includes in the literature as a combination of the "precer" and the "proletariat". In this aspect, it can be said that the precariat was formed by the masses that are subject to work in the field of work replacing the working class, which has become more for capitalism and shrinking with technological progress (Irak, 2010).

The precariat class is a new social movement in which the boundaries of the modern (digital) age individual in the social space are determined. The changing network of economic, cultural, political and social relations as a result of the developments in the welfare society, which is accepted to have emerged in the recent past, laid the groundwork for the formation of this new class form. Individuals included in the precariat on this ground always struggle to survive. This struggle is the struggle of common feelings whose experiences are similar, expectations are the same, their perceptions (consciousness) are uniform, and their preferences are one. The precariat class includes not only the sum of common insecurity but also feelings which is futureless. Hence Guy Standing argues that, unlike a salaried worker, trust between the precarious individual and the owners of state power or capital is the lowest. In other words, proletarian workers' wage/obedience guarantee which is a requirement of

unwritten rules is at the lowest level for the precariat. It is not the case for precariat individuals and it has a fragmented class status because this new class form is based on income inequality (Standing, 2019).

Besides these, the precariat that emerges fragmented, boundless, and fluid form, manifests as a class form very similar to the fiction of the modern world which has a very wide base throughout the world. In pioneering studies on the precarious class form, although labour processes have been tried to be based on a material commodity, the redistribution of the labour form, the change in the fields of work styles, production processes, and relations, and the transformation that has become the progress in information technologies have started to determine the precariat individuals (Mosco, 2008). This communality has evolved from the proletarian class in the form of a compulsory band to the precariat, which is the digital age class form.

Unlike the proletariat which only includes workers with contract guarantees, the precariat, which is the domain of limitlessness, has included workers without contractual guarantees, and precarious people who do not have a job, and also immigrants who do not find a legal basis in the system. And also, the precariat class encloses refugees living in camps in addition to these, individuals whose future is not yet widely accepted by the society/politics due to their sexual identity preferences. The individuals that are in the same boat form the basis of the precariat are defined as "those born in fluid" by Z. Bauman (Bauman, 2020). Based on this definition, it is accepted that the precariat individuals have complete insecurity and fluid world vision in which they are already born and live into the class.

In the emergence of the precariat which is the class of fluidizing crowd of people structural change and transformation in labour practices, especially in the dynamics that constitute the social, have been a trigger. Advances in communication technologies have moved the working people away from the robotizing type state of factories and put them into computer-based intangible labour activities in line with the change and the velocity of period (Hardt&Negri, 2004). Although the precarious individual is living in these activities, they live in a form of labour independent of the factory, in a delusion of freedom, the fluid individual suitable for the precariat class cannot take this freedom beyond the hyper-mobile precarious lifestyle (Lazzarato, 2005). From this point of view, an employee can produce a computer operating system by writing codes as well as consuming it. The person that mentioned can gain distributorship titles in other sectors which are based on the consumerist tech program by selling code. And as a matter of fact, the person who writes the code has transformed into a fluid precariat who is constantly working in the social transformation due to the known fluid work types.

What distinguishes the precariat from the proletarian is the expansion and frontier meltdown within the borders of this worker concept. Instead of the manual power needed to sustain the capitalist system in the proletariat, the operation of living bodies in the precariat to guarantee the future of capitalism, it's centering of cognitive processes, and the unlimited use of human intelligence created a new, cognitive capital (Özmkas, 2015). This capital is based on digital labour processes that rely on the intelligence of modern, digital age people and move away from the material part of the raw material. What is meant by digital labour is any form of action taken not only for platforms but also for a digital object as defined by C. Fuchs (2010).

Adding on all these, the limits of precariat class depend on precarious home, insecure work, unsecured social rights, and professional identities, ever-changing patronage typology, unethical norms, a new formation human without social memory, as well as global markets which contain digital information (Standing, 2019). The precariat covering the segments working in all fields such as child labour, information, informatics, finance, service, tourism, and health is the global common name of new poverty and new forms of unemployment. So that, class changes continuously and job types become temporary and irregular in the new society form built on flexibility, which is the social reality of the digital age.

According to Standing, this class is the product of globalization. Due to the own characteristics of globalization, the precariat worker does not know the employer but he/she knows the job definition, yet, the worker does not know what they are doing, and also he/she is not a member of the middle class which has certain limits. Because of these conditions, the fluid individuals do not have a stable, proportional, and predictable salary and status or rights, the precariat just has common feelings, but these feelings are based on temporality stage (Standing, 2019).

Temporality-based precariat draws a dynamic and ever-growing class profile. In this pattern, the precariat individual feels alienated, does many jobs although he/she does not want to, but cannot do what he/she wants to do (Standing, 2012). Globalized business conditions and the uncertainty brought about by digitalization have revealed a form of labour time that encompasses the entire lifetime of the precariat. On account of, the precariat



individual struggling in this form of labour represents fluidity far from a working proletarian who is not included in the middle class.

## Conclusion

As a result, the structure of the working class has constantly changed and transformed over the historical process. The first form of the working class in the modern sense is the proletarian class defined and framed by Karl Marx. The proletarian class is a labour-based class, which includes the vast majority of workers who started to work on the production line with the industrial revolution. The main factor defining the boundaries of the proletarian class is material labour. In other words, the actors of the proletarian class are factory workers and productive power is manual labour however, the melting and infinity dimensions that occur at the limits of labour also fluidize the essence of the concept of class. And also, the ancient class structure turns into fluid social mobility and the functioning of power becomes rational. The labour and production scene transforms from material labour to immaterial that is into a hegemonic network of relationships that produces knowledge, information, ideas, images, relationships, and effects. So those, instead of the labour movement and manual labour, new forms of organization and mental labour begin to gain importance. Shortly, Marx's strict class evaporates. In other words, the class can include identities based on sexuality and immigration as well as workers. That is to say in this new class structure, the conditions of labour depend not only on economic differences but also on like race, ethnic group, geography, gender, etc. differences. This new class form will cause the melting of the classical definitions loaded on the concept of class and the emergence of a new, fluid, and very broad class form in terms of scope. This class form is far away from the proletarian class form in its main meaning and is the 'precariat class' with its new name suitable for the digital age.

To sum up, the structure of class has constantly changed and transformed in the historical process. However, it has been the development of technology-based automation systems that initiated the transition to precariat and transformed the class balance into an unlimited class world. These developments have turned the world into a global neighborhood and also they have led to the emergence of a new precariat class form in a continuous flow without a base, the precarious class form that best suits the district. The precarity is the child of globalization because except for those who passed from the proletariat of the working class to the precariat. It is a class on which the existence of a global world working mass that is more highly educated, striving for continuous advancement and better income that is the rival of another at a competitive market and is open to all kinds of flexibility for this cause. This class form is growing day by day in line with the desire of global capitalism and includes all groups such as ethnicities, identities, and silent immigrants. Hence, the new structure of the class has moved away from the boundaries of the proletariat which is based on production as it encompasses the unemployed, precarious immigrants, other identities, and ethnic minority groups altogether.

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