

# Toward a Theory of Global Proletarian Fractions

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## Abstract

Globalization provides the material basis for the existence of a global proletariat. However, the worldwide working class is not homogeneous. The global proletariat is fractionated on the basis of workers' physical mobility relative to nation-states and regions, as well as the geographic scope of workers' labor-power expenditure relative to the circuits of production in which they are engaged. On that basis, three transnational fractions of the global working class are observed: the dynamic-global, the static-global, and the diasporic-global; and three local fractions of the global working class are observed, including the dynamic-local, the static-local, and the diasporic-local. In order to theoretically locate this fractionated perspective on the global working class this paper reviews Marxian class theory, class and contemporary perspectives on globalization, global social formations and the global proletariat, as well as labor-capital relation and the global proletariat as it relates to Marx's concept of simple reproduction. After a discussion of the fractions and directions for future research a typology is provided.

## Keywords

global working class fractions, transnational class relations, global capitalism, Marxian class theory

Let me explain by introducing Gabriel Rozman—a Jewish technologist of Hungarian roots who was raised in Uruguay, educated in America and now heads the Latin American operations of India's biggest software/outsourcing company, Tata Consulting Services of Bombay. “[The imperative is to] ‘follow the sun,’ he said. We like to start a project in Bangalore or Bombay [sic], then as the day moves on, move it to our offices in Eastern Europe, and then to Latin America.’” Tata expects its engineers in each place to be equally trained, speak English and have computing infrastructure to seamlessly receive and hand off projects. This is a global-scale business (Friedman 2006).

Friedman's (2006) column highlights two tendencies linked to globalization: first, that human beings themselves are physically mobile, that border-crossing is more common and easier than ever *for some people*; and second, that even if a specific human being does not physically cross a border, participation in transnational production processes like the one described above ensures that a person's labor-power does. Workers in transnational production chains

contribute incrementally and cumulatively to the creation of commodities that range from software to automobiles, and from food to fuel. The parts of a cellular phone may be created from components that derive from China, Israel, and the UK, and may be assembled by workers from Indonesia, Mexico, and Turkey in factories in California, Taiwan, or South Africa. The global division of labor creates interdependencies on the part of capital that operate across borders and within firms, as documented by Dicken (1996), Robinson (2004), and others (Cox 1996a; Sklair 1999), but it also creates interdependencies and relationships on the part of workers as well.

As Robinson (2002) remarks, “globalization has involved a profound and comprehensive restructuring of the world productive apparatus, including the nature of the world production process and of work...” (p.1060). In fact, as he continues, globalization as a set of unfolding social practices can be identified as “the global fragmentation and decentralization of what were once national productive processes, the dismantling of national economies and construction of a single global production system” (Robinson 2002: 1060). In other words, globalization represents the expansion of *productive* economic activity to more-than-national contexts, and thus constitutes a new stage of capitalist development (Laibman 2005; Robinson 1998).<sup>1</sup>

So what does the “globalization of production itself” or the expansion of business to the “global-scale” imply for the concept of class? How do these global interdependencies affect class theory? While Embong (2000) admonishes us not to “assume the formation of transnational classes just because there are domestic classes that serve in global forces of production” (p. 989), Sklair (2000) instructs us that “a transnational capitalist class based on the transnational corporations is emerging that is more or less in control of the process of globalization” (p. 5). However, Poulantzas (1975) maintains that classes exist only in the context of broader and more determinant social formations like nation-states and cultures. Although Poulantzas still asserts that the labor-capital relation conditions class identification fairly completely, these social formations have different effects on production relations in different societies. Still, Robinson (2004), among others discussed below, maintains that the globalization of the production process constitutes the material basis for transnational social formations, including classes, and that economically and politically there is evidence that social formations are themselves becoming

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<sup>1</sup> Briefly, the stages of capitalist development according to Laibman (2005) are Mercantilism, Liberalism, Imperialism, and Globalism. From his perspective we are *transitioning* into the fourth, global, stage.

global. Except for positing the material basis for a global working class that exists in relation to global capital however, the global proletariat remains under-explained and under-theorized.

The globalization of production and concomitant social formations, the existence of a transnational capitalist class, and the impact that specific social contexts have on class relations requires us to carefully re-specify the concept of class if it is going to retain meaning relative (especially) to subordinate groups globally. The ways in which the capitalist project have unfolded since the late 1960s “challenges,” as Cox (2003) puts it, “the Marxist schema of the primacy of class-oriented identities. The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century concepts of class have been muddled by the emerging social structure” (p. 85). Cox is correct—issues with the concept of class derive from the actual changes that have taken place since the collapse of the Keynesian compromise and the Soviet Union. Liberalization, structural adjustments, austerity programs, welfare-reform, etc.—in short, national state and transnational state apparatus projects aimed at revitalizing the world capitalist project relative to the 1970s world-economic crisis, effectively dismantled the class compromise that labor and capital struck in the Post-War era.

These “emerging social structures” create problems with class theory too: as the conditions on the ground changed before our eyes and the capitalist system began to reflect transnationalized relations of production, we were left only with the skeleton of a class analysis based on historically specific, and now faded social realities. The Midwest rustbelt may indicate the disappearance of industrial production as the hegemonic mode of economic activity in the United States, but it does not indicate the disappearance of the living, breathing workers who once acted in the capacity of industrial proletarians. Workers in that context had to be rearticulated (or not) into global forces of production in various ways—often to the detriment of their standard of living, as they became former union members who took service sector jobs, for example. On the same hand, the activities associated with industrial production did not disappear: they were merely relocated by capital seeking to take advantage of wage differentials in different regions of the global system. Thus the labor-capital relation itself may have shifted from an internal relationship relative to nation-states and national classes, to a partially external relationship relative to nation-states, but it still remains a labor-capital relation.

We must not throw the baby out with the bath water, however. Class analysis based on relations of production (the Marxist schema) in the global system can be made relevant if the relations that workers share as a class are specified. We can also still indicate the class orientation of individuals and groups in the global system on the basis of objective criteria: labor-power expenditure for

the production of commodities on the part of one party in exchange for compensation from another party who retains the product is indicative of a labor-capital relation regardless of the distances in which such a relation is lived, and regardless of the rate(s) and national origin(s) of compensation. While it is true to a degree that “the ‘working class’ in its conventional meaning is now divided among the three levels of the social hierarchy and these three components can be shown to have very divergent interests” (Cox 2003: 85),<sup>2</sup> the global proletariat can also be shown to exhibit similarities and convergent interests across its several fractions. As Cox implicitly asserts, the working class remains a class even if its various representatives enjoy various levels of (dis)comfort and (under/over)consumption.

My contention is that workers *can* be identified as such at various levels of the “hierarchy,” and that *the* working class can again make sense—this time in a global system. First, the fact that the global proletariat is “highly heterogeneous,” as are proletariats in national contexts, must be acknowledged (Robinson 2002: 1065). Sklair (2001) has shown with great efficacy that the Transnational Capitalist Class is fractionated, that the fractions often overlap in practice (although they are analytically distinct), and that the interests of the transnational fractions often exist in contradiction to the interests of fractions of those that maintain national orientations. A similar perspective on global working classes, one that is able to analytically differentiate various strata while maintaining a view of the class as a whole, is necessary.

Second, the absolute mobility of workers should not be the only criterion for their identification as either global or local/national. It is true that insofar as certain workers are required to cross borders flexibly (with legitimacy relative to states) or inflexibly (with *de jure* illegitimacy relative to states) during the conduct of their labor, they can be said to belong to a transnational fraction of the global proletariat. Workers in such a fraction or fractions expend their labor-power in cross-border contexts. That idea is not in dispute. However, the activities in which certain other workers engage—those whose productive activities are geographically fixed, but whose products are geographically diffuse relative to firms and nation-states—indicate a degree of transnationality. Transnational production chains by definition involve workers from different regions realizing labor-power in products incrementally. If “the direct relationship of labor to its products is the relationship of the worker to the objects of his [sic] production” (Marx 1974: 65), then the relation of the worker to transnationally produced objects of production is a transnational relation.

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<sup>2</sup> Lower, middle, and upper levels, presumably.

Thus, even workers who do not cross borders still participate in transnational relationships relative to one another, and relative to capital as well.

Third, the fact that some workers are not transnational either physically or by virtue of their participation in a transnational production chain does not preclude their belonging to the global working class. Whether or not a worker is excluded or only partially articulated into the global system does not indicate that a worker is not dominated by the system. Generalized systemic diffusion (Laibman 2005) indicates a worldwide proletariat. Thus, some fractions of the global proletariat remain local in nature.

In this paper I propose that the fractional determination of workers in the global system is dependent on two primary factors: first, on workers' physical mobility relative to nation-states and regions, that is, whether the worker moves to the point of production, or remains fixed relative to a point of production; and second, on the geographic scope of workers' labor-power expenditure relative to the circuits in which they are engaged, that is, whether the products move successively to the worker (as in transnational production chains), or the products remain geographically fixed (as with local production chains). Using these criteria, I constructed a six-fraction typology of the global working class. The worldwide proletariat can be analytically divided into dynamic-global, static-global, and diasporic-global fractions that can collectively be conceived of as being transnational; and dynamic-local, static-local, and diasporic-local fractions that can generally be conceived of as national or local.

Before going any further into the nature of global proletarian fractions and the utility of such a fractionated perspective, this paper reviews Marxian class theory, class and contemporary perspectives on globalization, global social formations and the global proletariat, and the labor-capital relation and the global proletariat as it relates to Marx's concept of simple reproduction. After discussing the fractions of the global working class, I address some of the implications concerning a spatial-productive fractionated perspective and directions for future research.

### **Marxian Class Theory**

It is not enough to state that "from the assumption of the primacy of production flows the Marxist definition of class" (Clark and Lipset 2001:40). The specific linkages in the relations of production conditioned by the production of *commodities* have to be made clear—if only at first in an abstract and general manner. In fact, capitalism itself is characterized by Marx as specifically relating to the production of commodities—objects produced specifically for exchange—(not the production relation *per se*):

The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as ‘an immense accumulation of commodities,’ its unit being a single commodity. Our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity. (Marx 1906: 41)

For Marx, the analysis of political economy *begins* not with the production process itself, but with the objects being produced in their general, abstract form:

A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether... they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference. (Marx 1906: 41)

It is in the subsequent analysis of commodities that it is posited that one’s relation to this process of objectification—as worker or as purchaser-recipient of labor-power and the value advanced by it—determines one’s class relation (Marx [1933] 2006). A member of the working class is defined as someone who sells his or her labor-power as a commodity itself (to capital) for the purpose of commodity production for a given amount of time. The buyer of labor-power, so conceived, who accumulates both private productive property and surplus value (value advanced) on this basis is defined as a member of the capitalist class. As suggested above, the specific form of the commodity is irrelevant—the object can be either material, a cog or a book, or the object can be immaterial, the engineer’s description of a cog (intellectual property) or the contents of a book. Regardless, these objects are the embodiment or objectification of human labor-power, and their production in-itself conditions class relations.

In order to make the idea of the class relation relative to commodity production more determinant, we turn to commodity circuits. Commodity circuits refer to the process of commodity exchange and production in the abstract; to Marx’s conceptualization of “the general formula for capital.” The idea is that under capitalism, money ( $M$ ) is exchanged for commodities ( $C$ ) and commodities are then exchanged again for money, this time in a greater magnitude ( $M'$ ). The circuit of capital (in general) is classically expressed as  $M-C-M'$  (Capital 168). For our purposes, ultimately the determination of class relations in the global system, it is useful to expand Marx’s basic expression,  $M-C-M'$  into  $M-C...P...C'-M'$ , as Dicken has done in the spirit of *Capital*, Volume II (Marx 1992 [1893]), where

Money is used to purchase ‘commodities’ (materials, labor). These commodities are transformed by the process of production [ $P$ , and  $C'$ ]. The monetary value of the original commodities is enhanced. The increased money is used to purchase... [*ad infinitum*]. (Marx1998: 180)

While this general circuit can be broken down conceptually into “three distinct circuits” including the circuit of money capital, the circuit of productive capital, and the circuit of commodity capital—usually depending on the focus of investigation—it is important to remember that the ‘distinct’ circuits are “in fact . . . part of a completely interconnected whole” (Dicken 1998: 180) and that each systemically relies upon the other. Of course, it is possible to discuss the circuit of money capital independently from productive capital, or commodity capital—as we do when we discuss financial flows, securitization, global banking infrastructure, etc. But, as Marx says of the formula, “this whole circuit presupposes the capitalist character of the production process, and hence this production process as a basis, as well as the specific social relations determined by it” (1992 [1893]: 142).

To put these social relations in familiar terms, the capitalist production process constitutes a mode of production based on exploitation.<sup>3</sup> “All pursuit of commodity production becomes at the same time pursuit of the exploitation of labor-power,” and therefore the exploitation of those who expend labor-power, namely *laborers* on an individual basis as well as collectively (Marx 1992 [1893]: 120). To be clear, labor-power, “or capacity for labor is to be understood [as] the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being which he [*sic*] exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description” (Marx 1906: 186). It is this capacity that the capitalist requires in the realization of commodities (for exchange), and it is this capacity that the capitalist seeks when he encounters the worker in the market place.

What makes the relationship differential or exploitative upon the execution of the contract to sell labor-power on the one side, and to buy it on the other is the way in which the exchange-value obtained from the production process is divided among the parties contracted. Without a long exegesis of the labor theory of value, the process by which value is added to commodities is production, not exchange. Thus, the only source of value creation is labor-power itself. However, in the creation of values the worker is only entitled to a predetermined amount based on the terms of her contract with the capitalist, and the socially determined level of exchange-value necessary to reproduce the worker’s subsistence. The capitalist, though, is entitled contractually to the extra value created in the process of production. Simply put, the worker receives a lesser amount of exchange-value than the labor-power equivalent she puts into it, and the capitalist receives a greater amount of value than he advanced relative to wages and capital expenditures (Marx 1906).

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer at the Global Studies Association of North America 2008 for pointing out that class antagonism is a meaningless concept without the notion of exploitation.

Again, this differential, exploitative relation constitutes the essential moment of class formation, and thus of class antagonism. The class positions and places, fractions, segments, situations and categories—qualifying terms for intra- or extra-class groups (Poulantzas 1975; Wright 2005)—all take place in the context of the labor-capital relation, and it is on this basis that the Marxian project of explaining capital and class begins.

### **Class and Contemporary Perspectives on Globalization**

Robinson (2004) argues, “that the rise of transnational capital is the basis for economic globalization” which is “in turn . . . the material basis for the emergence of a single global society marked by transnational political and cultural processes and the global integration of social life” (p. 9).<sup>4</sup> While the nature of those economic and social processes that define globalization are developed more fully in the argument below, suffice it to say here that the primary basis for the materialist argument that Robinson (2004) makes relates to “the decentralization and functional integration around the world of vast chains of production and distribution” (p. 11).<sup>5</sup> Insofar as this is a central tendency of contemporary capitalist practice, it is thus “the globalization of the production process itself” that provides the basis for the transnationalization of classes (Robinson 2004: 10). The crux of the perspective that he has developed has primarily revolved around the formation of what he and Sklair (2001) call the Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC) (1996; 1998; 2002; 2003; 2004; 1999; 2001). However, Robinson (2004) does deal with the concept of class in general by stating that by class he means “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 social power struggles” (p. 37). Further, he deals with the working class specifically, in the context of globalization defined above:

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<sup>4</sup> The political aspect here refers specifically to the Transnational State Apparatus discussed below; the cultural, I assume, refers to something like Sklair’s (2001) culture-ideology of consumerism; and the social refers to global class formation (Robinson 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Production chains as defined by Dicken (1998) refer to “a transactionally linked sequence of functions in which each stage adds value to the process of production of goods or services” (emphasis added p.7). Thus, *production chains refer to concrete relations engendered in actual productive activities*. Moments within chains add value to the products being produced as the commodities move from point to point—from, for example, mine to factory, field to mill, desktop to billboard, or producer to distributor. *Commodity circuits on the other hand refer to the process of commodity exchange and production in the abstract*, or to Marx’s conceptualization of “the general formula for capital” discussed above.

The proletariat worldwide and subordinate groups more generally are clearly caught up in the process of transnational class formation. A transnational working class is increasingly a reality, a *class-in-itself*, meaning that it exists objectively.... But this emerging global proletariat is not yet a class-for-itself; that is, it has not necessarily developed a consciousness of itself as a class. (Robinson 2004: 43)

Beyond the positing of a global or transnational proletariat (of which there are differences conceptually, see below), Robinson (2004) has not yet developed a fuller account of what such a working class looks like. Although he states that, “workers who make the various component parts... in the assembly of a Ford car in a singular” transnational production chain that may “span whole continents... enjoy an internal relation to one another” (Robinson 2004: 43), a theoretical explication of this and other ways proletarian fractions are articulated into the global capitalist project is required.

Sklair (2001) is best known, regarding class theory, for his proposition that the Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC) is fractionated into four (often overlapping) groups: the corporate fraction, the state fraction, the technical fraction, and the consumerist fraction—discussed in detail below (Sklair 2001: 17). That having been said, his seminal work lacks a theory of class formation that is determinant and specific. That is, he never thoroughly specifies what makes a capitalist, transnational or not, a capitalist and a worker a worker. The closest approximation to such a statement is reflected in his treatment of Domhoff’s (1996), class dominance theory, which is:

Based on three methods of research: analysis of membership networks (the institutional connections between people and organizations), money flows (between people and institutions), and outputs of networks (which involves content analysis of texts). (Sklair 2001: 13)

What the research program yields or “sets out to prove,” according to Sklair (2001), is that there is indeed a “small social upper class” that is marked by “ownership and control of a corporate community... that is integrated with a policy-planning network and... has great political power” (p.13). Thus, by using class dominance theory, even in the absence of a strict theory of (antagonistic) class formation, Sklair (2001) is capable of identifying the segment of a social system—an identifiable elite—most responsible for its direction and maintenance at the highest levels.

Even though Sklair (2001) points out that the project undertaken by Domhoff (1996) relates specifically to American political, economic, and social power relations, he also insists that the same research program can be applied to transnational contexts insofar as similar sets of relationships are established in cross-border networks, money flows, and network outputs. The

thrust of his work, then, is the establishment of a theory of “a transnational dominant class” as it relates to the global system (Sklair 2001: 16).<sup>6</sup> With such a project in mind, Sklair (2001) makes four propositions: 1) that there is a “transnational capitalist class based on... transnational corporations that is more or less in control of the process of globalization,” 2) that “the TCC is beginning to act as a transnational dominant class in some spheres,” 3) that “the globalization of the capitalist system reproduces itself through the profit-driven culture-ideology of consumerism,” and 4) that the TCC “is working consciously to resolve two central crises:” the global “class polarization crisis,” and the global “ecological crisis” (2001: 5). Thus Sklair’s (2001) orientation, while not theoretically specifying the basis of class formation, does account for both class antagonism—the TCC is class conscious and hegemonic, and subordinate classes regardless of consciousness are subject to TCC domination—as well as the materially oriented nature of the TCC’s economic project, and the problematics that result from systemic reproduction that is expansionist in nature.

Robert Cox (1996a) states, “polarization exists both among and within countries” in the global system, and exhibits itself in a “social structure [that] takes the form of a three-part hierarchy” (p. 26). Keeping in mind that this theory of social structure is not a restatement of world-systems theory where the world is partitioned into core, periphery, and semi-periphery, but an approach to global systems where interdependence conditions hierarchal relations, not regional location, Cox (1996a) states that

at the top are people who are integrated into the global economy, including everyone... from the managers on down to the relatively privileged workers who serve... production and finance in reasonably stable jobs. The second level... includes those who serve the global economy in more precarious employment—an expanding category segmented by race, religion and sex as a result of the “restructuring” of production... The bottom level consists of superfluous labor—those excluded from the global economy...; the objects of global poverty relief and riot control. (1996a: 26)

Here, relative articulation into the global economy conditions social stratification, but the strata, specifically the first, can be further broken down in the context of class: “as a consequence of international production, it becomes increasingly pertinent to think in terms of a global class structure alongside or

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<sup>6</sup> Global system theory for Sklair is centered “on the concept of transnational practices, practices that cross state borders but do not originate with state agencies or state actors. Analytically, they operate [in] the economic, political, and cultural-ideological [spheres]. The whole is what is meant by the global system” (2001: 4). Proponents of this school of thought include Robinson and Harris (2000).

super imposed upon national class structures” (Cox 1996b: 110). From this perspective, then, transnational classes interact with and reconfigure national class relations on the basis of conditions marked by production itself.

While Embong (2000), discussed below, highlights some differences between Cox and Sklair’s conception of the top of the transnational class hierarchy, the transnational managerial class—understood as those who occupy institutional positions in organizations like the OECD, World Bank and IMF, as well as the primary agents of the TNC (Cox 1996b)—and the transnational capitalist class—analytically viewed as the four fractions comprising the corporate, state technical, and consumerist elements of the global dominant class (Sklair 2001)—can both be viewed as analogs of the same core idea. However, for Cox, the lower rungs of the transnational managerial class occupy a portion of the “middle strata” that also include workers and bureaucrats who operate within the context of the global economy. Cox’s (1996a; 1996b) perspective is thus a bit more differentiated relative to middle and working class groups in the global system, and provides some nuance to class hierarchy in that realm, but Sklair’s (2001) perspective provides more specificity relative to the contours of the upper echelons of the global class structure. Clearly, a perspective that is capable of both is called for.

Embong (2000) correctly states that “Class is one of the most widely used and most thoroughly contested concepts in the social sciences” (p. 989), as exhibited in the varieties of class and social stratification analysis discussed here. But as Embong also states, it “has been conspicuously absent in recent post-structuralist, post-Marxist and state-centered approaches emerging in historical and sociological scholarship” (p. 989). He points out that class analysis in its traditional forms has been understandably preoccupied with “national societies” and the “history, politics, and culture” of particular societies considered internal to nation-states (p. 990). Such an orientation is problematic, especially under current conditions of globalization and transnational production flows. Thus Embong (2000) takes as his starting point “production relations and the global system” in his analysis of transnational class relations (p. 990).

The core of his perspective is based on “three interrelated issues: (1) globalization and the reconfiguration of class relations; (2) emerging class structure and the dominant class; and (3) subordinate groups *vis a vis* the dominant class” (Embong 2000: 991). At the center of these forces is the transnational corporation. As these firms penetrate different regions and come to be viewed as companies without countries that are “exerting influence upon members of the domestic classes,” they “[reconfigure] class relations transnationally”

(Embong 2000: 992). Following Cox (1996b) and Sklair (1991), Embong (2000) locates a segment of the capitalist class in a transnational formation, but cautions that Cox (1996b) and Sklair (1991) tend to “overwork their analytical tools” (Embong 2000: 993). He contends that their perspectives tend to be “too broad and amorphous” as a result of their lumping in of transnational managers and capitalists, which he regards as too inclusive of diverse groups (Embong 2000: 993). Consequently, Embong (2000) advocates the differentiation of transnationally dominant groups into two analytically distinct “concepts—the transnational capitalist class and the transnational managerial class” (p. 994). Thus the dominant transnational class can be fractionated into “bosses” at the top of the hierarchy, and managers in the “lower fractions” (p. 994).

As regards the subordinate groups relative to the transnational dominant class, “the key question concerns the criteria for analyzing the relationship between the TNCs and the domestic classes” (Embong 2000: 997). Specifically, this involves those workers engaged directly with TNCs and “those on the periphery” of transnational production that engage in the reproduction of conditions necessary to the operation of TNC’s systems (Embong 2000: 997). It also concerns the Coxian hierarchy of “subordinate groups [that] (1) consist of the new middle stratum; (2) established (unionized and non established (non-unionized) workers; and (3) the peasantry and the marginals” (Embong 2000: 998; Cox 1996). However, Embong cautions that workers, even in conditions where transnational migration has occurred, “though standing on the same side of the production relation . . . , are not integrated with one another” (2000: 998). The subjective side of class formation remains paramount to Embong (2000), as does the theoretical primacy of nation-state centric class-life. Therefore, while it is possible that there exists a transnational dominant class, from Embong’s (2000) perspective, the subordinate classes remain decidedly national in most contexts.

That said, the materially contingent basis of class formation still suggests that the global proletariat “exists objectively” and constitutes “a class-in-itself” (Robinson 2004: 43) even if the nation-state remains a significant source of social structuration (Giddens 1986). The same social forces that reflexively constitute the agents and actors responsible for capitalist projects of globalization and dominant class formation—the Transnational Capitalist Class itself, Transnational Corporations, the Transnational State Apparatus (discussed below) (Sklair 2001; Robinson 2004; Dicken 1998)—have an effect, no matter how differential and disparate across regions, on the subordinate class in a global context. Thus a materialist theory that is capable of balancing the emergent

nature of global proletarian class formation highlighted by Robinson (2004) with the problematics of intra-class hierarchy indicated by Cox (1996a), and the relation of the TCC (Sklair 2001) and the TNC to subordinate classes (Embong 2000) is necessary. Fortunately, the Marxian toolkit enables us to begin to do just that.

### Global Social Formations and The Global Proletariat

Keeping in mind Marx's perspective on class formation—that capital is a mode of production characterized by the realization of commodities, that commodity production itself is the basis for antagonistic class relations, that the labor-capital relation is exploitative, and that the circuits of production in which capital is engaged fully condition “the specific social relations determined by [them]” (1992 [1893]: 142)—we can begin to (re)conceive of class on a global scale. Indeed, globalization itself (conceptually and practically) may be considered the internationalization of the productive circuit of capital (Dicken 1998; Robinson 2004; Sklair 1999). Although the moments M, C, and C',M', of the circuits of capital have been internationalized to a greater or lesser degree throughout the history of capitalist social relations in the forms of trade and financial flows across borders the moment, P, that is, production itself, has only recently undergone internationalization as a consequence of changed communications and transportation technologies, and changed juridical conditions in the world economy. Thus production “is increasingly decentralized and globally dispersed” (Robinson 2004: 39).

Before moving on to the specific ways the world wide proletariat is articulated into the global system, a few comments on the nature of the TCC as well as Transnational Corporations (TNCs) (Sklair 2001), and the Transnational State Apparatus (TNS)(Robinson 2004) are necessary, as these are the social formations that constitute the structural and institutional forms in which the global proletariat exists. First, as Sklair asserts, “a transnational capitalist class based on the transnational corporation is emerging that is more or less in control of the processes of globalization [and] is beginning to act as a transnational dominant class in some spheres” (2001: 5). To be clear, a TNC “is a firm which has the *power to co-ordinate and control operations in more than one country* [emphases added], even if it does not own them” (Dicken 1998: 177). Toward that end, multiple levels of coordination are necessary in multiple economic, ideological, and political realms—hence, the fractions of the TCC.

Members of the TCC are fractionated into four, often overlapping, groups: the corporate fraction, the state fraction, the technical fraction, and the con-

sumerist fraction (Sklair 2001: 17). The first fraction includes mainly what Sklair terms “TNC executives and their local affiliates” (p. 17); the second is composed of both those politicians responsible for legislation that enables transnational economic processes, and the “lobbyists” that advocate for TNCs at state levels; the third fraction, some members of which I dispute are *materially* capitalist though they certainly are *agentially*, is composed of individuals responsible for the coordination of transnational production processes and the nuts and bolts operation of TNCs; and the fourth consists of “merchants and the media,” or those most responsible for the production and reproduction of the culture-ideology of consumerism, that is, advertisers, and commodity distributors, the Madison Avenues *and* Wal-Marts of the world.

The activities of these fractions embodied in TNCs account for “around two-thirds of world exports of goods and services” and though the figures are difficult to establish with certainty, approximately “one-third of total world trade is intra-firm” (Dicken 2007: 38). That it is possible for TNCs to operate across borders either internally (in an intra-firm capacity) or through networks of local affiliates at such startling magnitudes speaks volumes about the material basis for claims about globalization and the existence of a global system. But the existence of TNCs and the TCC class fractions that guide their operation is not enough of an indicator for the expansive, systemic nature of global processes. To complete the social formation (global society) a set of legal, ideological, institutional, and legitimizing factors that make the transnational operations of capital possible—that is, a Transnational State (TNS)—is required:

This TNS apparatus is an emerging network that comprises transformed and externally integrated national states, together with the supranational economic and political forums [i.e., WTO, OECD, the EU, ASEAN, etc.], and has not yet acquired any centralized institutional form. (Robinson 2004: 88)

It is in this context that the state fraction of the TCC operates, both within and between nation-states, by mediating political and social processes that enable the transnationalization of economic activity. It is important to note, however, that this is not conceptually used to suggest that the end of the nation-state is upon us, as some “hyper-globalization” (Dicken 2007) theorists suggest. The nation-state “is being transformed and absorbed into the larger structure of a [nascent] TNS” and remains an integral part of global social formations (Robinson 2004: 88). Yet, however amorphous the TNS appears and however multivariate its reach is, it does constitute an important tool for the management of global contradictions that arise both between capital’s fractions (transnational or otherwise) and between capital and labor.

To sum up, the TNC is the primary institutional form through which transnational commodity circuits are engaged. The TNC thus provides the material basis for the existence of the TCC and its subordinate counterpart, the global working class.<sup>7</sup> As the global system is constructed in and through these actors, contradictions arising from their activities require a mediating force for their management: the TNS. Insofar as there is a material basis for these actors, transnational corporations, transnational classes, and a transnational state, there is a basis for transnational social formations, or transnational society. However, the global working class remains an under-explained and under-investigated class beyond the circuits oriented approach and transnational labor flows.

### **The Labor-Capital Relation and the Global Proletariat: Simple Reproduction**

Digging deeper into the circuits approach employed by Marx in *Capital: Volume II*, where capital is further broken down into component parts—variable and constant capital—reveals more clearly the nature of the labor-capital relation on a global scale. Variable capital (as value) “considered in its material aspect . . . consists of self-acting labor-power itself, i.e. of living labor set in motion by this capital value” (Marx 1992 [1893]: 472). In the global system, variable capital is constituted transnationally; variable capital confronts the worker as something literally foreign, but at once familiar. It does not matter that the wages paid to a worker derive from capital from a different geographic region than the one in which the worker is employed—the market in which the two parties make contracts remains a market, though it now transcends national boundaries. It also does not matter that the worker knows or does not know the national source of wages (transformed variable capital): the relation itself remains transnational even if it is not apparent to one of the parties. In many cases, however, the relation will be known to be transnational by both parties. In this case, the class relation is clearly transnational—as the potential for class antagonism.

The case of constant capital is a bit more complex. This form of capital (as value) is defined as “the value of all of the means of production applied to production in this branch. It breaks down in turn into *fixed* capital: machines, instruments of labor, buildings . . . etc.; and *circulating* constant capital: materials of production, such as raw and ancillary materials, semi-finished goods,

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<sup>7</sup> Keep in mind the global working class from my perspective includes those workers who are transnational in nature as well as those workers who exist in only-local contexts. Most proletarians, with rare exception are more or less articulated into the global capitalist system, and thus constitute global capital's subordinate counterpart.

etc.” (Marx 1992 [1893]: 472). Constant circulating capital has been international in nature for a good amount of time, as the history of world trade and imperialism attest. So too have certain forms of fixed capital, but only insofar as the objects can be traded as commodities—the objects become fixed (and really) only (capital) through their employment in the process of production. In a global system, however, the constant capital in both forms is transnational. In the case of constant circulating capital, the production process that uses (consumes) this form of capital operates across borders but within firms: each ancillary, raw, or semi-finished object proceeds from one geographic point to another within the TNC or its subsidiaries until they are used up in the production of commodities. Thus the fixed capital utilized to receive and process the circulating capital is employed transnationally as well, which forms the basis of the capitalist project of globalization, as so many commentators have noted (Cox 1996b; Dicken 1998; Ietto-Gillies 2002; Robinson 1996; Sklair 2001).

The employment of fixed and circulating constant capital in the process of production also confronts workers worldwide as something that is at once foreign and familiar. This time, however, the social origins of the objects and therefore their transnationality may be clearer: the fact that the circulating capital is stamped literally and figuratively with the cultural and geographic artifacts that may identify them as foreign indicates to the worker that the process of production in which she is engaged is part of a global chain. The character of the fixed capital also has a direct effect on the worker. When the completion of the circuit (the creation of a commodity for exchange) is dependent upon the expenditure of labor-power cooperatively and cumulatively in multiple geographic locations, and thus multiple fixed capital inputs, and utilizes circulating constant capital from as many or more geographic locations as the fixed capital inputs derive, the only factor of production remaining that can be considered national is the worker herself. However, given the fact that the variable capital is transnational, and the constant capital is transnational, the *relations of production*—regardless of the nationality or cultural affinity of the worker—are *transnational as well*.

As suggested above, not all workers in the global system are transnational in terms of their activities, even though generalized class antagonism itself is constituted on a global scale. But insofar as some are or are not transnational, and insofar as their activities vary in location and content, differentiation among workers within the global working class is possible. Proletarian class-life even in national contexts is heterogeneous; various strata, depending on activities and regions, that is, whether workers produce and exist in urban or rural, industrial or agricultural, service or manufacturing contexts can be observed historically in all societies organized on the basis of commodity production.

Even under national conditions where the cultural character of the people is relatively definite (19th Century Germany for example), the variance in activities and work situations—the ways in which the worker confronts capital on a day-to-day basis—will be significant. Whether a worker resides at the top of the aristocracy of labor (Hobsbawm 1999) or at the bottom of the global pool of proletarian marginals (Cox 1996b), the labor-capital relation conceptually and materially ensures that the worker remains a worker.

Historically, intra-class differentiation is generally made on the basis of occupational engagement or authority relations, or on the basis of the material-mental labor divide (Braverman 1998 [1974]; Cox 1996b; Hardt and Negri 2001; Mallet 1975; Poulantzas 1975; Wright 1989; Wright 2005). However, given the scope of global relations of production, and the amount of variance in the possible activities in which workers may confront capital in its various forms, the use of 1) physical mobility relative to nation-states and regions, and 2) the scope of workers' labor-power expenditure relative to the circuits in which they are engaged, produces more manageable, inclusive, and conceptually flexible fractional determinations (see Typology). This approach also allows for objective determination of the class relation in the global system. Even though the agential dimension of class is important, and the fact that some workers associate with and work on behalf of capitalist class interests (transnational or otherwise) is problematic, this perspective allows us to eschew, at least momentarily, the ideologically centered conceptions of class that have come to dominate sociological conversations about the topic in general. The labor-capital relation is our starting point—even if the quality of life certain workers enjoy sets them apart from their less fortunate counterparts. The places and ways in which the relation is experienced—across or within national boundaries, and within or outside transnational production chains—are our modes of conveyance.

## The Fractions

The nexus of the mobility/labor-power expenditure matrix results here in six fractions: the dynamic-global, the static-global, and the diasporic-global, which form the transnational fractions of the global proletariat; and the dynamic-local, the static-local, and the diasporic-local, forming the local or national fractions of the global proletariat. The term, *fraction*, itself could be substituted for segment, portion, component, etc., but it conveys better—as in its mathematical usage—the notion that a fraction is both merely a portion of a whole and integral to the whole itself. Fractions of the global working class can be considered individually in an analytical manner, but it is important to keep in mind that each relates to one another in a global productive division of labor.

## The Dynamic-Global Fraction

The first fraction, moving from the global to the local, and from the mobile to the fixed (immobile) is the dynamic-global fraction. This fraction of the global working class is composed of *workers whose productive activities and products are geographically diffuse relative to firms and nation-states*. For these mobile workers, labor-power is expended at multiple points in a given transnational production chain. Whether they cross borders in order to set up, maintain, or merely sell products related to information technology (or food and beverage delivery systems, or widget production, or concrete), or they act in a flexibly mobile capacity as mid-level managers who regulate the expenditure of labor-power of others, they work on behalf of “key actors who are accumulating rights and powers to cross those borders” (Sassen 2005: 525): namely, transnational corporations. As such, many of these workers function at the highest echelons of the class hierarchy not only in terms of compensation for their labor-power, but in terms of the rights they enjoy relative to nation-states. However, some workers in this group, such as journalists, airline workers, international aid workers, military contractors, and workers for private transportation firms in active martial contexts like Iraq enjoy relatively lower rates of compensation, though they still have access to more rights relative to states. Members of the diasporic-global fraction discussed below cross borders in pursuit of compensation as well, but they rarely do so with legitimacy relative to nation-states (e.g., they lack documentation as citizens or are deemed temporary guest workers), and therefore, their security relative to firms is tenuous at best.<sup>8</sup> The value-added activities in which members of dynamic-global fraction engage occur physically across borders and within firms or their subsidiaries, or with firms’ global/transnational customers. This fraction of the global proletariat is a transnational fraction: in the simplest formulation, the worker flexibly moves to the point of production.

Members of the dynamic-global fraction may more closely affiliate with the interests of transnational capital as a function of the types of labor-power they expend, the ideological imperatives in which their work is ensconced, and the rates of compensation they enjoy. Indeed, many members of this fraction are workers considered by Sklair (2001) to be members of the technical fraction of the TCC; that is, capitalist in-themselves. Regardless of the agential and subjective orientations of workers in this fraction, the objective conditions of their activities firmly place them in the camp of labor. One need only look to the recent Screen Writers’ Guild strike (workers I consider to be members of the next fraction, the static-global fraction) to note the potential for

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to imply that the security of dynamic-global workers is absolute. All workers, highly skilled and compensated or not are disposable in the end.

combinatory solidarity among workers at the higher levels of the global division of labor against the demands of transnational capital when the correlation of forces reveals open class antagonism. The contradictory nature of this fraction's social position should not prevent us from seeing the labor-capital relation in which they are engaged. The dynamic-global fraction is working class in-itself, even if it is capitalist in orientation for-itself.

### **The Static-Global Fraction**

The static-global fraction is composed of workers whose productive activities are geographically fixed relative to nation-states, but whose products are geographically diffuse relative to firms. Labor-power is expended by stationary workers at single points in a transnational production chain in coordination with workers at other points in that transnational production chain. Workers in this fraction range from Skype phone designers who pass their preliminary sketches, computer-aided drawings, and product prototypes back and forth between Shanghai and London on a 24-hour production cycle, to the Shanghai factory workers who manufacture the phones and install "Qualcomm chipsets" made in California as well as software written in Israel (Gardiner 2008: 138). Other workers in this fraction who may be engaged in global production chains are call center workers who, as communicated to me personally by a worker in India on a recent occasion, communicate with customers from the US, the UK, Australia, etc., as the workday moves from time zone to time zone, and consequently culture to culture on a 24-hour cycle. Still other workers engaged in this fraction are automobile assembly line workers, local transportation workers, Screen Writers' Guild members, and, in many cases, food service workers. The value-added activities in which members of this fraction engage occur within borders individually, but across borders collectively through the functional integration of activities within firms or with firm's customers. This fraction is transnational as well: the product successively moves to the worker at different points of transnational production chains.

The static-global fraction ranges in rates of compensation from the highest echelons of the global proletariat, to the lowest depending upon geography, skill, and location in the production chain (design, manufacturing, distribution, etc.). Because of this variation, the subjective class identification of members in this fraction will show a great degree of diversity as well. However, as with the dynamic-global fraction, the relation of these workers to the transnational corporations with which they engage as workers and class adversaries remains a labor-capital relation. Class antagonism may most acutely be transnationalized in this fraction: clearly, workers know that the geographic reach of their products is variable, and in some sectors more often than not, trans-

national. Workers also know that they often cannot afford the products they produce (and that even if they could, the necessary infrastructure for full consumption—as in the case of the Skype phone perhaps—may not be in place). It is in this way that alienation itself is transnationalized: the worker's detachment from her product spiritually and physically transcends political boundaries.

There are no real differences in a worker who knows that only certain populations/ consumers will be able to enjoy their products locally and workers who know that the product can only be enjoyed on a global basis. The Chinese worker making a particular type of product knows full well that the use-value that her labor embodies will likely remain out of her reach whether it is used in Shanghai or New York. Indeed, that is the self-fulfilling, always-unfolding nature of the culture-ideology of consumerism (Sklair 2001): create and maintain desire even when its fulfillment is impossible (that is the necessary, but not final, link to the world that the static fractions discussed below maintain relative to the global economy). Transnational relations of production and distribution form an ontological whole for workers in this fraction and others.

### **The Diasporic-Global Fraction**

The diasporic-global fraction is composed of workers whose productive activities are geographically diffuse as a consequence of cross-border migration, and whose products may or may not be geographically diffuse relative to firms and nation-states. In general this fraction is the population that Kennedy and Roudometof (2002) have in mind when they claim that “the strong leaning of the literature has been directed towards research mainly concerned with migrants, [and] diasporas” when the notion of transnational subordinate classes is pursued (Kennedy and Roudometof 2002: 2). Here, labor-power is expended by workers in multiple geographic and productive contexts because of some inducement to relocate more or less permanently. Like the dynamic-global fraction above, the activity of this fraction is characterized by cross-border movement, but unlike the dynamic-global fraction, diasporic-global workers do so without the full legal rights or flexibility afforded the former.<sup>9</sup> The legal illegitimacy or pseudo-legitimacy denoted by the lack of official or permanent documentation for many workers in this fraction, combined with capital's tendency to exploit at the lowest possible wage rate, and capital's

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<sup>9</sup> I would like to thank Jerry Harris for pointing out that *legal* immigration itself may fall within the realm of diasporic-global fractional activity. Limited legal rights and temporary statuses constitute qualitatively different subject-state relations than do full rights and/ or citizenship.

tendency to exploit racial and cultural divisions, creates class antagonism in transnational and national contexts, as well as inter-fractional conflicts—as the split labor market suggests (Bonacich 1972).

Having said this, the value-added activities in which members of this fraction engage occur despite the borders of nation-states that exist as containers of people (and remittances home), and the cultural and racial conflicts present in the production relation and broader social relations in general. Workers in this fraction engage in activities that range from agricultural work, assembly line work, and domestic labor, to food preparation, transportation, and work in other service sectors. While workers in this fraction are often marginalized economically and socially, there remains considerable variance in fractional experience relative to wages and other factors pertaining to the labor-capital relation. But in terms of the global reserve army of labor, the conditions endured by workers in transnational contexts that range from North Africa-Europe, Latin America-United States, Palestine-Israel, and Central Africa-South Africa to name a few, are often at the extremes of human capacity. The actual act of border crossing may be among the most dangerous undertakings in which members of this fraction engage.

Even when nation-states provide for legitimate (legal) means of immigration into a regional economy, as in the case of Singapore relative to (especially) Thai workers, states “selectively choose the types and nationalities of workers that are allowed entry” (Kong 2007: 82). Just as significantly, “the employment [passes immigrants] hold determine the type, terms and length of employment, marking them distinctively as temporary foreign workers” (Kong 2007: 82). Where a worker is from in the global system thus conditions what that worker is legitimately capable of doing; determines the fractional location of work itself, and the legality or pseudo-legality of the worker’s presence in a given region.

However, the types of communities created by workers in this fraction are also significant social formations that suggest the newness of the global moment, as Kennedy and Roudometof (2002) suggest:

In our global age communities have become liberated from dependence upon direct interpersonal relations and, like cultures, from the need to operate primarily within the limits set by particular physical locations. Locality is no longer the only or even primary vehicle for sustaining community. The subversion of physical locality... is carried out by the migration of people and cultures across borders. (2002: 13)

To this it may be added, “the subversion physical locality” is often carried out in the context of the labor-capital relation. For whatever reason, in the case of this transnational working class fraction, the worker moves to the point of production.

### The Dynamic-Local Fraction

The dynamic-local fraction, like the other remaining fractions in this perspective can be perceived as belonging to *primarily* nation-state contexts, but because workers are still more or less articulated into the global economy in other way—through the culture-ideology of consumerism (Sklair 2001)—they remain part of the greater, global proletariat. The members of this fraction are *workers whose productive activities and products are geographically diffuse relative to firms within nation-states*. Here, labor-power is expended by mobile workers at multiple points in a given *national* production chain. The sectoral activities in which members of this fraction engage are similar to the transnational fractional analog, the dynamic-global fraction. Sales people, managers, Teamsters, engineers, rail workers, doctors, and other professionals are required to be flexibly mobile in the conduct of their working lives. The value-added activities in which members of this fraction engage occur physically within borders and within firms or their subsidiaries, or with firms' local/national customers. Here the worker flexibly moves to the point of production within national/local contexts.

Like the dynamic-global fraction, dynamic-local workers may be tied agentially to the capitalist class, though their activities locate their objective social relations on the side of labor. The gambit of class-life experiences is observable in this fraction, from the purely proletarian trucker who, consequently, represents the aristocracy of labor in his capacity of union member, to the proto-bourgeois chemical engineer. While it would be tempting to relegate members of this fraction to regions or states that are only poorly articulated into the global capitalist project—which, to be sure, is a condition that needs exploration—or to previous moments in the development of the advanced capitalist economies of the north, the dynamic-local fraction remains a vibrant subset of the global proletariat. In either case, the culture-ideology of consumerism links the dynamic-local fraction to broader market contexts, as does their engagement commercially with segments of transnational capital (and labor).

### The Static-Local Fraction

The static-local fraction is composed of *workers whose productive activities and products are geographically fixed relative to firms and nation-states*. Any of the manufacturing, service, mental/ manual labor, professional or unskilled activities that occur within the context of local chains of production constitute the relations in which members of this fraction work. Labor-power is expended by stationary workers at single points in national production chains and in single

geographic contexts. This does not preclude the extraction of raw materials for trade on international markets *per se*, nor does it preclude the export of finished goods (intended for domestic consumption) as a *secondary* outcome of production. But it does preclude the practice of “export promotion” or “sacrificing production for domestic consumption and basic needs in favor of earning foreign exchange” (Cox 1996a: 22). Such activities are indicative nominally or at least nascently of a static-global fractional orientation. The value-added activities in which members of this fraction engage occur within borders for local firms. In general, the product may successively move to the worker within a local context.

For this fraction, too, it is tempting to search for its existence only in peripheral or poorly articulated national contexts—if only because of the global nature of global capital, and the expanded role of transnational forces of production (Sklair 1999) and distribution worldwide. To be sure, a localized circuit, combined with the static nature of the worker engaged in it, denotes a condition of national class membership, and indicates an amount of closure economically and socially that would be difficult to find let alone sustain in the Global North (or increasingly South). Still, empirical examples of members of this fraction can be derived from multiple national and labor contexts; even within the most globalized societies of the Global North some industries that exist within only one national circuit may be found, though they are increasingly rare. One example that comes to mind is that of local organic foodstuffs. However, the transnationality of the laborer also conditions the socio-cultural content of the commodity, so the possible and likely employment of migrant labor (diasporic-global workers) complicates the identification of such circuits as purely local.

### **The Diasporic-Local Fraction**

Finally, the diasporic-local fraction is composed of *workers whose productive activities and products are geographically diffuse relative to the nation-state*. Labor-power is expended by workers in multiple geographic and productive contexts because of some inducement to relocate within national boundaries. The examples that jump immediately to mind are the workers displaced by the recent earthquake in the Chinese, Sichuan province, farm workers displaced by the massive economic and environmental dislocations associated with the Great Depression, and internal diaspora generated by Hurricane Katrina. While there may be a strong tendency to associate the origination of this fraction with environmental catastrophe because of the examples just given, capital's flight from a given region, as in the case of the North American Rust Belt,

also induces workers to relocate (*en masse* on occasion), as does generalized systemic instability.

Obsolescent capitalism (Amin 2003) as it is practiced in local contexts destroys physical communities and infrastructure as it abandons once profitable enterprises in one region for others elsewhere. In the process, workers are forced to relocate—in this case, within a given nation-state. While members of this fraction may derive from any segment of the working class relative to compensation and skill, those on the margins of the productive relation are most often impacted by such dislocations. What is problematic (again) about the notion of purely localized or national fractional contexts is the fact that the motivation for capital's flight may be location specific: global impacts on local life complicate the determination of regional cause and effect materially and conceptually. Whatever the cause of disruptions and inducements to relocate, the value-added activities in which members of this fraction engage occur within borders, and may or may not occur within the confines of firms. In this case, the worker moves to national points of production.

### **Conclusion: The Fractions and Directions for Future Research**

In sum, the fractions of the global working class are divided into two broad segments: transnational fractions, including the dynamic-global, the static-global, and the diasporic-global; and national or local fractions, including the dynamic-local, the static-local, and the diasporic-local. Fractional determinations are based first, on workers' physical mobility relative to nation-states and regions, and second, on the geographic scope of workers' labor-power expenditure relative to the circuits in which they are engaged. By using a fractionated perspective of the global proletariat we can continue to make meaningful the concept of class relative to commodity production regardless of (but respectful of, in many senses) the overwhelming occupational, cultural, and social complexity that conditions the labor-capital relation in the global era. This paper approaches class from an objective standpoint, as the reliance on commodity production as the centerpiece of class theory suggests, and in so doing disposes temporarily of the subjective and ideological determinations that cloud the understanding of class-life.

As Robinson (2002) suggests, I have striven to “break with nation-state centered analysis” and understand global political economy and its impact on class formation based not on “territory but on transnational social groups” (p. 1047). This paper is an attempt to make sense theoretically of the complexity that such a project implies. Insofar as the production process is transnationalized, class antagonism is transnationalized. Our investigations of these

relations should reflect explications that keep this in mind. I want to make clear the importance of regarding the abstractions I have designated “proletarian fractions” as such—that is, as abstractions. Although I provide a typology below, I do not want to suggest to the reader that I regard the fractions as ideal-types, or that this is the *only* way to honor the attempt to perform a sociology that moves “from a territorial to a social cartography” (Robinson 2002). The typology merely represents a compact and pseudo-graphical means of communicating my perspective. I hope that I have clearly demonstrated that the relations I have discussed are actually-existing relations that are historically located. The nexus of the labor-capital relation and the spatial-productive relation seemed to me to be an efficient means of reconceptualizing class analysis relative to globalization.

A conscious effort to avoid the material-immaterial/mental-manual labor divide so often invoked to determine the differential nature of working class groups and their hierarchal relationships (Braverman 1998 [1974]; Hardt and Negri 2001; Hardt and Negri 2004; Mallet 1975; Wright 2005) also informed my decision to use the geo-spatial reach of workers’ physical activities and their embodied labor-power for fractional determination. The material-immaterial/mental-manual divide implicitly suggests (perhaps unintentionally) that those who engage in physical and repetitive labor are less intellectually inclined, when in fact most workers are “the antithesis of Ford’s mindless automaton” (Peña 1997: 7). Workers as individual human beings and as a class, regardless of their fractional position or their occupational activities, tend to be pretty complex animals. This approach allows for a reconsideration of the proletariat as a “universal class” (Gouldner 2001), even if it is heterogeneous, diffuse, and only extant in-itself.

While the newness of globalizing processes requires a respecification of what class means under the conditions of contemporary capitalist social practices, and thus suggests the necessity of an expanded or “new” approach to class analysis, I would like to emphasize the idea that a spatial-productive perspective on class resides at the very core of class as a concept. Take for example the etymology of the term, *bourgeoisie*, meaning literally, “one who lives in town” or “one who lives in a *burg*.”<sup>10</sup> The spatial relation of those in the towns to those in the country (as well as those at the center of power) conditioned class formation in early capitalist contexts. In contemporary circumstances, “time-space convergence,” and geographic divisions of labor (Dicken

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Marx’s and Engels’ discussion of the feudal origins of bourgeois society in the *Manifesto* (1992 [1848]).

1998) continue to alter the appearances of the labor-capital relation and the way class is experienced in the global system.

As for the productive aspect of class as a concept (and a social practice) it is important to remember that the proletariat could initially (and substantially still) be identified as that class who, "having no wealth in property [only serves] the state by *producing* offspring" (New Oxford American Dictionary 2005, emphasis added). Global chains of production indicate the transnationalization of workers' "offspring" through the objectification of labor-power in incremental and spatially divergent situations across borders; global cross-border labor-flows indicate the transnationalization of social actors' offspring—proletarians themselves. Fractions based on spatial-productive relations should then be seen not as the introduction of new theoretical conditions for class analysis, but as the extension of concepts central to class itself into new global contexts.

By identifying the global fractions of the working class, potentials for inter- or intra-fractional solidarity in transnational or broader regional contexts can be theoretically brought to the fore. Understanding the nature of inter- and intra-fractional conflict is possible as well, for, as I have so far avoided, the subjective and ideologically induced experiences of the labor-capital relation do matter. Convincing workers at the highest levels of the dynamic-global fraction that they are indeed members of a transnational fraction of the global working class, and that their class allegiance should shift on such an objective basis is clearly a difficult or impossible (utopian) task to propose. But, as the Screen Writers' strike demonstrated, well-compensated workers normally affiliated with segments of the bourgeoisie can be induced to see and react to the labor-capital relation when the class contradictions become too apparent for capital to manage with ideology. In that case, the most active segment of the static-global fraction arguably represented the top of the hierarchy. As the capitalist project unfolds, further contradictions will be exposed at all levels of class-life.

As a friend gently reminded me "property [often] has a phenotype" and a gender, and relations of production are experienced "around that phenotypical, [gendered] and epidermal aspect of social life."<sup>11</sup> The ways in which race, culture, and gender intersect with class-fractional experiences need to be explored as well. Class analysis has to, as Cox (2003) makes clear, "embrace comprehensively the various identities—ethnic, religious, gender, etc.—manifested by those groups that have initiated pockets of resistance" (Cox 2003: 85). By fractionating the global proletariat conceptually, we may be able to better manage our understanding of the way non-class social relations act

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<sup>11</sup> Thanks to Manuel Espinosa for highlighting the cultural and racial dimensions of class-life.

upon individuals and collectivities under the influence of globalization. Having said this, I hope that class as a concept can be reinvigorated in its own right as a means of self-identification.

While I am hesitant to ascribe a fixed hierarchical set of relations to global working class fractions, we must ask, on what basis does one fraction have hegemony over another? If the criterion is numerical, political, or agential the structure of the hierarchy changes. In terms of the current configuration, our answer to the question of hierarchy would focus on the agential aspects: the dynamic-global fraction is partially articulated into the TCC itself, and clearly enjoys a great degree of autonomy and direction over the production process as regards their own labor and the labor of others. In that respect, the global-dynamic fraction resides at the top of the social structure of the global working class. If we assess the relative position of one fraction over another in terms of potentials (relative to the *current* trajectory of the global system), we must look to the potentially numerically dominant group, the static-global fraction. If indeed the static-global fraction (or even segments of the fraction) is capable of transnational organization by sector, by industry, or by region, their potential for intra-class hegemony (and thereby systemic counterhegemony) locates them at the top of the global proletarian hierarchy. If, however, the diasporic-global fraction can effectively organize in transnational contexts and advance the causes of labor mobility and full human rights for migrants, the hierarchy shifts in their favor. By advancing the cause of labor transnationally for those with historically the least rights and the least stability in relation to capital, the diasporic-global fraction may function as a vanguard for the global proletariat, thus placing them politically and agentially at the top of the global working class social structure.

Further still, the instability of the global capitalist system may cause ruptures within and between fractions that force us to rethink the possibility of global classes in general. While it is perhaps not possible to return to conditions where the nation-state is the final juridical, economic, and social container, *ala* the inter-war period of the twentieth century, the potential for inter-regional conflicts and/or collusion to undermine global integration remains. Thus, national class fractions, regional class fractions, or even national and regional *classes* may socially insinuate themselves once again into *international* relations and more-local-than-global contexts.

Of course, all of these potentials rest upon the ability of working-class formations to assert themselves to gain some ratio of class consciousness and attain a for-itself orientation at least partially. Absent such a "reawakening," the long interregnum of generalized conscious and effective working class activity in the global system will continue.

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Typology of Global Proletarian Fractions

Global Proletarian Fractions	Attributes	Possible Empirical Examples	Co-Extensive Social Formations
Dynamic-Global	<p><i>Workers whose productive activities and products are geographically diffuse relative to firms and nation-states: labor-power is expended by mobile workers at multiple points in a given transnational production chain. The value-added activities in which members of this fraction engage occur physically across borders and within firms or their subsidiaries, or with firms' global/transnational customers. [The worker flexibly moves to the point of production.]</i></p>	<p>Project coordinators, IT professionals, sales people, mid-level 'management,' journalists, airline employees</p>	<p>Transnational Corporations; Culture-Ideology of Consumerism; Transnational State Apparatus; Transnational Capitalist Class</p>
Static-Global	<p><i>Workers whose productive activities are geographically fixed relative to nation-states, but whose products are geographically diffuse relative to firms: labor-power is expended by stationary workers at single points in a transnational production chain in coordination with workers at other points in that transnational production chain. The value-added activities in which members of this fraction engage occur within borders individually, but across borders collectively through the functional integration of activities within firms or with firm's customers. [The product successively moves to the worker.]</i></p>	<p>Call center workers, Screen Writers' Guild members, automobile assembly line workers, transportation workers, service workers</p>	
Diasporic-Global	<p><i>Workers whose productive activities are geographically diffuse as a consequence of cross-border migration, and whose products may or may not be geographically diffuse relative to firms and nation-states: labor-power is expended by workers in multiple geographic and productive contexts because of some inducement to relocate more or less permanently. The value-added activities in which members of this fraction engage occur despite the borders of nation-states that exist as containers of people (and remittances home). [The worker moves to the point of production.]</i></p>	<p>Farm workers, assembly line workers, domestic laborers, service workers</p>	

## Typology of Global Proletarian Fractions Continued

Global Proletarian Fractions	Attributes	Possible Empirical Examples	Co-Extensive Social Formations
Dynamic-Local	<i>Workers whose productive activities and products are geographically diffuse relative to firms within nation-states:</i> labor-power is expended by mobile workers at multiple points in a given national production chain. The value-added activities in which members of this fraction engage occur physically within borders and within firms or their subsidiaries, or with firms' local/national customers. [The worker flexibly moves to the point of production.]	Farm workers, assembly line workers, domestic laborers, service workers	Transnational Corporations; Culture-Ideology of Consumerism; Transnational State Apparatus; Transnational Capitalist Class
Static-Local	<i>Workers whose productive activities and products are geographically fixed relative to firms and nation-states:</i> labor-power is expended by stationary workers at single points in national production chains or in single geographic contexts. The value-added activities in which members of this fraction engage occur within borders for local firms. Though products may be intended for domestic consumption, international trade is not precluded. [The product may (or may not) successively move to the worker within local contexts]	Project coordinators, IT professionals, sales people, mid-level 'management', doctors, lawyers	
Diasporic-Local	<i>Workers whose productive activities and products are geographically diffuse relative to the nation-state:</i> labor-power is expended by workers in multiple geographic and productive contexts because of some inducement to relocate within national boundaries. The value-added activities in which members of this fraction engage occur within borders, and may or may not occur within the confines of firms. [The worker moves to national points of production.]	'Okies,' national migrants, nationally internal diaspora (Hurricane Katrina victims)	