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Cover Page Footnote

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Exploring the Interaction between Relative Surplus Population and Forms of Capitalism: A Case Study on Platform Capitalism

Everywhere the eyes of modern corporations look, there is data—even if not actively seen as such outside of the company. From the cars people drive, to the search engines they use, and the dozens of web searches they conduct each day, data is created—and often harvested—at every turn. Increasingly, this data drives corporate service delivery by means of “platforms.” Data harvesting and implementation occurs in a process that regularly goes underappreciated, consented to through lengthy Terms of Service agreements that often go unread. Karl Marx, in *Capital: Volume One* warns readers that, within a capitalist society, things are often not how they appear. For instance, the wage worker and employer seem free on the outset, but their relationship is revealed for what it truly is—a relationship of exploitation—only after entering the factory where there is “no admittance except on business.”¹ For understanding modern capitalism and how it impacts workers, further investigation is necessary on the platform structure of firms, predominated by systems of exchange that include one or more of the following characteristics: a focus on the extraction of rents and sale of related services (as opposed to the sale of goods), bounded systems with value creation relying on network effects, independent contract labor, and the commodification and deployment of data (often behind the scenes or in masked ways) for profit.

Inspired by Marx’s investigation of ever-obfuscated exploitation, this analysis seeks to look beyond the flashy manifestations of what is often endearingly called the “knowledge economy” or “sharing economy.” Where does exploitation operate today, and what does it look like to have one’s labor power exploited? The process of economic exploitation in the gig economy is affectively different when compared to previous labor arrangements; gig work

depends on independent contractor labor that is often assigned electronically and in just-in-time cybernetic fashion. Workers in the gig economy experience a high level of labor precarity: their work contract is signed one ride, one delivery at a time, and they are fired not by being called “onto the carpet” but through account deactivation that originates thousands of miles away, or even algorithmically. Perhaps even more uncannily, has capitalism veiled value production within what most identify as modern leisure time, subsequently making it difficult within any lived instance to identify worker, commodity, surplus labor time, profit, *ad infinitum*? Just as in *Capital*, the secret to profit-making—and the secret of exploitation—is evident within the locus of economic production. The following analysis looks at a new and unique type of production means, one that centers on the collection, distillation, and operationalization of vast amounts of data. It is long past time to see electronic data as foundational to a modern historical materialist approach.

This project adopts a contextual approach and assumes that today’s various platforms within the market have somewhat different impacts, affects, and appearances geographically. Therefore, this analysis focuses primarily on platform capitalism as it appears within North and Latin America, due to researcher positionality and the examples offered by Nick Srnicek, but also in hopes of prompting an awareness and action in some of the most privileged users of platforms: Americans and those in the West. Certainly, this is a story of globalization which transcends borders.

Platform capitalism is an approach to structuring the production and exchange processes within the market. This analysis evaluates what digital economy theorist Nick Srnicek coined “platform capitalism.” This is an alternative to what social theorist Nancy Fraser calls “financialized capitalism,” whose defining mark is large stores of capital, rapid and global

capital flows, and the domination of the financial sector upon the market. Financialized capitalism is certainly a component of Srnicek's analysis, but that framing is Fraser's. To Srnicek, the modern process of value valorization is marked by platformization, which emphasizes the extraction of rents over ownership alongside a focus on data.

As Nick Srnicek notes, this altogether new type of economic strategy is driven by the implementation of platforms in capitalist enterprises. In his work *Platform Capitalism*, Srnicek argues that techno-historical events, like the post-war economic boom, 1990s technology bubble, and 2008 financial crisis set the backdrop for a new mode of commodity presentation, creation, and consumption. These events, in large part, came to center around data as a raw material to be “extracted, refined, and used”² and ultimately commodified (and perhaps even enclosed.)³ To Srnicek, the modern economy's distinguishing feature is platform capitalism, where data accrues value and marketability in particular ways. He defines the platform as a new type of business model that gives incentives for buyers, sellers, workers, and intermediaries to conduct business within the context of a bounded system. Srnicek lists five subtypes of platforms: advertising, cloud, industrial, product/on-demand, and lean. Owners of platforms benefit from their positionality and functionality as the forum for transactions as well as “network effects.”⁴ As mediator, firms extract data for use as a source of value. This value can emerge later, after analysis and operationalization, or can be rapidly implemented into business models through techniques like machine learning. Network effects simply mean that, the more people simultaneously using a platform, the more utility each user of the platform receives. This value comes from more people being on a singular platform, and therefore more goods or information are available for exchange between parties. The network effects become especially potent when a

platform owns horizontally or vertically-integrated firms that share customers, making data from one firm's business valuable to the conglomerate's other enterprises.

A simple example of platform effects follows. Facebook, a platform, benefits users (and itself) by being a means for an ever-increasing list of things: messaging, calls, sales, gaming, payments, events, and more. According to Srnicek, Facebook as a platform, a closed-system, is able to obtain information about users because of its positionality and privilege as a closed-system. Since users cannot easily interact with those not on Facebook, or utilize its services without an account, Facebook cultivates a sort of monopoly power over certain social realms and their appertaining data. Facebook's power as a platform is multiplied through "network effects" which mean that the more people who use the Facebook platform, the more people can interact with others, which makes the network more "social" and ultimately of greater economic value.⁵ In other words, users of Facebook, as well as Facebook itself, both gain value the more people use the platform. Due to this phenomenon, Srnicek says that "a tendency towards monopolization is built into the DNA of platforms."⁶ The platform as a corporate form has consequences for the workforce.

Marx hypothesized three categories of relative surplus population that describe the connection of workers to the labor market as well as their socio-economic position. It is not clear which technological or economic processes facilitate the making of people into the "floating," "latent," or "stagnant" categories of surplus population. This paper posits that each stage of capitalist production—and therefore the subtypes of platform capitalism—requires different configurations of floating, stagnant, and latent surplus populations.⁷ The paper does not present a general theory for the etiology of the ratios in relative surplus population, but suggests that its

segmentation is a result of the material conditions of production: conditions that are socially, geographically, technologically, and politically situated.

Introducing Marx's Theory of Surplus Population

Karl Marx, in *Capital: Volume One*, categorizes workers in a few ways. In the broadest sense, Marx first says that there is an “active army of workers” and the “industrial reserve army”; the latter curbs the economic “pretensions” of the former through a demonstration of the industrial reserve army’s precarity.⁸ The industrial reserve army, those with a marginal attachment to work, is more specifically the “relative surplus population” which is made up of workers who are either “partially employed or wholly employed.”⁹ Marx breaks down the relative surplus population into four parts: floating, latent, stagnant, and pauperism (See Figure 1).

The first category, floating population, represents the fully-proletarianized worker. As David Harvey describes it, the prototypical floating workers “are already full-time wage workers, who are temporarily thrown out of work for some reason” and who survive those bouts of unemployment (as caused by, e.g., automation, geographic production relocation and outsourcing, or economic boom-bust cycles) and manage to be reabsorbed into the workforce with regularity.¹⁰ Marx describes the prototypical member of the latent population as an agricultural worker who is on the cusp of proletarianization but is not yet a capitalist wage-laborer. Finally, Marx describes the stagnant population, a group opposite of the floating population, a product of the proletarianization process. The stagnant population is fully proletarianized, constantly struggling to find work both in terms of quantity and quality. As Marx writes, “its conditions of life sink below the average normal level of the working class”—the stagnant population is clearly worse off socioeconomically than the floating population.¹¹

Despite its lowly economic status, the stagnant population is key to the success of the capitalist system. Due to their general deprivation of basic necessities, and resultant desperation, Marx says they are ripe for exploitation with low wages, long hours, and the poorest of working conditions. Capitalists also leverage the existence of a stagnant population as a way to put pressure on the floating population to comply with bourgeois directives, as the stagnant population acts as a stop-gap for labor-power needs (strike breakers, popularly called “scabs” tend to come from the stagnant surplus labor population.)

Marx’s taxonomy also includes pauperism. Capitalism has trampled the paupers. Those in this category, often having a modest connection to the workforce, bear the brunt of labor precarity resulting from changes in the configuration of the means of production (e.g., from a narrowing division of labor, technological displacement, and/or shifting global production chains.) The pauper category also includes unskilled laborers who are employed in times of economic boom, orphans, and those who worn down by the capitalist system, the “demoralised and ragged.” Marx writes that pauperism is a product of capitalism, a “*faux frais*” or the “incidental expenses” of production.¹² According to Marx, capitalism exerts a downward pressure on the relative surplus population and he implies that it creates pauperism; the reserve surplus population and its built-in precariatizing pressures ultimately have a function “to discipline” workers.¹³

Figure 1. Marx's Categories of Relative Surplus Population (excluding pauperism)

Floating	Stagnant	Latent
<p>The typical worker in a capitalist society who has a relatively strong attachment to the labor market, but might enter and exit the labor market concomitant with capitalism's crisis tendencies.</p> <p>Examples: Factory worker; bureaucrat.</p>	<p>The most vulnerable worker in a capitalist society with a marginal attachment to work. Precarious attachment to the regular/legal economy. They have a record of work history, but it is haphazard and usually low-paying and mundane, "low-skilled," and/or stressful.</p> <p>Examples: independent contractor; migrant farm worker.</p>	<p>Workers do not have an ordinary attachment to the capitalist labor market. In the U.S. can include "petty-bourgeois independent producers and artisans."¹⁴</p> <p>Examples: Outside U.S. or historically: peasants; classes excluded from wage work on the basis of gender/race. In the U.S.: rural farmers or crafters without a strong attachment to the economy; those in the informal economy under specific circumstances.</p>

In practice, there certainly is overlap and transfer between these three categories. The threat that members of the stagnant population could enter the floating population is part of what keeps in check the floating population as a class. The potential to climb the latter into the floating population and better their predicament incentivizes the stagnant population to accept conditions of labor that often end up producing the "demoralised and ragged." What is unclear is if certain types of capitalist economy forms (like financialized capitalism, platform capitalism, mercantile capitalism) have specific tendencies when it comes to the production of these reserve surplus population strata. This is the fundamental question posed in this project. The following analysis tries to open up this question using platform capitalism as the frame of analysis.

The Literature on Relative Surplus Population Creation

There is limited literature that explores the exact etiology of relative surplus population stratification. First, populations are sometimes made "surplus" through expropriation and modern

processes of primitive accumulation, like Harvey's "accumulation by dispossession." According to Professor Antonis Balasopoulos, such acts of expropriation and subsequent surplus population creation were a dynamic that made the English colonial project possible.¹⁵ Through a reading of Thomas More's *Utopia*, he concludes that "colonialization is not the result of an individual desire... but, on the contrary, the consequence of a collective pursuit of self-regulation, translated precisely in terms of securing the equilibrium and overall stability of the population."¹⁶ In this sense, the relative surplus population is a concomitant of colonial expansionism, norms of [capitalist] consumption, and primitive accumulation. Perhaps there is even a performativity on the part of large firms to create labor markets they can understand and that best meet their objectives.¹⁷ Balasopoulos does not address the diversity within the surplus population and whether the colonialist tendency utilizes, prefers, and/or creates particular proportions of subpopulations of relative surplus population.

A large subset of the literature on relative surplus population focuses on "periphery" and Global South countries. Researchers Habibi and Juliawan put their focus there, writing that in "developing countries" the relative surplus population outnumbered the fully employed by a margin of over 600 million.¹⁸ The authors distinguish between two varieties of explanations for relative surplus population. The first group of explanations consist largely of neo-liberal apologetics for globalization, contending that the "process of global marketisation" is "not yet sufficiently deep or because states lack the capacity to make the right policy choices." In the other camp are post-classical Keynesian economists and Marxists who argue that the relative surplus population is a "direct outcome of the current model of development."¹⁹ These authors detail a global "precariat" in which a diverse group of workers, ranging from those with white-collar jobs to service sector workers, are experiencing job insecurities²⁰ albeit in ways that are

very often affectively and materially different. The process of global precarization has the *potential* to create experiences of proletariat solidarity (and perhaps consciousness) amongst different workers as well as a shared vulnerability. Looking at the Indonesian relative surplus subpopulations from 1986 to 2014, Habibi and Juliawan find that neo-liberalist political developments led to a growth of outsourced work (i.e., work largely for the stagnant population) after 1997²¹ accompanied by a failure to convert the latent surplus population into a floating population.²² What remains unclear is whether this conversion would have been more successful if, first, neo-liberal development in Indonesia had consisted of lean platform development and, second, if affordable internet and computer access had further proliferated into the latent population, allowing access to lean platforms like Amazon's Mechanical Turk.²³

Perhaps most pertinent to this exploratory research is Figueroa Sepúlveda who sees a connection between the organization of economies and the production of relative surplus population. Drawing on Quijano (1977) and Nun (2001), Figueroa Sepúlveda, a scholar of imperialism in Latin America, notes that “the emergence of monopolies modifies the conditions of the production of a relative surplus population.”²⁴ Following this logic, since Srnicek observes that the network effects of platform firms hold monopoly power, it is plausible that platform firms impact the production of a relative surplus population. Within Latin America, “monopolization and internationalization of capital have already matured, thanks to high technological levels” leading to the growth of a particularly marginalized segment of the relative surplus population due to capital not resting “on the existence of local circuits already developed.”²⁵ In other words, firms who implement “imperialist capital” to turn a profit engage in a more severe type of value extraction because imperialist capital is not geared to build local circuits of economic production (nor socio-political production that is particularly self-

deterministic) within an economy. The means of production become even further removed from the local workers. A particular type of platform firm, the on-demand platform, embodies the relation Figueroa Sepúlveda is describing. In on-demand platform firms, the means of production are not sold within economies but are rented. Srnicek uses the example of airlines who are increasingly renting the means of production—airplane engines—to extract additional value. As Srnicek describes it, the jet engine business went from “one that sold engines into one that rented thrust.”²⁶ In practice, this further removes the means of production from Latin American corporations and their workers. According to the International Civil Aviation Organization, many Latin American governments hold ownership stakes in airlines; this is an especially pernicious form of imperialist capital.²⁷

The vast majority of the literature on relative surplus populations is too general for the purpose of this analysis. The bulk of it focuses on the proletarianization of workers in the Global South or “developing” [proletarianizing] countries or on the precariat as either a shared, global phenomenon of economic insecurity or as a facet of burgeoning “gig” economies in late-capitalist nations.

Platform Capitalism: The Lean Platform and Relative Surplus Population

The linkage between platform capitalism and the need for a large stagnant surplus population is robust and apparent. More specifically, “lean platforms” within platform capitalism depend overwhelmingly on the stagnant surplus population. Lean platforms consist of corporations who tend to “reduce their ownership of assets to a minimum and to profit by reducing costs as much as possible.”²⁸ More precisely, their ownership of assets takes a back-seat to the ownership of intellectual property and proprietary code which creates sites for value production. These are the companies of the “on-demand” and “gig” economy, like Uber

(primarily a personal transportation and food delivery service,) Grubhub (a food delivery service,) and TaskRabbit (a platform for odd-jobs and one-time gigs.) Each of these companies relies on independent contractor labor. A preliminary analysis of the lean platform business model suggests that there may be an optimal ratio between floating, stagnant, and latent surplus population that is ideal for the functioning of lean platforms. What is clear is that lean platforms require the maintenance of a relative surplus population that has a high level of stagnant workers and relatively lower levels of latent and floating workers.

The stagnant surplus population is the most useful type of worker for lean platforms. These workers typically have a relatively weak connection to the labor market, but they are fully proletarianized. These workers struggle to economically reproduce themselves. On average these are low-skilled workers engaged in jobs of low social desirability. They are at higher risk for exploitation when compared to workers of the floating surplus population because of their generally restricted job skills and limited options for other work. Due to their economic precarity, they are more likely to accept poor working conditions and terms, as well as precarious work contracts, as compared to the floating population. In other words, these workers are perfect for lean platform jobs because they are cost-effective.

It is important for lean platforms to keep at a minimum the size of the latent surplus population because self-sufficient (non-proletarianized) workers do not require the lean platform to operate. In fact, the existence of latent (and perhaps even sections of petit-bourgeois) workers endangers the lean platform business model. Take for example the hypothetical taxi driver who owns their vehicle as well as medallion (a license to operate a taxi in some jurisdictions.) To Harvey, this type of worker is like Marx's conception of the latent surplus population.²⁹ To a large extent, this worker owns the means of production and that of his own subsistence. This

driver does not need the lean platform, and his non-participation in it actually hurts the platform because of network effects. The story of lean platform Uber's victory over taxis is just as much about network effects as it is about the pitfalls of the monopolization of medallions in major cities.³⁰ The hypothetical taxi driver, who owned their own taxi but now drives for Uber and leases his vehicle through Uber's leasing partnerships illustrates best the lean platforms' built-in ability to take modern latent surplus populations and proletarianize them. There is a tension though: lean platforms want their workers to have just enough resources, like access to a car or smartphone—so they may use the platform—but not so much freedom that they become self-sufficient and no longer have a need for the platform. In cases where platforms are for the masses, platform firms need the population to possess the means of access. Has there ever been a time in history where the means of production and the methods of consumption had such a spatio-temporal unity?

Lean platforms face strong incentives to minimize floating populations for two reasons. First, workers in stable, well-paying employment will not turn to lean platforms to make money. Second, lean platforms are engaged in fierce competition for high-skilled technology workers to develop the code for their digital systems and maintain the platform. Another tension arises: lean platforms need a high-skilled floating population, but the population should remain scarce to reduce competition from other lean platform startups. It is hypothetically critical for a burgeoning lean platform to hoard these type of workers so would-be competitors cannot build their own lean platforms.³¹ This is to ensure that the platform has the time to acquire sufficient network effects that make competing with it increasingly difficult. In theory, the current glut of corporate savings, availability of venture capital, and cash-on-hand³² enables lean platforms within the startup phase to hire high-skilled workers it might, under other circumstances, do

without, so they do not work for other lean platforms. Highly-skilled workers can then be let go as their lean platform employer accrues the monopoly-like power of network effects.³³

Competition for highly-skilled workers and talent hoarding is nothing new. The difference in modern times connects to market temporality: a gig platform app or feature immediately reaches millions of users. The market advantage connoted by a high-skilled worker with the next big idea is realized rapidly. Code can be tweaked to offer a new feature quickly, and then rolled out instantaneously—there is no need for lead-time in manufacturing, logistics, distributor, and end-user sales. The success in the marketing of tangible products takes months if not years to judge, and the feedback loop from mass market consumer to corporations is elliptical. Judgments on new platform products are pronounced contemporaneously by consumers and workers alike through their interactions with platforms, and the lessons contained in this data are immediately implementable where apps collect data in real time and are fed into machine learning algorithms. Just as quickly as the data flows back to platform corporations come the network effects that bolster the company's market share in a rapidly-changing world. These workers have served an important role in the life of a start-up lean platform: an important part of their job was to *not* work for the competition. This seems to create the seed of peculiar class formations where precariousness, not class in a formal sense, could bring together workers.

Platform Capitalism: The On-Demand Platform and Relative Surplus Population

The typical On-Demand platform features a form of commerce that substitutes rents where ownership has typically stood. Srnicek's primary example is jet engines, which increasingly, are no longer owned by airlines but are rented on a pro-rata basis. The organization of a business model in this way has repercussions on the production and maintenance of the relative surplus population and its subcategories.

Firms who utilize the on-demand platform model make money by buying up certain types of fixed capital and designing electronic platforms to facilitate the leasing and maintenance of that capital. The proliferation of this firm form has repercussions on relative surplus populations. For example, when airlines owned jet engines, they needed to maintain a distributed workforce for engine maintenance. This workforce was comprised of employees responsible for rudimentary maintenance tasks (who could perhaps be hired out of the stagnant surplus population,) and, more complicated, high-skill mechanic jobs (people who were typically drawn from the floating surplus population,) as well as managers who monitored the use, lifespan, and maintenance schedules of engines (also largely members of the floating surplus population.) With the shift from financialized capitalist firms (i.e., companies may have sold jet engines to airlines with in-house financing) to on-demand platform capitalist firms (i.e., jet engine manufacturers rent the jet engines alongside a set of services) the demands upon surplus populations change. In the on-demand platform setting, airline managers no longer need to monitor and implement the maintenance schedules of their engines: that role is now outsourced for the airline, centralized, and increasingly guided by automation. In the example of jet engine maker Rolls Royce, instead of a skilled worker being needed in Latin America, the task occurs at a “command centre in the United Kingdom.”³⁴ Similarly, high-skill mechanic jobs become centralized for the sake of cost-effectiveness, as engines rented to airlines who encounter significant issues can be swapped and then repaired regionally on behalf of airline customers across national borders. This shift in employment practices, born out of the structure of capital firms, necessitates shifts in the makeup of a society’s relative surplus population. In this case, Latin American airlines no longer need as many floating workers. Workers who were career mechanics may be forced into the precariat in this way, not because “the robots are coming for

our jobs” but largely due to the proclivities inherent in platform capitalism. The market and its on-demand platform firms necessitate a larger stagnant population as the skills within the floating population become superfluous, non-relevant to the current relations of production. Not only is the conversion of workers in and of itself important, attention should be paid as to the geography of where and how multi-national platform capitalist firms are creating this conversion.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to show how changes in the structure of firms could impact the strata of the relative surplus population. Marx was clear that a relative surplus population is necessary for the functioning of capitalist society. What he did not explore, and has been relatively untouched by the literature, is how the process of relative surplus population stratification interacts with the contemporary presentation of capitalism and its processes. This analysis has tried to explore those processes with a few interesting results.

The first premise is that capitalism appears differently throughout time. This has meant that the character of firms looks different: mercantile capitalism (for instance, as described by Immanuel Wallerstein) was marked by firms whose primary focus was trade as directed by the nation-states who owned and chartered the firms. Future research should continue to unpack how the bounding of markets differs between, e.g., mercantile capitalism and platform capitalism, and why it might matter for workers and society at large. Financialized capitalism³⁵ is marked by a collection of firms who, using immense stores of financial capital and government intervention to shore up their mistakes, engage in exotic and wide-ranging financial schemes including venture capital and derivatives speculation. Key for future research is a study of the incentives and disincentives—and the market and policy forces they employ—for firms existing under

financialized capitalism to have certain proportions of relative surplus population to maximize their profit-making ability. How are workers part of the relative surplus working population experiencing something different than those under platform capitalism?

The second premise to this argument has been that, as firms organize their profit-making differently, their interactions with the relative surplus population will change. From a functionalist perspective, relative surplus populations exist because they serve a purpose for capitalist firms. By extension, the subdivision of the relative surplus populations must also serve a function. The existence of the relative surplus population subcategories across time, despite capitalism's crisis tendencies, suggest this is the case. A longitudinal data analysis may show a correlation between the proliferation of platform-based firms within an economy and the size of the stagnant population.

The final premise has been that, taking platform capitalism as a case, the way firms relate to capital has a bearing on the ratios between floating, stagnant, and latent surplus populations. The facts of the progression from financialized to platform capitalism seems to support this hypothesis. At the very least, there seems to be a connection between this phase of capitalism and the specific ratios between the surplus population subpopulations. Due to advances in cybernetic technology and globalization a "global precariat" is arising.³⁶ That precariat's evolution has depended on platforms like Uber and Amazon's Automated Mechanical Turk. The process of global precariat formation is, utilizing Marx's framework, the "stagnifying" of capitalism's industrial reserve army. The global precariat is marked by an even stronger downward pressure than has historically existed, pushing floating populations into the stagnant subpopulation. That downward pressure has differential impacts: those with wealth may be able to weather the economic shocks that come from processes of reserve surplus population

stagnification more successfully. In a country like the United States, the racial wealth gap, when combined with processes of workforce stagnification, is likely to have a harsher impact on people of color.

Finally, this work is one intervention to open up new possibilities for solidarity formation among workers. One of the preliminary findings here has been that platform capitalism exerts certain precariatizing pressures. It also exposes that people of very different social strata (think computer coder and full-time Uber driver) can both experience precarious working conditions under platform capitalism, yet for very different reasons. Could it be that through a popular understanding of how phases of capitalism proletarianize, a more sophisticated and potent worker solidarity movement could be formed? Certainly, the key to worker solidarity today is illustrating how global capital flows, outsourcing, automation, and independent contracting contributes to precariousness in a way that cuts across class.

Platform capitalism has enabled people to participate in the labor market in unprecedented, creative, and dynamic ways. As Marx warns, though, things are not always as they appear. What presents itself as opportunity to participate in the market includes the opportunity to be exploited. Not only that, it is the opportunity to have one's means of livelihood made more precarious. Those concerned with precariatization as a general phenomenon should consider how the relative surplus population stratification mechanism presents itself within a given society's political, social, and economic order.

ENDNOTES

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume One*, Penguin Classics, 1990[1867], 280.

² Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, Polity Press, 2017, 40.

³ Enclosure in the most general sense refers to the privatization of a public good or property. David Harvey argues that enclosure, the process of dispossession of common lands and the making of laborers under capitalism, continues today through “accumulation by dispossession” (David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital*, Verso Books, 2010 at 313). He points to the process of government privatization, often aided by state policy, as a “particular form of enclosure of the commons” which results in the “taking away of assets and rights from the common people” (309). Something akin to this process is occurring with the transformation of the internet from, playfully put, a conglomeration of Yahoo GeoCities sites with relatively little data monetization to a consolidating collection of behemoth platforms. The often-unknowing creation of data for platforms by their users could be argued to be a dispossession of assets that users may have never knew they created, and whose extraction is either condoned or constrained by law (consider the EU’s General Data Protection Act or California’s Consumer Privacy Act).

⁴ Srnicek, 43-45.

⁵ Network effects can increase the value of ad sales, of data for later deployment, of data to build better products based on discernable preferences, of data to better market products, as well as data to better market the data itself. After all, modern social science and political science research necessitates larger and more varied types of data. The same is true as market researchers assemble target market profiles.

⁶ Srnicek, 95.

⁷ Could this lead to competing prerogatives between, for example, advertising platform corporations and lean corporations if one desires a high level of stagnant workers while the other favors a high concentration of latent workers? This is an area for future research.

⁸ Marx, 792.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 794.

¹⁰ Harvey, 278.

¹¹ Marx, 796.

¹² *Ibid.*, 797.

¹³ Marina Kabat, “From structural breakage to political reintegration of the working class: Relative surplus population layers in Argentina and their involvement in the piquetero movement.” *Capital & Class* 36, no. 2 (2014).

¹⁴ Harvey, 278.

¹⁵ Antonis Balasopoulos, “Dark Light: Utopia and the Question of relative surplus population.” *Utopian Studies* 27, no. 3 at 622.

¹⁶ Balasopoulos, 623.

¹⁷ This economic performativity may look differently in Global South and Global North nations. Put differently, how might platform capitalism tend to construct ratios of relative surplus population in what Immanuel Wallerstein calls “periphery” and “core” states? For examples, and a primer for the economic sociology performativity literature, see Donald MacKenzie, Fabian Muniesa, and Lucia Siu. *Do Economists Make Markets?: on the Performativity of Economics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

¹⁸ Muhtar Habibi and Benny Hari Juliawan, “Creating Surplus Labour: Neo-Liberal Transformations and the Development of Relative Surplus Population in Indonesia.” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 48, no. 4 (2018).

¹⁹ Habibi and Juliawan, 650.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 652.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 664.

²² Ibid., 662-63.

²³ Mechanical Turk (“MTurk”), launched in 2005, is a website that allows workers to perform short tasks called “Human Intelligence Tasks” or HITs (Kevin E. Levay, Jeremy Freese, and James N. Druckman, “The Demographic and Political Composition of Mechanical Turk Samples.” *Sage Open* January-March 2016). Tasks can range from transcribing grocery receipts for companies to drafting text for blogs; many tasks are paid at a few cents per HIT. Many tasks require or would simply be too tedious without using a large screen and keyboard. By 2011, only 21 percent of Indonesians had used the internet within the past year, with 31 percent of households owning a home computer, the lowest proportions in Southeast Asia (Nielsen 2011). If Indonesians had increased access to desktop computers and internet during the period described by Habibi and Juliawan, could it have had an impact on the latent/surplus population conversion process by allowing greater access to the types of work presented by platform capitalism within that national context?

²⁴ Victor M. Figueroa Sepúlveda, “Latin America: Underdevelopment and Surpluses of Population.” *Critical Sociology* 36, no. 5 (2010), 669.

²⁵ Figueroa Sepúlveda, 670.

²⁶ Srnicek, 73.

²⁷ International Civil Aviation Organization. n.d. “List of Government-owned and privatized Airlines (unofficial preliminary compilation).”

<https://www.icao.int/sustainability/Documents/PrivatizedAirlines.pdf>.

²⁸ Srnicek, 50.

²⁹ Harvey, 278.

³⁰ An analysis of platform capitalism’s monopoly power and its victory over medallion monopoly power is worthwhile, and may offer commentary on the ability (or refusal) of modern governmental forms in the regulation of multinational firms and cybernetic capital. See Nicholas Croce, “Predicting the Fifth Phase: Interpellation, World Systems Theory, and the Fall of Nation-States.” *International Social Science Review* 94, no. 1 (2018), 7-9.

³¹ Large technology corporations are snapping up small companies and their data scientist teams in a way that is tremendous putting pressure on start-ups (Cade Metz, “Giant Corporations are Hoarding the World’s AI Talent.” *Wired*, 2016). What is debatable is the extent to which this behavior is spurred on by a competitive corporate strategy that takes the oxygen out of start-ups before they begin. Future research should interrogate this hypothesis.

³² Srnicek, 32.

³³ See Srnicek, 95.

³⁴ Srnicek, 74. Also, see Nick Dyer-Witford’s *Cyber-Proletariat* chapter entitled *Cybernetic* which explores this interaction between data, outsourcing, and command-and-control functions. It is indisputable that cybernetic interactions are motivating the mechanizations of platform capitalism. The isolation of cybernetics within platform capitalist firms and its impact upon relative surplus population subpopulations is a promising area for further research.

³⁵ Nancy Fraser, “Crisis of care? On the social-reproductive contradictions of contemporary capitalism.” Pp. 21-36 in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, Edited by Tithi Bhattacharya, London: Pluto Press, 2017.

³⁶ Habibi and Juliawan, 652 citing Standing (2011).