

Why Hardt and Negri's Understanding of Labour is Impractical in the Field Studies on the Social Class Phenomenon?

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Abstract

This article examines Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's ideas on class and labour relations. Negri and Hardt sufficiently explain the change of capitalist production process in trilogy (Empire, Multitude and Commonwealth) in which how the relation between the material and immaterial labour evolves is formulated. They assert that the immaterial labour is the hegemonic labour today and the Multitude is a kind of answer which will be the main political actor against the capitalist system. Of course their discourse is charming and supported by many people. Their ideas are important to see the big picture but unadoptable to understand the details of that big picture. Eventually, the article's main argument is that Negri and Hardt's understanding of labour is impractical and feeble in the field studies, provided that some useful aspects in the structure of their ideas to be demonstrated for researchers interested in the field. The article suggests that post-weberian Luc Boltanski's analysis is more useful to understand class details than Negri and Hardt's theory.

Keywords: Hardt and Negri, field studies, relations of production, Luc Boltanski, Pragmatic Sociology of Justification.

Hardt ve Negri'nin Emek Anlayışı Toplumsal Sınıflar Hakkında Yapılan Alan Araştırmalarında Neden Elverişsizdir?

Öz

Elinizdeki makale Antonio Negri ve Michael Hardt'ın sınıf ve emek ilişkileri hakkındaki fikirlerine odaklanmaktadır. Negri ve Hardt kapitalist üretim sürecinin değişimini trilojisinde (İmparatorluk, Çokluk ve Ortak Zenginliğimiz) maddi olmayan emekle maddi emek arasındaki ilişkinin değişimini yeterince açıklamıştır. Onlar günümüzde maddi olmayan emeğin hegemonik emek olduğunu iddia etmekte ve kapitalizme karşı "Çokluğun" yeni bir politik aktör olabileceğini iddia etmektedir. Söylemleri oldukça popüler hale geldi ve bir çok insan tarafından desteklendi. Onların bu söylemi büyük fotoğrafı görmek için işlevsel olsa da ayrıntıları anlamak için oldukça kullanışsızdır. Sonuç olarak makalenin temel iddiası, Negri ve Hardt'ın fikirleri sınıf üzerine yapılan alan araştırması verilerini yorumlarken, anlarken kullanışsız ve işlevsiz olduğudur. Onun fikirlerinin yerine post-weberian gelenek içerisinde gelen Luc Boltanski'nin fikirleri kullanılmalıdır. Ancak Negri ve Hardt'ın görüşleri üretim ilişkileri yapısının nasıl değiştiğini göstermek açısından araştırmacıya yararlı bakış açıları sunmaktadırlar. Bu iddia Negri ve Hardt'ın fikirleri ve yapılan bir alan araştırması deneyimleri üzerinden ispatlanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hardt ve Negri, alan araştırması, üretim ilişkileri, Luc Boltanski, Gerekleştirme Sosyolojisi.

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INTRODUCTION

Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt are important social scientists who formulate the essential terms including 'the empire, multitude, role of immaterial labour, refuse to work, social worker' etc. to understand the contemporary relations of capitalist production. However, their ideas are impractical in the field studies on the class phenomenon. Once upon a time I thought that this fact was only my fault derived from my experience, then I understood that it is not just my experience but a structural inadequacy in their understanding of labour. The article consists of three parts to point out this structural inadequacy. Firstly, Negri and Hardt's understanding of labour and class will be explained. Secondly, after Negri and Hardt's understanding of labour and class is compared with the Post-Weberian class analysis, there will be a discussion on which one is more useful to find the research details during field studies. Finally, the article unveils why Negri and Hardt's understanding of labour and class is unadoptable and inflexible to analyze the data collected from the interviews and observers. In this work it is desired to become a pathfinder for the scientists planning to use Negri and Hardt's understanding of labour and class for new field studies on the class phenomenon.

1. THE MEANING OF LABOUR AND CLASS FOR NEGRI AND HARDT

First of all, let's start with approving a significant viewpoint about Negri as a political actor and a theorist. His life is a summary of the second part of tw twentieth century European Working Class. He was a militant Marxist in the 1950's and 60's Italy. "Italy's revolutionary left was that associated with the class and state analysis developed by Antonio Negri" who asserted that traditional Fordist assembly line worker was changed by the new means of production and "disseminated throughout society, congregating in the spheres of both production and reproduction" (Wright, 2002, p. 152). The time has witnessed how traditional mass working class turned to be no stronger enough against the bourgeoisie. Hence, the capitalist class gained a new ability to use on the mass working class, which is able to go wherever the cheap and unorganized labour lives. Therefore, the Italian mass working class was smashed by the new relations of production. In this situation, Negri aimed to find a new pathway to exit for the benefit of the Italian Working class. He tried to develop an alternative critical approach to the issue together with Hardt. "Three highest examples of this critical tradition of modern political theory, in their opinion, are Machiavelli, Spinoza, and Marx" (Negri and Hardt, 2000, p. 184). They updated Marx and Spinoza's ideas for the pathway. Consequently, Negri and Hardt's idea of labour and class requires is also meant a scientific political research in support of the working class in the world societies.

After establishing the ground to indicate Negri and Hardt's understanding of labour and class, there are two questions raised to be asked. What is the meaning of labour and class for them and why is their analysis popular in social theory? Their theoretical framework's aim is pragmatically to understand the transformations in the capitalist labour relations so their class analysis is useful and clear cut in the social science. Negri and Hardt accept Marx's material labor analysis so that new generations can link up between the classic Marxist Theory and Post- Marxizm. However, Grundrisse is more important than Capital according to them. Because Grundrisse is not as a

solid structural capitalist analysis as Capital and additionally includes how material labour is in relation with immaterial labour in the capitalist system so that Grundrisse may also offer a chance to link Spinozist affectivity and Marxist class analysis. Negri and Hardt pointed out that the capitalist system has been transformed and rebuilt the desire, taste and lifestyle of the traditional working class in the last sixty years so the organized European working class has collapsed which was achieved through the construction of another type of labour by the capital. It is called as the immaterial labour. Negri and Hardt noticed that Marxist social structure analysis needed to be revised in order to explain the new labour relations. They consulted Marx's theory and Spinozist nature of affects to improve the Marxist class analysis. They used the concept of "general intellect" from Grundrisse to explain the emerging immaterial labour. Marx (1993, p. 706) summarized it thus:

...Organs of the human brain (locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs), created by the human hand; the power of knowledge, objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process.

"General intellect" is the immaterial labour today for Negri and Hardt. The immaterial labour not only has been producing the consumption culture but also determining the ordinary people's desire, fear, taste etc which is a fundamental point in their class analysis. According to the classical Marxist analysis, the production process and exploitation of the labour are in working hours. However, the exploitation and production is every time in people's lives for Negri and Hardt. The name of this era is the "Empire". Empire is a political project to understand global relation of production. "Our basic hypothesis is that sovereignty has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule. This new global form of sovereignty is what we call Empire" (Negri and Hardt, 2000). Empire is a new model of the global capitalist system. The main actor of this system is global companies.

When a Marxist theorist like Hardt and Negri describes a new type of capitalist actor, should also describe a new type gravedigger for the actor. The new gravedigger's name is Multitude for Hardt and Negri. Multitude is a concept that is difficult to describe. The concept includes enigma and mystery. It has body, motion, changing and a potential to get working class power against the capital. The Multitude is a kind of war myth about which every anti-capitalist has sympathy and talks to each other. However no one can see and describe it in real life. The Multitude ignores different types of capitalist strategies and the fragmented global working class culture. Empire can be monolithic but the Multitude cannot. Multitude is weak to understand local working class relations in the global world. It just like a motto "we are %99", however it is not sure how many people want to smash %1 or want to join %1. I don't accept either %99 is monolithic or Multitude has a potential to get solidarity around the class conscience. For example first world countries' working class can buy cheap clothes and commodity owing to the third

world countries' child and cheap labour. How can we say all working class constitute a global multitude? People who are in Multitude have different profits in the capitalist production process in the Empire.

2. TO UNDERSTAND "MULTITUDE" IN FIELD STUDIES

If a concept is influential, it can explain every question as a part of any topic with that concept. Let's ask a question for the Multitude. The question is basic on three main vocabulary: "benefit, control and promotion. When we ask a question? Do people in the Multitude have the same benefit, control and promotion? The answer is clearly "no" because the Multitude is not phenomenological and social scientific. It is as a result of the quest of the political actors against the Empire or any other new capitalist actor. The Multitude has too many varieties in itself. But the variety does not mean that Multitude. Hardt and Negri said that the immaterial labour is the new hegemonic labour in the capitalist manufacturing process. Immaterial, in other words, cognitive labour is the new actor for labour movements. Hardt and Negri think of immaterial labourer has enough calibre to organize blue collar workers against capitalist system. When this assumption is accepted; how can we explain the fact that there is too much competition to be a middle class member among the white collar workers even they do not have a right to control over the blue collar employees? What is the function of the governing board and the audit commission? Consequentially it is aimed to indicate that each person controls and has free competition with each other in the Multitude. Multitude is a kind of improper design for the field studies. If a researcher uses this concept in the field studies, he/she can never notice the details but only see the subjects of the field in a big rough picture. The view would lead to a wrong analysis. In order to avoid that, in this work it is suggested that their theory is more useful to understand how the capitalist labour relations has been changing by the scientific developments in the globalization. This process of change can be named as from Fordism to Post-Fordism or Toyotizm. Hardt and Negri assumed that the capital found a way to use cheap labour in the world because of the new telecommunication and logistic technology. "In response to the growing power of the mass worker, capital's attempt to destroy its political composition opened up what Negri believes to be a third phase in the history of class struggle. This epoch starts in the years following 1968" (Bowring, 2004, p. 110). The change is a capitalist policy to weaken the organized mass workers in Europe and the U.S.A. After, the capitalist labour relations change two important things. Firstly, the immaterial labour which is important to control telecommunications and logistic labour in the global era, is now hegemonic to material labour. Secondly, the old organized mass workers depend on the third world's cheap labour to keep their life standards. For example, cheap textile labour in Bangladesh is making cheap clothes for English working class. Therefore, the solidarity of international workers is collapsed by the new capitalist labour relations. Hardt and Negri's determination is important and practical for macro analysis in social science. However, if a social scientist wishes to understand the details, the determination would not be enough. Hardt and Negri's theory is powerless in specific topics in different societies and cultures. For proof the situation I want to show my own experience. I tried to use Hardt and Negri's assumptions in my phd research at 2015. Firstly my thesis theory based on Negri and Hardt hegemonic immaterial labour and multitude and my phd thesis is based on a qualitative research which includes interviews with working individuals from low, middle, and upper classes conducted in Istanbul. I totally made twenty-six interviews.

After I first making five interviews I understood that Hardt and Negri's immaterial labour concept and multitude concept are useless. Because I couldn't understand and explain my field data with multitude and hegemonic immaterial labour idea. I noticed that Hardt and Negri's theory is valuable to realize the big picture in the capitalist labour relations. However, a researcher who needs to investigate a specific society and cultural relations should use Weberian or post-Weberian perspective in order to find the details and efficiently carry out a data analysis in the field studies. In other words, Negri and Hardt (other post-Marxists as well) are good at explaining the capitalist policy but insufficient at looking at the micro perspectives which is a part of the Multitude. A good research map should use a combination of post-Weberian and post-Marxist theories. Because of this I firstly determined my theoretical problem, thesis was followed different pathway to analysis immaterial labour strategies and facts. The pathway called as the "Pragmatic Sociology of Justification" which has been developed by a Paris-based group headed by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (Thévenot and Boltanski, 2006). "The notion 'pragmatic' inspired, in different degrees, by pragmatism, such as symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology. Rather, the term pragmatic refers to linguistic pragmatics, stressing the actors' use of grammatical resources facing situations in which they find themselves" (Jagd, 2011, p. 345). Pragmatic Sociology of Justification is useful for data analysis in the qualitative field studies. Because the sociology based on sociology of critique. When a social scientist wants to get sociology of critic, the scientist needs to know the worth of the society. Thus, they can learn how actors justify their own behaviours in capitalist system.

Pragmatic sociology quickly focused its attention on one, very specific category of 'practical reasoning', namely, the range of arguments and principles of evaluation which individuals deploy in the process of trying to define what may be the most proper or legitimate action or standard of action, and whereby they grope for or re-establish social agreement (Silber, 2003, p. 429).

Boltanski and Thévenot improved the pragmatic sociology's basic logic for the data analysis in the field studies. They used two main concepts and six categories for the data analysis. The six categories are the inspired world, the domestic, the world of fame, the civic world, the market world, the industrial world. These worlds are composed of personal worth, habitus, social, cultural, economic capital for the actors' justification of their own actions in daily life. Every actor is in all the worlds at same time. Every world has different value than others. The change of value depends on practices in daily events.

Pragmatic Sociology of Justification has two important concepts: "worth" and "polity". "Worth can describe the argumentation of the persons involved in a situation" (Basaure, 2011). Worth depends on the harmony between the actor's own social, economic, cultural capital and society's economic, cultural and social capital. Every actor plays own different worth in each world to provide a powerful justification against the other actors which is determined by the harmony between the worth of society and worth of actor. Let's draw an analogy to make it clear. Worth is a kind of money and each world has local currency. An actor has every world's local currencies in his packet with different rates. An actor can be the richest in a world but at the same time he can be poorer than the other actors in another world. An actor's worth challenges another actor's

worth in each world on the daily practice. The other important concept is “polity” to understand Negri and Hardt’s Multitude. The concept of “polity” is a central one in the study of processes of justification. By “polity,” Boltanski means what we could call an “argumentative kit” articulated around a definite form of the common good” (Jacquesmain, 2008). Polity is a determinant factor to reach a consensus among actors in every world. Boltanski and Th evenot’s theory has a polity for each world. I want to give an example to easily comprehend the pragmatic sociology of justification. An actor wants to buy a medicine at 10:15 p.m. but the pharmacies close at 10.00 p.m. Patient insists on to open the pharmacy. The staff of the pharmacy does not accept to open the door. Patient suddenly shows his artificial leg in front of the pharmacy at the crowded street and shouts out that “I am a veteran, I lost my leg for our country and now my child is ill. I want to buy a medicine but the staff don’t sell the medicine (...)Why? Because, I am just 15 minutes late after the closure time. It is injustice!” and then a lot of people gather in front of the pharmacy and ask the staff “Why don’t you sell the medicine for veteran?” with one voice. The example explains three different world values at the same time. First, value is in the market world which is pharmacy closing time. People’s consumption is a determined timetable for free market. Second, value is in the domestic world which is about the fact that a father wants to buy a medicine for his innocent child. Child’s life is more important than the free market rules. Third, value is in the civic world which is built over the sense that the veteran has lost his leg for the freedom of the country. Veterans are more efficient public figures than the pharmacy’s staff labour contract. Consequently, the domestic world and the civic world value is stronger than the market world in this practice. This method of analysis which belongs to the pragmatic justification of sociology is more helpful than Negri and Hardt’s ideas for data analysis in the field studies. Let’s use Negri and Hardt’s ideas for this fictional example. How can the data be analysed with Negri and Hardt’s concepts such as Multitude, Empire, and Social Worker etc.? I can be said that a veteran should be in Multitude and against the universal monopolist pharmaceutical industry. The medicine was produced in a third world country. The medicine could be bought due to immaterial labour’s telecommunication and logistic control ability at Empire times. Pharmacy staff has not got the means of production and this is what Marx calls as the alienation. However, the actors use their own pragmatic justification of worlds in the field. The veteran is happy now for example as he has bought the medicine for his child after 10 p.m. from the pharmacy with the public support aroused by his past sacrifices for the country. We cannot understand how the capitalist system goes on with the happiness with Negri and Hardt’s theory but we can unveil with the pragmatic justification of sociology that the happiness was a result of policy and worths in different worlds which pave the way for the persistence of the significant social structural codes.

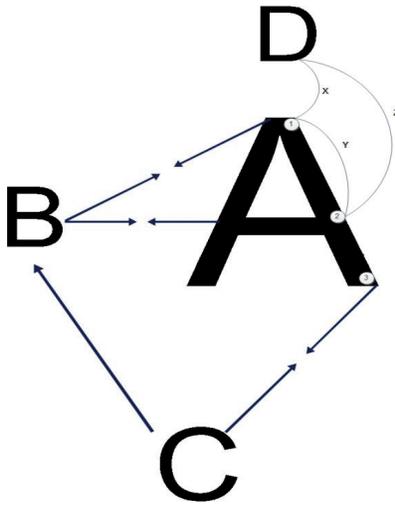
After explained Hardt and Negri’s assumptions and pragmatic sociology, giving original main evidence or data why is Negri and Hardt’s understanding of labour is impractical and feeble in the field studies? According to my field research, the content of security, fairness and excitement changed for the immaterial labour (middle class members) today. The change was not understood by Negri and Hardt. Fairness is not in relation with equality; conversely it represents inequality for the middle class. “A” middle class member acquires security and fairness when he/she is better in work life than the others in a company. Success is determined in terms of the adaptation to the new market

system and market rules. Security and fairness aren't given to everybody by the system but only are deserved by the middle class members who provide the systemic necessities. The middle class members who deserve the right to justice, also gain work security, high salary, promotion and their own future life plan. These are exciting things for the middle class life. All exciting things can be bought with money so money is the source of excitement and motivation. Middle class labour is hegemonic on other labour types (blue, pink collar workers etc.) in global product process, however only a few of the middle class members has decision authority on themselves, working class and capital. The situation is too different than Hardt and Negri's arguments. Middle class members establish their own strategies over the changing and newly emerging meanings. In this context, the table.1 presented the picture of the working mechanism of the immaterial labour.

Group C consists of white collar workers who don't possess fairness and security. Group C members have four social type. First social type; just graduated university, has not had a work experience in any sector and social and economic capital. Second social type does not get into capitalist system but has a work experience, and doesn't want to follow a business carrier. Third social type desires to have business carrier, yet has bank debt because of mortgage loan, marriage loan etc. so that type cannot compete with other Group C members. Last social type of Group C has not had a work experience but has social and economic capital from her/his family and their labour type is technical (engineer, architect etc.) which is advantageous than others in Group C (financier, investment adviser, human resources etc.) Only technical middle class members (engineer, architect etc.) can rise from C to B. Group B has two social type. Both of them come from Group C and has work experience as technical labour. First social type has social and economic capital and wants to be executive engineer which motivates them to gain an MBA degree. Their aim is to get promoted into Group A2, and A1 positions. Second social type doesn't have a passion to get promotion to Group A but is only interested in being provided a regular income. This type has risen from Group C owing to their labour type and work experience. In case people whose only capital is network (financier, investment adviser, human resources etc.) can rise from C to A:3. Competition is higher while rising from C to A:3 than C to B. Group C member can rise to A:3 and then respectively A:2, A:3; and B member (provided that MBA degree) can go up to A:2 and A:3 (as executive engineer). Group D members are capitalist.

They own the means of production; employ middle class and working class members. They are in relation only with A:1 and A:2 members. Middle class and corporate culture are determined by X, Y and Z. The main dynamics of all these relations and flows are based on the new meanings of justice, security, excitement and authority in our age (Uca, 2016).

Table.1



Group D: Capitalist

Group A (general): Executives,
A:1 Top Managers, A2: Mid-lever
Manager, A3: Junior Administrative
Officer.

Group B: Technical Middle Class

Group C: White Collar Workers

X, Y and Z: relations between D,
A1, A2.

(Uca, 2016, s. 196)

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates and tries to prove three main points in Negri and Hardt's theory. Firstly, their theory is more political than scientific. They tried to find a new political actor in the global era; thus, their argument was shaped around that the immaterial labour is hegemonic on other labour types and the labour members can be chief of the Multitude against the capitalist Empire. However, the field, real world is too different than their theory. White collar workers and middle class members labour type is immaterial labour. Engineers, business managers, technicians, accountants etc. are examples for immaterial labour. These jobs are in a hierarchy. Every middle class and worker class member is controlled by a superior. Superiors are controlled by boards of management, general director etc. Immaterial labour could be a member of management, director or superior, must prove the dependency on the capitalist system and should win a rivalry against the other immaterial members in his own sector. Only after a member who has risen to the level of the upper class manager has a right on the subordinate immaterial workers and blue collar workers. As you can see, only a few immaterial labour members are able to be chief of white and blue collars workers. However, the member's agency is shaped by the capitalist manufacturing process. Subsequently, Negri and Hardt's new political actor does not have the characteristics to be a locomotive of the working class.

Secondly, the multitude is a problematic and monolithic concept in Negri and Hardt's theory. They cannot understand the discrepancies in different worlds of working class. How we can say that the Indian and Bangladeshi working classes constitute in the same position with the Swedish and French ones at the Multitude? I think the multitude is a concept to close the puzzlers in the global working class relations.

Furthermore, the Marxist bourgeois-working class dualism continues owing to the multitude. Multitude is an impractical mould for researchers in field studies yet it is still a hope for the Marxist policy.

Finally, Negri and Hardt's theory can be good to see the big changing capitalist relations of production in the global era. However, their theory is unworkable, impractical for field studies so my suggestion is that a researcher firstly should use the Marxist or Post-Marxist theory such as Negri and Hardt's theory which gives political glasses to understand the societies, the aspects of capitalist orientation and the changing capitalist system structure. Then, the researcher should go to the field research. For a data analysis derived from field research, they should use the Weberian and post-Weberian theories out of which I highly recommend the "Pragmatic Justification of Sociology" developed by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot.

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