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Precarious subjects as potential agents of social transformation in the light of Critical Pedagogy

Kurzfassung: Wird das "Prekariat" - Guy Standings "class in the making" - als Katalysator des sozialen Wandels wirken? Diese Frage veranlasste uns, uns mit prekären Bevölkerungsgruppen zu befassen und ihre Haltung gegenüber sozialer Ungerechtigkeit zu untersuchen. Unsere Untersuchung bezieht sich auf zwei verschiedene Gruppen von Menschen, die unter prekären Bedingungen arbeiten und leben. Es wurde festgestellt, dass es nicht nur Elemente gibt, die prekäre Subjekte passivieren und sie im Gefühl des "Unvermeidbaren" gefangen halten, sondern dass sie auch in der Solidarität untereinander zersetzend wirken. Prekäre Subjekte sind anfällig für die Rationalisierung der Entfremdung und neigen dazu, Kompromisse mit der "Enteignung" ihrer Wut einzugehen. Unsere Untersuchung zielt darauf ab, zu analysieren, was dieses Thema bedeuten könnte, wenn es aus der Perspektive der Kritischen Pädagogik untersucht wird.

Abstract: Will the "precariat" – Guy Standing's "class in the making" – be able to function as a catalyst for social change? This question led us to deal with precarious population groups and examine their attitudes towards social injustice. Our research was carried out on two different groups of people who work and live under precarity conditions. It has been found that there are elements in society that not only passivize precarious subjects, entrapping them in a sense of the "inevitable", but also function to corrode the solidarity among these subjects themselves. Precarious subjects are prone to rationalize alienation and tend to compromise with the "expropriation" of their anger. The purpose of our survey is to discover what this issue might mean, if studied from the Critical Pedagogy perspective.

1 Introduction

In this article we present the findings of two empirical surveys conducted with two different Greek population groups, which were intended to discover how these groups make sense of the precarious conditions under which they live and how they perceive and react to their experiences of injustice. We will approach the findings of each survey in relation to the management of precarity and injustice by both groups in the light of Freirean Critical Pedagogy.

The term "precarity" is associated with unemployment and work that is not permanent and secure, along with the absence of control or limited control over this situation. In addition, it can also be linked to the mismatch between social status and the education or qualifications of individuals. So, we are not only talking about the absence of long-term contracts and protection against the possibility of losing one's job, but also about the lack of opportunity for social development (Standing, 2011: 9-11, 12, 17). What the individual is actually required to do to manage his or her insecurity is to be flexible and adapt individually to the volatile working conditions available to him or her, while education, even lifelong education, has been shown to be no "guarantee" of upward social mobility. As Zygmunt Bauman (2005: 25) puts it, young people are told not to be choosy, "but to accept any job and to see it as an opportunity of the moment, for as long as it lasts, and not as the introductory 'chapter of a life project', as a matter of self-respect and self-determination, or as a guarantee of long-term security".

As for the term injustice, anything that causes harm in any field of a person's life is clearly considered unjust and actually causes anger, and at this point, injustice and anger are identical. According to Moore (1978: xiv), recurring situations of degradation, which constitute the victimization of subjects and their experience of injustice, provoke manifestations of anger. In these situations, the subjects, under certain conditions sometimes react and sometimes remain silent, stifling their anger. Social and psychological mechanisms contribute to this situation and create various ways of expressing anger as a result of experienced injustice. Freire, (2005: 30, 91), likewise, refers to a "culture of silence" where the subject is trapped in the social system and adapts to it without being able or even willing (unintentionally and passively) to transform it. This is similar at this point to Moore (1978: 489-496), who spoke of the "inevitable" trapping subjects in the functioning and structure of the existing social system. Shor similarly affirms that systemic pedagogy structures passive characters, and this passivity brings produces aggression, as it is not a natural state causing an underlying angry silence (Freire & Shor, 2011: 185). So, the "culture of silence" can be found in social structures which subordinate the individual and inhibit the development of thought and reasoning.

According to Dolar (2006: 105), the power of speech – combining "phone" and "logos" – is intended to set forth both the expedient and inexpedient and therefore likewise, the just and the unjust, following Aristotle's perspective. So, as speech can express the just and the unjust, it can also express and give meaning to the concepts of right and wrong, in this way constructing a standard of judgment (Dollar, 2006: 106). Voice is here

manifested as speech in the political sense of human existence. Change, though, can be achieved if people realize the power of their voice and take action. This change can only come about if pedagogical awareness is acquired by means of the Freirean critical dialectical method.

In one of his numerous articles about Paulo Freire, Giroux (2010: 716) states: "Pedagogy for Freire is not a method or an a priori technique to be imposed on students, [all human beings in our case], but a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable people to explore the possibilities of what it means to be critical citizens, while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy". For Freire, pedagogy is crucial to a formative culture, which enables both critical consciousness and social action (Giroux, 2018: 2). For Freire, as Giroux rightly states, critical thinking attempts to provide a means of thought that breaks with the apparent neutrality or inevitability of the existing state of affairs, challenges the assumptions of the so-called 'common mind', transcends the limits of direct experience and seeks to establish a dialogue with history and a future that does not simply reproduce the present (Giroux, 2018: 3). Taking into account Freire's perspective, transformation can happen only if a human being examines his or her life critically, which in turn, will bring about change through action in favor of human justice (Freire, Araujo & Oliveira, 2021: 91, 107). Quite simply, we could say that hope, critical thinking and solidarity are the elements that are most able to lay the foundations of social transformation. We need hope to keep us alive, and continued critical thinking to confront life situations and social issues, and solidarity to make decisions and move ahead to collective action.

Bolder, and a courageous defender of revolutionary pedagogy, McLaren recommends the organization of teachers as part of a larger social movement struggling for a set of common objectives (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2013: 268). His position on the issue more or less complements that of Bourdieu (2017: 241-253), who envisages larger coalitions, with precarity and therefore injustice as their common denominator or, more broadly speaking, inequity.

According to Bourdieu, we need to 'restore politics' (2017: 242) by bringing together all existing social movements, which are currently still not linked together at the national, European and international levels. And this is the case, even though they share many common features and objectives, including a recognition of the need for self-management in ways differing from the patterns and dynamics that have characterized traditional models of mobilization. In order to overcome the obstacles of fragmentation and parochialism, it is therefore imperative to create an enlarged and expanded network of action through a coordinating body – which should of course refrain from centralization. Ongoing energetic action and theoretical elaboration of issues should be ensured – clearly in this regard consultants and researchers can be extremely useful. In this unified militant front, Bourdieu (2017: 241-253) also recognizes an important role for a renewed trade unionism, which must break its relationship with the nanny State. It must become stronger, act in unity, act transnationally and reorient itself, after fruitful consultations, towards specific demands for short-term and long-term goals.

2 The surveys: A brief encounter

2.1 Tools and population groups

The subjects were each given a questionnaire, a different one for each population group. The semi-structured digital questionnaires that were distributed consisted mainly of open-ended questions. Thus, the qualitative material gathered could be studied using Content Analysis. The population groups surveyed were a) Greek students writing theses, and b) Substitute teachers in Greek state-run schools.

2.1.1 The method: Latent Class Analysis (LCA)

The empirical material was analyzed using the methods of Latent Class Analysis. This method combines the virtues of both qualitative and quantitative research and aims to identify groups or different types (classes) of choices in multivariate categorical data. The application of this method attempts to bring to the surface the underlying ("latent") types of response texts. Latent Class Analysis aims to reduce the complexity of a data set by classifying the different cases into types/classes probabilistically, i.e. according to the maximum probability of inclusion in each of these classes and according to the profiles of their choices (Bos & Tarnai, 1989). In this phase, the correlations recorded between observed variables, depending on their inclusion or not in the latent classes, play a decisive role (Baros & Kempf, 2014).

The answers of the questionnaires, which consisted of open-ended and closed-ended questions, were evaluated using content analysis according to the multivariate model of the method and the binary system. In the end, we found groups/classes of subjects sharing the same or similar characteristics.

2.2 First survey population group: Greek Students writing theses

Either because they do not have the time or lack the necessary knowledge and experience, many students pay someone else to do assignments for them. This occurs in both undergraduate and postgraduate studies, and less frequently, students even pay someone else to write part or all of their doctoral thesis. Doing this is a common practice in Greece, as well as in other countries in Europe and internationally. Some assignment writers operate as freelancers, while others work as freelancers for organized "student assignment writing" companies operating on the Internet. These are either students still attending university, at the undergraduate or more often postgraduate levels, or university graduates, both younger and older ones. PhD candidates or even PhD holders are included in the list. They come from all academic specialties, but are mainly graduates of the so-called university pedagogical departments.

For the purposes of the survey, an anonymous electronic self-completion questionnaire was sent to student thesis writers whose email addresses were obtained from online advertisements. A total of 97 people successfully responded to the invitation, which was, after all, the sample of the survey. The survey identified three profiles of precarity management: Class 1: "The Competitive", Class 2: "The Precarity rationalizers" and Class 3: "The Precarity addicts". The class names were based on characteristics the Latent Class Analysis identified as dominant in each group (class).

2.2.1 Results: Short description of classes[1]

"The Competitive" thesis writers practice this activity without expressing any particular love for it. They do it for purely subsistence reasons, because they have no alternative sources of income. They are both younger and older people who are involved in this work either occasionally or systematically. They do not sufficiently address the precarious conditions around them and act antagonistically towards other young people, whom they blame for their precarity and characterize as lazy. We could say that they too actually focus on finding personal solutions in the context of an individualized course of action chosen to manage precarity.

"The Precarity rationalizers" are younger, financially dependent (on parents, partners, etc.) and engage in this activity occasionally to supplement their income. They tend to rationalize their choice, insisting that while their intellectual work is credited to another, it is they who gain the knowledge. This tendency to rationalize is confirmed by the fact that while they consider it unfair for students to pass their courses without personal effort, they also justify their decision to assign the work to a professional. They seem aware of the precarious conditions of their lives, but do not resort to active resistance in the context of collective actions. More likely, they choose an individualized solution by taking a kind of precarious, anomic and alienating employment. About the only time when young, economically dependent and casual thesis writers act for the collectivity is when confronted by the "outgroup" of migrants and refugees. Then, they may react to a perceived risk of "changing the country" by expressing xenophobic attitudes towards others who are experiencing not only unemployment, but a wider kind of precarity.

"The Precarity addicts" are experienced writers who systematically engage in the activity and identify with it, insisting on how much they love it and how it has improved their daily lives. This allows us to speak of highly flexible and precarious workers. They do not generally feel wronged, but they are concerned that their work is credited to other persons. This means that they only react to alienation when it takes on a more tangible form. It should be no surprise that they nevertheless excuse the students who cheat by paying someone else to do their assignments, since this practice enables them to work in a job they love. They do not understand or react to the conditions of precarity and social injustice that surround them, and thereby accuse young people of laziness, creating a competitive framework for intergenerational action.

2.2.2 Conclusion

The theorists of precarity are sometimes concerned, like Beck (1992: 99-101), about the social alliances of the future, and sometimes point out, like Bourdieu (2017: 241-253) and Butler (2011, 2017), the need for a social partnership of precarious population groups in order to make them visible and more able to demand better working conditions and a better life for all. However, our research shows that precarious work has a corrosive effect on solidarity. Actually, precarious subjects attempt to blaze their own trail within the unfavorable context of precarity, responding to the pressure of the system to look for personal solutions to social problems that should

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[1] Manafi, A., Baros, W., (2021). The perception of injustice in the working conditions of substitute teachers. A Critical Educational Research / Η πρόσληψη της αδικίας απέναντι στις εργασιακές συνθήκες των αναπληρωτών εκπαιδευτικών. Μία κριτική εκπαιδευτική έρευνα. In: Γεωργογιάννης, Π. (2021), Διαπολιτισμική Εκπαίδευση και τα ελληνικά ως δεύτερη ή ξένη γλώσσα – Αξιολόγηση, Διοίκηση, Αναλυτικά Προγράμματα, Διδακτικό Υλικό. Πρακτικά 32ου Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου, Πάτρα, 369-376.

be confronted politically. They end up finding an anomic[2] solution, which ultimately, without realizing it, intensifies their insecurity and destroys their identity through alienation.

2.3 Second survey population group: Working conditions of substitute teachers in state-run Greek schools

Substitute teachers are recruited every year for 3 to 10 months to fill temporary posts. After working for 3 to 4 or at most 10 months a year, they are laid off and put on unemployment status. They receive an allowance of 360 Euros per month, only for the summer months, which is often paid late. It is important to mention that not everyone can receive this allowance, because they have to meet certain conditions. Every year they can be reappointed, mostly to teach in a different location, and thus have to change their place of residence, most of them leaving behind a spouse and children. And women teachers often take their children with them, who must change schools every year. We can all understand what this means in terms of adapting to new situations, losing friendships, changing social relations, effects on family harmony, and so on. Every year they are laid off and do not know if and when they will be rehired.

The empirical research was conducted using electronic questionnaires distributed to substitute teachers in their email correspondence and with the help of social media. The study collected 136 samples, consisting of empirical survey material from both male and female substitute teachers, from different regions of the country and all specialties of Primary and Secondary Education. The survey identified four profiles of managing injustice: Class 1: "The politically indifferent and adaptable", Class 2: "The seemingly settled and politically detached", Class 3: "The aggravated but patient, believing in success through individual improvement" and Class 4: "The long-time substitutes, but suspicious ones". The class categories, as in the first survey, were assigned based on characteristics that the Latent Class Analysis identified as dominant in each group (class).

2.3.1 Results: Short description of classes[3]

"The politically indifferent and adaptable" do not want to be lifelong substitutes and hope to become permanently appointed teachers in the future. Their hopes of permanent appointment in their place of residence and financial support from parents, create a 'shield' which protects subjects not only from insecurity and precarity, but also from resentment, and these are two factors that make them more adaptable.

"The seemingly settled and politically detached" are teachers temporarily appointed as substitutes in their place of residence who can greatly supplement their income from other resources. These subjects do not sufficiently understand the nature of precarity.

"The aggravated but patient, believing in success through individual improvement" are subjects who experience insecurity and lack of planning in their lives and end up expecting the minimum that will provide them with relief, even though they recognize the injustice that is being done to them. Thus, having the support of their parents as well, they focus on obtaining knowledge and qualifications, believing and hoping that their individual efforts will ensure better employment prospects and professional development in the future.

"The long-time substitutes, but suspicious ones" are older teachers, with few alternative career options due to their age, who can only continue to wait and hope for a possible appointment. They perceive that they are given relief routines in order to keep their hopes alive for the coveted permanent appointment. Their temporary placement in their place of residence is unconsciously a quid pro quo meant to soothe their anger and feelings of unjust treatment.

2.3.2 Conclusion

From the analysis of the data, it is clear that the subjects of this demographic group, with regard to their working conditions, strongly perceive the injustice they are aware of, in terms of both the material and moral impact it has on their everyday reality.

Although the subject is outraged and describes feelings of insecurity, uncertainty about the future, unequal and unfair treatment by the state, with both anxiety and oppression (stress) making a daily psychological imprint,

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[2] Anomic solutions are those alternative and controversial means, from a legal or ethical point of view, adopted by subjects to achieve culturally established and accepted life goals (Merton, 1938: 672-682).

[3] Manafi, G., Baros, W., (2021). Precarious work and the perception of social injustice. A survey on the professional writers of academic papers, implemented with Latent Class Analysis / Πρόσληψη της κοινωνικής αδικίας από τους επισφαλείς εργαζομένους. Έρευνα για τους επαγγελματίες εκπονητές φοιτητικών εργασιών με τη Μέθοδο των Λανθανουσών Κλάσεων. In: Γεωργογιάννης, Π. (2021), Διαπολιτισμική *Εκπαίδευση και τα ελληνικά ως δεύτερη ή ξένη γλώσσα Αξιολόγηση, Διοίκηση, Αναλυτικά Προγράμματα, Διδακτικό Υλικό*. Πρακτικά 32ου Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου, Πάτρα, 369-376.

there are, however, mechanisms that induce passivity. At the same time, there are subjects who believe they will get what they deserve through personal development, and so they invest in more of it. They are looking, however, for a solution through personal development and fulfillment rather than by fighting against general social injustice. They distance themselves from major social issues, focus on personal problems and leave no room for interest in social issues they probably think are not relevant to their own future. Eventually, they are silenced by the comforting routines that the system takes care to offer in exchange for the anger the system itself causes them to feel through unjust treatment. As Moore explains, the system "expropriates" their anger with little tradeoffs for alleviation (1978: 500).

3 In the light of Freirean Critical Pedagogy

The findings and results of our research have led us to approach the major issue of precarity and the experience of injustice in the context of Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy.

It is possible to change the mechanisms that hold subjects hostage and trap them in inaction and passivity. The precarity that plagues today's society can be changed if precarious subjects become aware of their power. In his work, Freire underlines the power of the majority to change the world and make it more just.

Taking into account the conclusions in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire*, 2005: 145), we can state that precarity prevents people being from obtaining fulfillment through their work. Consequently, the precarious person, in the Freirean perspective, is oppressed because he or she experiences psychic harm. Under these conditions, the dominant culture of individualism drives people to construct their own individual path of survival, undermining solidarity, often turning a precarious subject against other precarious ones. For the ruling class, cooperation among the oppressed, and therefore precarious, constitutes a threat to its power. That is why it makes every effort to create divisions among them, while "lulling" their consciences with trivial concessions. The political alienation of oppressed precarious subjects facilitates the efforts of the ruling classes, because it keeps them passive and divided. The precarious, first of all, should recognize their precarity, understand its causes and then come to see that it is not a dead-end street. They must realize that this given situation can be changed and must regain hope for change and faith in their own power. The precarious, like all oppressed persons, must dare to escape from their illusion of security and become responsible for their actions. They have to stop conforming to a situation that dehumanizes them and demand their liberation.

Precarity is a liminal situation and necessitates that those locked into it in a fatalistic way must realize that only transformative resistance will liberate them. As long as people continue to be unthinking and passive, they can neither wake up nor change their situation. As Freire puts it, "The dependent society is by definition a silent society. In every way, the metropolis speaks, the dependent society listens" (Freire, 2000a: 46). It is a matter of vital importance for people to speak out, gain a voice and demand a more just world. Waking up is a necessary process so that people can proceed to take action for social reformation (Freire, 2000b: 44, 58 and 101).

This cannot be achieved, however, without critical reflection (Freire, 2014: 87). Liberating action must be founded on critical reflection, on the dialectical relationship between empirical and critical knowledge. Only in this way will reality be decoded and demystified and new visions and plans find expression. The precarious must be brought together, acquire a voice and engage in authentic dialogue. Their dialogue will have a pedagogical character, since it will create a new consciousness of reality and a new type of human being. It is all about a transformative process of changing oneself positively, which in turn will bring about change in wider aspects of the community. Dialogue is the tool and means that Freirean Liberation Pedagogy promotes in order to move forward to a better world. In their dialogue handbook *Liberating Pedagogy*, Freire and Shor (2011: 26) emphasize the creative and restorative capacity of dialogue. Through dialogue and communication, a form of mutual learning is achieved where each member gets to know himself or herself better and can shape and transform both himself or herself and others. This process results in broader social transformation, since constructive dialogue brings about action for change to benefit society as a whole.

3.1 Remaking oneself for a more just society

Adopting Freire's advice, we can say that our world can only become a better place if certain conditions are brought about: a) Understanding of Solidarity, b) Acquisition of Critical Consciousness, c) Creation of an "ideological map", d) Dialogue and e) Action.

3.1.1 For a just and solidary world

We need to understand that solidarity is a positive construct that inspires people and can lead to structural changes. Then, we must realize that social progress happens in relation to the degree of solidarity among the members of a society, as no one exists independently of others in our world (no one is an island). Thus, we need

to bring about solidarity among people facing common problems (Freire et al., 2021:108). The transformation of the individual through critical thinking and reflection marks the beginning of the journey to social change.

The path to critical consciousness is clarified by Shor (1993: 32) as follows: Analyzing Freire's theory, it begins with "intransitive thinking", where luck and God determine people's lives, and continues with "semi-transitive thinking", where people think and act for change, but only in regard to individual circumstances and individual issues, and without considering the system as a whole. The path then leads to the highest level of thought, critical thinking, where people think holistically and critically about their life circumstances and move to the highest level of thought and action, which is "critical consciousness". This is so-called Freirean "Critical Transitivity", where the subject sees and feels himself or herself able to think and act, to work against the surrounding negative conditions on a wider social level.

We need to construct an ideological map, as Paulo Freire (Freire, P., Freire Araujo, A.M. & Oliveira, W. 2021: 83, 84) emphasizes, in order to know whom we can count on, with whom we are compatible, and possibly who are our opponents. With patience, and together with people who share our dreams, we need to move forward and find others with common ideas and shared aspirations. We need to understand the "common point of pain" (Freire, Freire Araujo, A.M. & Oliveira, W. 2021: 124) in a wide range of social vulnerabilities, where work burdens, job insecurity and injustice are spreading rapidly at all levels. We need to unite, humanize ourselves for the awakening and liberation to come.

First, to achieve all of the above, dialogue among precarious groups is an imperative. The numerous precarious groups that appear to be a minority when viewed separately can become an absolute majority by building a coalition and acquiring voice and space in society, and can lead the way to social transformation. For a voice of revolt to be heard, it must offer hope and faith in change, change against exploitation, injustice, and insecurity for the future. When someone denounces something, he or she should also proclaim something, warns Freire. He or she should make proposals and plans to replace or reconstruct what they oppose. The majority of people who live under oppression and injustice, more likely in the middle and lower classes, should realize that denouncing an unjust reality and proclaiming a reform (pre)project should also presuppose an understanding of reality. Otherwise, they may fall victim to the revolutionary leadership, which is also a victim itself and follows the fatalistic concept of history (Freire, 2000a: 55). A reform project must include plans to fight oppression, injustice and dehumanization, striving to ensure equity in a humanized society of solidarity and prosperity.

3.1.2 Discussion

In this paper we presented the results of two surveys on how precarious subjects (student thesis writers and Greek substitute teachers) manage their precarity**.** The first study concluded that precarious subjects choose individualized solutions to cope with the precarity they experience, rationalizing their anomic choices and treating other precarious groups in the population suspiciously and antagonistically. The second study concluded that precarious subjects, while aware of the social injustice oppressing them, choose to cope with it through personal development, being indifferent to collective claims, succumbing to the system's practice of expropriating their silence and passivity in exchange for trivial benefits. Comparing the results of the two surveys, we conclude that it is difficult for precarious subjects to gain a voice and visibility and to demand collectively the improvement of their living conditions and transform themselves into a collective subject of social change, as the condition of precarity is corrosive to solidarity.

Bringing together Bourdieu's vision of a new type of unionism (Bourdieu, 2017: 241-253) with Freire's dialogical concept (Freire & Shor, 2011: 91) involving the dynamic of mutual enlightenment and reliance on critical thinking, we can say that precarious subjects should seek to organize themselves within the framework of a new dynamic unionism, which would be structured on the basis of self-management and moving away from centralization.

This should be realized in the context of an inclusive unionism that brings together all the precarious subjects who share common anxieties. It should happen in the context of a unionism in which consultants and researchers, together with the precarious, on the basis of a genuine critical dialogue, will seek to bring together empirical and critical knowledge, set short-term and long-term objectives and finally organize their actions to achieve improved human lives. Then, a dialogue with a reform perspective should be established between government and citizens. The aim of the whole project will be, as far as possible, to transform democracy to realize essential dimensions including justice and equity.

It is all about tolerance. Being a virtue, as Freire (2009: 150) explains, tolerance can give us the patience to recognize and think of alternatives. It can give us the space needed to meditate on and examine ourselves, and then understand and change the environment and conditions we live under. By discovering the nature of social reality, we will become able to **r**ethink, **r**econsider, **r**eact and **r**econstruct the social faults of the world order. These four 'Rs' are desirable as ways to work for and achieve the success story of a solidary and more just society, so that the journey of life will become better and more meaningful for all.

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