

Marx considered the creation of relative surplus populations inevitable for capitalist accumulation — “the general law of capitalist accumulation”. Since the 1980s, more and more scholars based in various disciplines have been stressing the unprecedented manner and scope in which post-industrial societies produce groups of people who have been framed surplus, disposable, expendable, redundant within the emerging international regimes of flexible accumulation (e.g. Wolf 1982; Ong 1988; Harvey 1989; Roseberry 1997; Harvey 2005; McIntyre 2011; Carrier and Kalb 2015). The representation of the worker as disposable constitutes an efficient strategy of dislocation through uncertainty as she chooses docility over being disposed of to “permanent surplus population” (Peck and Theodore 2001; Yates 2011). Relative surplus populations live under the condition of insecurity and constraint while being dispossessed of previous forms of livelihoods and sense of autonomy and subjected to a specific symbolic economy representing them as essentially dangerous and socially inadapt-able (Kalb 2011; Standing 2011 and many others).

Research has documented the gradual vanishing of the concept of the working class in deindustrializing countries leading to a seemingly disappearance of class and class issues while actually existing projects of neoliberal restructuring have been intensifying class differences at the very same time (Wacquant 2008; Kalb 2011; Kalb 2015; Carrier 2015). Scholars have shown how this de-classment of analyses led to a tendency to concentrate on the issues of culture-bearing groups and identities, on ethnicity and gender rather than class analysis which had been devalued and in fact somewhat delegitimized in the 1990s (Ortner 1984; for reconsideration of class in the Czech context see Pullmann and Rákosník 1997; Katrňák 2005; Nedbálková 2016 etc.). Within anthropology, concern with the changing forms and growing complexity of inequalities has led to a renewed interest in the concept of class referring to the dynamic and relational models of class (Thompson 1963; Wolf 1982) conceiving class as “bundles of relations” or as a relationship of social and cultural reproduction which emerges from struggles and confrontations within the global social and economic system (Smith 1984; Narotzky and Smith 2006; Kalb 2011; Carrier and Kalb 2015).

Recently, there has been rising concern about the uneasy transformations of work taking place after the collapse of state socialism and the introduction of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003) — both in academia, and somewhat hesitantly,



in the public discourse. Anthropologists facing the variable results of these macro-structural processes in the everyday workings of class and deepening inequalities have been offering ethnographically funded insights into the ways how populations of workers have been facing economic crises leading to the precarization of work, unemployment, loss of symbolic capital and dispossession. Forms of dispossession may vary considerably, but scholars provide evidence of certain patterns of dispossession under flexible production, one of which being a growing inability of workers to earn dignity and social validation and to overcome degrading stigmatization through work (see Cobb and Sennett 1972 for an early account).

Scholars have shown that the social consequences of the traumatic experience of dispossession and devaluation might sometimes take form of antagonisms articulated in the form of various racisms and populisms from the dispossessed traditional working class towards the newly racialized low-wage workers as well as wage-less workers represented as social scum, helping to reproduce racial hierarchies and discursive exclusion of the poor and the most precarized (Kalb 2011). Such racial divisions and segmentations of the working class and the relation of the social reproduction of surplus population and reproduction of race under flexible production have constituted object of inquiry for some time (Chandavarkar 1994; Roseberry 1997; McIntyre 2011), some researchers have documented the ways how class, race and space form naturalizing nexus with the neoliberal state as the primary “producer of socio-spatial inequality” (Wacquant and Wilson 1989; Wacquant 2008).

This special issue deals with some of these aspects of work and works in contemporary societies. Petra Burzová and Ilona Dvořáková focus on former industrial workers whose memory is structured by external political and economic forces. They use the memory of Karlov, still reproduced as a living memory space, to counterbalance those forces. Pavel Hulec discusses tactics of resistance among Czech welfare state bureaucrats and workers’ resistance which is seen as a product of their habitus. Silvia McKenzie uses experimental form of autoethnography to analyse the situation of migrant workers who choose nonstandard identities. A group of authors led by Václav Walach, likewise, study marginalized populations. In their contribution, they analyse the various aspects and limits of their research strategies. The section “Materials” contains a narrative by Arnošt Bánom which briefly describes the situation without work and stable home. Petra Burzová outlines some of the difficulties in her research of the “surplus class” under flexible production.

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