

Précarisation des conditions de travail à Toronto et à San Salvador en 2010 : auto-organisation des travailleurs et main d'œuvre transnationale en périodes de crise

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Résumé

Cet article évalue la détérioration des conditions de travail à San Salvador et Toronto durant l'année de crise 2010, en appréhendant de façon conceptuelle les thèmes étudiés. L'auto-organisation des travailleurs des deux villes contre la précarisation est le fruit de leur expérience directe des applications impérialistes, racialisées et fondées sur le sexe du néolibéralisme, et à ce titre, constitue un important site de résistance. Le choix d'étudier San Salvador et Toronto tient à la position qu'elles occupent au sein du capitalisme contemporain. Les deux villes ont été façonnées par le néolibéralisme grâce à des politiques d'ajustement structurel et à des exportations massives de main d'œuvre à San Salvador, et grâce à des politiques d'austérité et des méthodes d'importation importante de main d'œuvre à Toronto. Les travailleurs sont assujettis à de sévères restrictions et les capitalistes s'enrichissent; les deux villes représentent des sites de lutte significatifs.

L'article démontre que le travail précaire des travailleurs locaux, tout comme celui de la main d'œuvre transnationale, représente une source d'accumulation essentielle au renouvellement du développement capitaliste. Si l'hyper-exploitation de cette main d'œuvre est cruciale pour l'apartheid économique mondial, la précarité vécue par les travailleurs contribue à engendrer une lutte libératrice. L'auto-organisation des travailleurs contre cette précarité du travail est un outil puissant pour les tentatives de transformation des intensifications impérialistes, racialisées et fondées sur le sexe du néolibéralisme. S'auto-organiser donne plus d'agence aux travailleurs dans leur résistance contre la domination capitaliste, faisant de la classe ouvrière au sens large des protagonistes plus actifs.

Precarization of Working Conditions in Toronto and San Salvador through 2010: Workers' Self-Organizing and Transnational Labour in Times of Crisis

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Abstract

This article assesses worsening working conditions in San Salvador and Toronto through the crisis year of 2010, applying conceptual understandings of self-organizing, precarity, and transnational labour. Workers' self-organizing against precarization in both cities is informed by direct experiences of the gendered, racialized, and imperialist applications of neoliberalism and is thus an important site of resistance. San Salvador and Toronto, because of their particular positions in contemporary capitalism, represent two significant sites of workers struggle. Shaped by neoliberalization through structural adjustment policies and massive export of labour in San Salvador, and austerity policies and major labour-import practices in Toronto, workers are severely constrained and capitalists enriched.

The article contends that workers' precarious labour, like that of transnational labour, is a central source of accumulation for renewed capitalist development. While the hyper-exploitation of this labour is crucial to global economic apartheid, workers' experiences against precarity contribute to a liberatory struggle. This article argues that workers' self-organizing against labour precarization is a powerful tool in their attempts to transform the gendered, racialized, and imperialist intensifications of neoliberalism. It gives workers greater agency in their resistance to capitalist domination, making the broader working class more active and effective protagonists.

Introduction

In the current capitalist crisis, the hierarchical social stratification integral to the precarization of working conditions has intensified. Along with precarity (relatively lower wages and benefits, less security, and higher health risks [Vosko, 2006: 3-4]), the worsening conditions of labour such as a more racialized and gendered

labour force and new imperialist policies (Biel, 2000) have, in some instances, reached new extremes of the neocolonization of labour. Exemplary organizing by citizen workers at export-processing zone sweatshops in San Salvador and by foreign caregivers living in their employers' homes in Toronto, as examined in this article, confronts the gendered and racialized consequences of a new imperialism that includes neoliberal trade and migration policies and worsening wage inequities and social hierarchies (Federici, 2009). In each city this organizing also contends with a neocolonization of labour due to the super-exploitative domination by capitalists and/or states foreign to the workers' original countries, along with this neocolonization's mediation by government policies, supply contractors, placement agencies, and employing families. Where mass migration shapes the working class, a significant number of labourers are themselves *transnationals* (maintaining relations across state borders) and their experiences connect with those of co-workers and neighbours in popular efforts to overturn processes of precarization. In these contexts, *self-organizing* activities to transform precarious working and living conditions manifest mutual accountability and collective self-determination with minimal bureaucracy and are thus distinct from established institutional forms, even when they occur within them.

San Salvador and Toronto, the largest cities in El Salvador and Canada, are chosen as sites in which to examine struggles against devaluations of labour-power through precarity because of those countries' respective positions in contemporary capitalist development. Each state is shaped by neoliberalization, i.e., the processes of neoliberal change that define deepening capitalist discipline of workers and privilege of owners in the present historical period, and that have recently focused on the precarization of work (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 395-99). In El Salvador, this operates through structural adjustment and massive labour-export and, in Canada, through austerity measures and labour-import practices. With its left government elected in 2009, El Salvador is a recent arrival into Latin America's left turn. Canada, especially in the present crisis, is purported to be a global model of political and economic stability for both capital accumulation and renewed neoliberalization. This article assesses worsening working conditions in San Salvador and Toronto through the crisis year of 2010, by applying conceptual understandings of self-organizing, precarity, and transnational

labour. It is informed by the author's interviews in San Salvador and Toronto with people who are unemployed or who work in assembly and processing plants, homes of people receiving care, educational institutions, advocacy organizations, and government offices. It argues that workers' self-organizing, including by transnationals, against precarization is uniquely powerful because it is informed by direct experiences of gendered, racialized, and imperialist applications of neoliberalist policies. This self-organizing involves the radical protagonism necessary to overthrow the exploitative social relations underlying precarity and subordination to capital.

Self-Organizing and Precarity: Contextualizing Definitions

Real life situations of self-organizing against precarious conditions typically address numerous overlapping gendered and racialized inequities including wage disparities and competitions between workers of different citizen and migrant statuses. The types of organizations examined in this article and the problems to be researched are introduced through two instances: unionizing sweatshops in San Salvador and mobilizing Filipino caregivers in Toronto. On this basis, select scholarship about migration and neoliberalism is referenced to contextualize these self-organizing efforts against precarity conceptually before focusing on their specific urban and national settings in greater depth.

Acts to effect change based on one's own direct experiences are central to self-organizing. As one union organizer described to me while referring to a video recording of their strike at an export processing zone in San Salvador:

Our federation is always practical. We always do things and not just in theory. ...These are women who didn't go to work. They closed the gates and stayed to dance. So this improved the condition of people. We sometimes don't have all the tools to protest so, because we are practical, we improvise. During 15 days and 15 nights you can see that we don't have anything but it's like a family, we have a kitchen and are cooking. It was one of the longest activities that we did with women from the factory.

This enactment of workers' unity in striking, dancing, and operating a camp with a productive kitchen is especially meaningful

in contrast to the various divisions imposed upon workers in export processing zones by their bosses. Indeed, several strikes against the same sweatshops succeeded in winning either reinstatement with compensation or severance payments for fired co-workers, who were usually also union organizers. More routinely, workers organizing with another union in the same export processing zone emphasized the problem of supervisors assigning or withholding available work at their whim or according to prejudices against union organizers. This has informed the workers' prioritization of demands to include levelling wages upwards, sharing workloads more equally, and applying principles of non-discrimination. These self-organizing efforts to unionize sweatshops in San Salvador relate a shared working-class interest to oppose precarization of labour with concerted actions to raise the conditions of all workers as well as those targeted for the most intense exploitation.

In the case of mobilizing Filipina live-in caregivers in Toronto by the Magkaisa Centre, their central concerns, workers deskilling and the naturalization of workers' gendered and racialized roles (see also Chong, 2009), are shared by Filipino youth and Overseas Filipino Workers in other jobs. Self-organizing to address these issues involves opposing the precarious conditions that define the Live-In Caregiver Programme of the Canadian state as well as conducting anti-racist investigations of education by youth and critically analyzing the Temporary Foreign Workers Programme in general. One organizer told me "the fundamental thing is that we're trying to find solutions from our experiences. Some people take [a nationalist] or top down approach but that is quite rigid. There is a role to represent things from the bottom. That is where the solutions are going to be derived from." In each case, workers' related their specific lived experiences to appeal to the sympathies of other affected groups and thus widen the scope of their self-organizing activities. This reflects the simultaneous necessity to extend one's understanding of precarious conditions to the capitalist processes that shape them.

Self-organized resistance to precarization is powerful to the extent that it pursues improved conditions for labour and also challenges underlying capitalist exploitation. Such power is necessary to both confront the vested interests upholding the inequalities of precarization and overturn the social relations realizing capitalist development. For example, the discussion

around self-organizing against precarity considers labour migration, and the simultaneous entrenchments of lower tier jobs and sub-citizenships as aspects of the process of neoliberalization. This is exemplified by the use of the term *precarious migratory status* to denote the gendered and racialized deterioration of the legal status of migrants in Toronto (Goldring, Berinstein, and Bernhard, 2009). Precarization of labour and migration are crucial in the evolution of global apartheid from the “forcible isolation of people who are different” (Richmond, 1994) to absorption of the most exploited workers’ labour as a central source of accumulation for renewed capitalist development. Improving precarious working conditions through self-organization addresses rather than denies the wider differentiations of and competitions between people whose labour is commodified through neoliberalization. As Gorman contends about political consciousness and “mixed-race suspects”,

“It is not a question of expanding liberal citizenship to include non-white habitus; rather, we must analyze liberal citizenship as an aspect of the global system of nation states through which the capitalist system functions, even as we demand protections afforded by the extension of citizenship rights...” (2011: 10-11).

Likewise, the entwined historical transformations in Latin America of Brazilianization (labour informalization and mass migration) and neoliberalism position people thus exploited, such as migrants, as working class antagonists of regionalized, gendered, and racialized processes of capitalist development (Antunes, 2011; see Munck, 2008: 1229-31). Self-organizing against precarity engages the social protagonism of its active subjects to oppose the inequities they immediately experience as integral parts of contemporary neoliberalization.

San Salvador and Toronto: Neoliberalization and Transnational Labour

I chose San Salvador and Toronto as sites from which to examine workers’ self-organizing against precarization of working conditions because the state in which each city exists occupies an exemplary position within capitalist development and is distinctively shaped by advanced neoliberalization in the following ways. El Salvador has been thoroughly neoliberalized through structural

adjustment and reoriented to labour-export since the end of the 1980s war. Approximately one-third of all Salvadorans have emigrated and over 120,000 reside and work in Canada (Naciones Unidas Programa Desarrollo El Salvador and Universidad Centroamericana, 2011). Scholars name El Salvador one of a few “transnational nation-states in that they treat their emigrants as long-term, long-distance members” (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004: 27; see also Landolt, Autler, and Baires, 1999); by 2014, Salvadoran transnationals everywhere will be able to vote remotely in Salvadoran elections (Ayala, 2012). With the election of its left government in 2009, El Salvador is also an instance of the Latin American left turn, although this is mediated by the strong influence of right parties in the legislature and the mass media and the continued use of the United States dollar as its official currency.

Canada has also been undergoing neoliberalization since the 1990s, through state austerity and regressive tax restructuring ever since implementing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and the United States. Its restructuring of labour aggressively implemented the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development’s jobs strategy of flexibilization, since repudiated by scholars (McBride, McNutt, and Williams, 2009; see Chow, 2011). Immigration policies were also restructured to precaritize labour, a practice especially relevant to Toronto where a majority of residents were born outside Canada; up to 500,000 workers in Canada – half of whom reside in Toronto – are without documents legalizing their employment (Magalhaes, Carrasco and Gastaldo, 2010). The year 2010 is additionally an opportune time to examine Salvadoran and Canadian experiences of crisis because state stimulus programs were determined by political parties of opposite ideologies (socialist in El Salvador and conservative in Canada), which governed with exclusive appointment to all executive offices and the largest minority of legislative seats.

San Salvador and Toronto are also sites of self-organized resistances to precarity by transnationals (non-state actors who sustain ongoing relations across national borders). Many people I interviewed, especially most transnationals, emphasized how working-class migrants and their peers self-organize together, beyond the exclusive boundaries of groups based on respective national origin. One worker in Toronto said to me “We are a transnational community coming from...countries all over the

world” (see also Angulo, 2010). The Regional Campaign Against Labour Flexibility was created in El Salvador in 2004 and expanded since 2005 to involve 70 organizations across Central America including 12 Salvadoran groups (11 unions and one feminist organization, Transforming Women) (Campaña Regional contra la Flexibilidad Laboral, 2010). The first workers’ centre in North America was started by "feminist Central America solidarity and labor activists in El Paso in 1981" (Fine, 2007: 215). Workers’ centres proliferated in the United States, and twenty years later were independently organized in Toronto as the Workers’ Action Centre (WAC) and in Montreal as the Immigrant Workers’ Centre (Choudry, et. al., 2009). A WAC organizer told me they communicate closely with workers’ centres across North America. And, as an education worker in San Salvador told me, on at least one occasion a WAC organizer observed a campaign to increase the minimum wage in El Salvador that prompted interactions valued by groups in both locations. Since then, transnationals from El Salvador organized and hosted the eighth Convention of Salvadorans of the World in 2010 in Toronto to focus on development and the diaspora, especially regarding Salvadoran women migrants (Convención Internacional de Salvadoreños en el Mundo VIII, 2010). Transnationals are the original protagonists of self-organizing against precarization in Central and North America. This historical legacy enriches already rooted local self-organizing with even broader experiences and thus creates a basis for reconstructing connections between workers in various national and transnational settings, whether within a single city or across state borders.

Common to both cities is the worsening of precarious working conditions and in each the specific patterns of their effects serve as catalysts for constructive criticisms of resistance to neoliberalization. Four examples demonstrate the importance of revisiting progressive demands and class analysis and improving directions for self-organizing. First, a caregiver and queer community organizer in San Salvador noticed how the present crisis manifests within established imperialist relations such as labour emigrating from El Salvador to be appropriated in the United States, when he said “Budget pressures cause a lot of fighting in families. I see a lot of fighting every day. They say ‘Why don’t you go there to the United States to find money?’” This organizer also criticized the way in which North American nongovernmental organizations exacerbate workplace

inequalities in their own operations and raised the example of how one such service provider privileges only North American workers in El Salvador with superior employment benefits. His conclusion is significant for exposing the structurally subordinate role of such workers and thus problematizing bourgeois workplace propriety: “We should have the ability to participate, not just to request or keep jobs, but to be equal partners”. Second, the Workers’ Action Centre (WAC) in Toronto, upon continually confronting discriminations against workers in precarious jobs, rejects the lesser-status for migrants that intensifies labour competition. They demand, “Our immigration policies must be changed to ensure permanent status for temporary foreign workers on arrival, an end to employer-specific work permits and a fair appeals process when workers are forced to return to their home country. We also need to see a full and inclusive regularization program for all non-status workers” (WAC, 2011: 4).

Third, the Magkaisa Centre in Toronto, which consists of many allied Filipino-Canadian organizations, furthers the demand for regularization of migrants by calling for the abolition of the state’s Live-In Caregiver program. An organizer with the group whom I interviewed emphasized the conceptual difference between continuing differential migrant/citizen statuses based on national interests in circular-migration such as through the Live-In Caregiver program and called for the creation of a site for unifying working class interests, including those of transnationals, such as around socializing caregiving: “Ninotchka Rosca, a Filipino feminist, said ‘The bourgeoisie really took it to heart when we said the proletariat really doesn’t have a country.’ Because we don’t. It’s up to us to create that country. It’s the working class... For us, we’re not going to settle for less with our lives” (see Rosca in Philippine Women Centre-Ontario, 2011). Fourth, solidarity actions in Toronto by workers of colour in a public sector union with migrants and community organizations inform these members’ critical interventions within their own union. One such organizer specified that this involves members improving their access to internal union resources, including basic defence of their workplace rights since sometimes members disaffected by their union solicit advocacy from separate community groups such as the Workers’ Action Centre, as well as aligning their union’s political positions with demands from the community organizations they engage with through solidarity actions. Such demands include deepening campaigns for higher

minimum wages and employment standards and challenging the impoverishment of unemployed people and those receiving welfare or disability support payments. Experiences of labour exploitation vary between El Salvador and Canada. Only by examining both together, however, is it possible to perceive connections between them. Critical reflections upon their distinct situations reveal a shared central focus on transnational labour and the conditions of migrants form a constructive basis for future self-organizing efforts, and allow us to comprehend the details, as explained below, of class struggle against precarization of working conditions in the Salvadoran and Canadian contexts.

San Salvador, El Salvador

People in San Salvador face neoliberalization today due to the historical conditions of the war in El Salvador between 1980 and 1992. In the mid to late 1970s many newly urbanized and mostly informal workers demanded access to jobs with formal employers and state programs. A veteran labour organizer told me: “we started an independent union of the unemployed to get formal pensions for those who don’t have it,[and] health care, and open job opportunities from both government and small business”. Neither demands for improved urban working and living conditions nor insurgent pressures for transformative rural land reform could be met by the ruling oligarchy without relinquishing their power. In 1980 five opposition groups formed the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and fought a twelve-year war against the Salvadoran state which was heavily supported by the United States. A late 1980s change in leadership among the Salvadoran oligarchs led the state to accept peace negotiations with the FMLN and definitively impose neoliberalization after signing peace accords in 1992. This transformed the political-economic core from traditional agriculture to labour-export, export processing zones, non-traditional agricultural exports, and transnational services (Robinson, 2001: 538-50). Successive neoliberal structural adjustment programs were implemented throughout the 1990s and reached a low point of precarization of the state bureaucracy when, as a human rights advocate at the time explained:

Around 2000, 7,000 public employees were fired... During this time the Structural Adjustment Program was started and the state was reduced. ...The companies could come

and do whatever they wanted and the government could not stop them. ...They also took advantage of this to establish contract work for three months, or six months, or nine months, so this was a manipulation. Also they would restructure the jobs, they could have fewer people and pay them more and keep these jobs secret which was illegal and also how to increase [the function of] the 'I-scratch-your-back,-you-scratch-mine' system.

After 20 years of neoliberal leadership from the Salvadoran oligarchy, the first FMLN government found “50 per cent of the [labour] laws are not respected”, as an advisor to the FMLN president of El Salvador told me in an interview.

In 2009 Salvadorans elected the FMLN into federal government with Mauricio Funes as President and the party holding the single largest number of delegates in the minority National Assembly. The government’s 2010 report to the World Trade Organization (WTO) summarized the party’s present compromise to progress incrementally towards alternatives to neoliberalization, in contrast to its founding purpose in 1980 to address exploitation and impoverishment fundamentally. The new Salvadoran trade goal centred on “generating well-paid, quality employment opportunities that should help to improve the overall standard of living of the population while offering better development opportunities” (Govt. of El Salvador, 2010: 9). Achieving “well-paid, quality” work, if realized fully, would reduce much precarity; however, in practice the underlying causes of low-paid, low-quality jobs that continued to predominate were rarely addressed. One advisor to the FMLN in the National Assembly told me “we have to change the experiences of the workers because it is the root of the economic situation and it can only be changed by structural changes. The model has been, well, the model is over, so we have to develop, to self-model, to develop the society.” As I argue below, it would take workers’ own self-organizing to press for structural improvements.

The situation in El Salvador in 2010 was dismal, as quantified by economic indicators and protested by many Salvadorans. Workers’ share of all proceeds from production in businesses lowered by 2005 to only 25% from 34% in 1995 (Sención Villalona and de Jesús Ramírez, 2010: 37). Wages, after accounting for inflation, were cut 0.6% and were already below the amount necessary to pay for

basic necessities of life. Minimum wages could pay for only 62% of these basic necessities while average monthly wages could provide only 92% of the costs of these. Unemployment has been popularly believed for years to be 50% (it was officially 7.2% in 2010) and even the official poverty rate was as high as 37.8% (International Labour Organization [ILO] Department of Statistics, 2011: 11). Popular pressure succeeded in convincing the government to raise minimum wages by 8% for workers in the private sector in 2011. A noteworthy mobilization in that direction was led by disabled veterans and families of veterans who died in the 1980-92 war. While they began receiving a total of US\$19million in back pensions for the first time, the amount paid to individuals at this late date was so low they conducted mass occupations to demand a further increase that would at least match minimum wages (CISPES, 2011b).

Only 30% of the people who work for wages participate in the social security system, which includes health care (there is no unemployment insurance in El Salvador) although eligibility was expanded in 2010 to include workers of temporary jobs and all domestic workers including housekeepers, gardeners, cooks, and childcare providers (CISPES, 2010b). The historically inherited structure, however, is dominated by informality: 66.4% of all non-agricultural labourers worked informally and disproportionately more women than men do so (72.5% and 60.1%, respectively) (Chen et. al., 2005: 44-57). One interviewee told me “I’m a teacher in a private school. The conditions I have been working in are bad... There are no benefits, not even the legally required ones like health [and] social insurance so we have no access to the social security health care.” All this conspires to keep 62% of those in the informal sector earning less than the minimum wage (ILO Department of Statistics, 2011: 3-4).

Few workers are in unions, but unions are active and growing. The fraction of unionized workers in the formal, private sector stood at 16.4% in 2007 and only 12% of these were women, compared to 33% in the public sector (Senci3n Villalona and de Jes3s Ram3rez, 2010: 128 and 154). In 2010, Salvadorans formed 50 unions including one in a call centre (International Trade Union Confederation [ITUC], 2011: 95-96). The call centre was condemned by the new union members as “the new maquilas ([export processing zone/]sweat shops) for young people, that profit from regularly violating workers’ rights” and 18 members were

fired without cause (CISPES, 2011a). This wave of unionizing also involved resurgences within established unions, for example by construction workers who reclaimed their union in 2011 from allegedly corrupt leaders (CISPES, 2011a), and 76% of whom are classified as working only temporary jobs (Sención Villalona and de Jesús Ramírez, 2010: 130). Social Security workers, who also seized their union from a reportedly unresponsive leadership in 2009, went on strike the next year for payment of US\$200 end-of-year bonuses and won a US\$37 per month rise in wages (CISPES, 2010a). Members of a hospital workers' union staged occupations to support laundry-workers closing their facilities to protest administrative negligence and won repaired and new machines while all charges against the unionists were also dropped (CISPES, 2011b). Health care workers' mobilizations have been widely popular since the 1990s and especially in 2002 when hundreds of thousands marched in San Salvador – the largest number since wartime in the 1980s – to oppose privatization (Rodríguez, 2003).

Maquilas (maquiladoras) are prominent in El Salvador and highly contested sites among workers, capitalists, and governments. Their origins are distinctly colonial-capitalist; for example, capitalists from the United States in Puerto Rico and the Philippines. These foreign (colonizing) capitalists invest and partly industrialize in the country and in exchange the domestic (colonized) state grants tax exemption of facilities, operations, and trading and freedom from certain legal obligations, including labour and environmental protections. Maquila owners profit from the implementation of laws in their favour such as tax exemptions and the non-enforcement of laws requiring consistent payment of all wages and contributions toward worker benefits. Maquilas in El Salvador systematically pay low wages, compel long hours of work, impose reprisals for organizing, and steal from workers social security. By one estimate, in 2007 benefit theft amounted to US\$5.7 million (Campaña Regional contra la Flexibilidad Laboral, 2010: 26, 42, 43 and 46). A maquila worker told me: “The bosses, they steal our money. For example, when I couldn't complete the quantity of clothes they wanted me to do in a day, they stole an amount of money. ... The economic crisis has affected me in a negative way. It is so difficult that when we get the salary sometimes we already have a debt on it.” In this context, maquilas are among the formal employers deliberately imposing informal employment upon some

workers (within the formal economic sector as a whole, 14.8% of all non-agricultural labourers – 16% women and 13.5% men – work in informal employment [Chen et. al., 2005: 44-57]). Workers at maquilas I interviewed reported widespread sexual harassment and targeted violence by employers, workplace security, or state security forces who were requested by employers to suppress labour strikes, violence that involved serious injury and death. Investors, employers, and governments, however, value the safety and security of their own interests first and foremost. A “Primer on Exporting to El Salvador” published by the University of Florida Food and Resource Economics Department reports that violent abuses against people in El Salvador, while “of concern”, are not aimed at foreign business people (Storz, Taylor, and Fairchild, 2005: 14) and maquila and call-centre employers increasingly conduct background checks on potential employees including applicants’ and their family members’ contacts with migrants (United States Government-Government of El Salvador Technical Team, 2011: 81). In a recent joint analysis, US and Salvadoran governments restrict their consideration of violence to that of “property crimes” with the assumption that only these are “directly related to economic growth” (US Government-Government of El Salvador Technical Team, 2011: 67). These systematic denials of real social determinants of health and mortality carry the legacy of the counter-insurgency wars of the 1980s into the present. Capitalist and state interests were then enmeshed in structures of violence manifested by death squads in El Salvador and genocide in Guatemala (Torres, 2004; see Menjívar and Rodríguez, 2005). The current exploitation of labour in maquilas is a related form of structural neocolonial capitalist violence.

Maquila workers’ self-organizing against the precarization of working conditions is noteworthy for asserting their power to improve their living conditions and their relations with co-workers and supervisors, and to achieve social justice beyond their workplaces. In interviews, one organizer concluded a longer statement about applying tactics that were proven in workplace solidarity actions, by exhorting workers to refuse patriarchal abuse in their families. In response to which two more workers elaborated: “Practically, our goals are to change the working conditions for all workers not just for us who are members of the union. ...Part of this is to improve our condition of life in general. ...So, we will continue struggling for that. And for that reason we are stronger women”.

...when we plan to get something specific and we organize, we get it. ...Now, at this present moment, we got what we didn't have before. For example, with the co-workers... they have fears and say 'to be part of a union is just to have more problems.' But I say 'No, it's important because we have rights.' So it's an internal struggle. ... The most important thing for me is that I'm proud of my work with the union. All the time the supervisor used to say profane words, was rude and violated our rights. ...Now the supervisor is limited to use good words about our work and every time he is going to say something he asks me first, 'Is this correct? What I'm going to say is in the Law of Work?'

Another organizer emphasized that their success in overturning precarious conditions at work ultimately went beyond the terms of their initial victories: “As a federation we are sure that to improve the conditions of the workers, we cannot limit ourselves to just a vindicated labourers’ struggle, but also a political struggle that has to include all rights. Not just rights for workers, but a social and a political struggle with the communities.”

Maquilas remain important in El Salvador, and their weakened production in times of crisis emphasizes the relevance of various proposals to develop the sector. Hundreds of maquila workers on the edge of San Salvador organized with the relatively new union FESS (Federación Sindical de El Salvador) and, only a few months after receiving state recognition in September 2009, five of their leaders were threatened by death squads (Menjívar, 2010). Maquila owners lobbied the federal government for even lower standards and longer hours (ICTU, 2011: 96). As a maquila worker with another union told me, “I disagree with that because we are not robots, we are human beings”. When workers with FESS went on strike from 11-14 May 2010 to press their employer to honour wage raises agreed to a year before, management collaborated with another union to divide the workers affected and the Federal Minister of Justice ended the job action by sending in the armed Order Maintenance Unit (UMO) (Freedman, 2010). Meanwhile, the threatened legislation failed after concerted opposition. The transnational Regional Campaign Against Labour Flexibility of 70 groups across Central America participated in efforts to halt the proposed new law and condemned the “brutal

repression” against FESS (Campaña Regional contra la Flexibilidad Laboral, 2010b). While neither maquila owners nor workers in El Salvador in 2010 changed the status quo which has intensified in the present crisis, the involvement of a Central American regional campaign asserted a transnational force of labour.

The FMLN government of El Salvador commenced an eighteen-month stimulus plan in June 2009 to spend US\$587million (17 per cent of total public expenditures) (WTO, 2010: 5). The promising moment of first taking office was tarnished through 2010 by struggles over the neoliberal aspects of the plan’s implementation. Water and energy subsidies were cut by 0.4 per cent of GDP (IMF, 2011: 10), although some were reinstated for bus drivers, small-restaurants in public markets, schools, and non-profits after mass protests and job actions. People also refused high prices by directly confronting leading capitalist firms, with the Consumer Defence Centre reporting US\$4.2million returned by suppliers (mostly financial, electric, and water) for illegal charges and US\$1.2million paid in fines to the state for violations of consumers’ rights (FMLN Communications Secretariat, 2011: 8).

As part of Latin America, El Salvador is one of a significant number of nation-states governed by parties elected largely because of opposition to neoliberalism. In practice, though, the present capitalist crisis discredits yet simultaneously perpetuates neoliberal devaluations of people’s labour and public treasuries, and is able to do so despite the relatively progressive governments in power. As a broad examination of this potentially post-neoliberal moment notes, “there are only two positions in the political arena: those who break with these governments (whom they believe to be following directly in their predecessors’ footsteps and, thus, mere managers of neoliberal models)...or those who align themselves with the left-wing sectors of these governments, reflecting their contradictory nature, in the struggle against their conservative sectors” (Sader, 2009: 10). This tension, also directly evident in El Salvador, has only intensified with people facing the especially violent capitalism of criminal gangs. Although 2010 did include an “I will not pay the rent”, a popular movement against extortions, with recorded cases reduced by 13%; an even larger action was conducted by gangs who announced a “halt to all activity”, which resulted in days of no bus service, hundreds of thousands of informal market vendors staying home, and many businesses closing (CISPES, 2010b). The federal

government's extension in 2010 of military deployment domestically in this definitively post-war era is instructive and reminds us of how socially explosive worsening poverty and exploitation had already proved to be in the 1970s. While "firearm violence" was estimated in 2003 to cost 10.5% of GDP in El Salvador (United Nations Development Programme, 2010), attempting to resolve this through militarization may very well escalate the already devastating consequences of neoliberalization to address capitalist crises.

Precarious conditions are improved when their underlying causes are remedied, extending from the most stereotypical informal jobs to the pervasive social inequities and stratifications that continue to define capitalist development in times of crisis. Salvadoran experiences of self-organizing about precarity reveal popular support for lower prices, accessible benefits, improved conditions, and higher wages, along with obstruction from neoliberal renewal of mass unemployment, emigration, and labour informalization. Now we turn to Canadian experiences.

Toronto, Canada

Toronto hosted the G20 Summit in June 2010, which changed the direction of multilaterally coordinated crisis driven policies away from stimulus and towards the renewal of neoliberalism. In this context, the G20s promotion of "the right conditions for wage bargaining systems to support employment" (in Ontario Federation of Labour [OFL], 2011: 7) is an easily deciphered code for expanding precarious conditions, especially in reversing collective bargaining achievements by unions, a reversal based on the neoliberal myth that this improves the labour market. The rapid implementation of this approach in Canada, and the province of Ontario, of which Toronto is the capital, remains the primary challenge to workers' self-organizing against precarity. The reality of structurally high unemployment, especially high for workers younger than forty five years of age, and highest (25 per cent) for recent immigrants fifteen to twenty four years of age who arrived within the most recent five years (Toronto Community Foundation, 2011: 47-49) deepens the already "growing gap" along lines of race and gender (Block, 2010) given the fact that 78 per cent of recent immigrants are from non-white communities. Workers are so stratified that some racial minority communities collectively created the term "economic apartheid" to name this reality (Wallis, 2008:

257; see Galabuzi, 2006). Vague criticism of economic inequalities such as “Toronto’s biggest liability? –the inability to capitalize on a young, diverse and highly educated workforce” (Toronto Community Foundation, 2011: 46) reflects rather than analyzes the contradiction of capitalism to socialize yet simultaneously degrade and devalue labour in the processes of production and reproduction. Wage inequities are growing as well between women and men, non-white and white workers, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers (Wilson and Macdonald, 2010). These inequities reinforce the different tiers of work in which precarious jobs are at the bottom and disproportionately filled by people of colour, Indigenous people, and/or women (Block, 2010; OFL, 2011: 10-11; Stapleton, Murphy, and Xing, 2012). The centrality of such inequity to contemporary capitalist development needs to be challenged explicitly to prevent further commodification (Munck, 2004: xiv) through an appropriation of human capacities, which effects false resolutions to the crisis. Such false resolutions displace practices of class struggle that construct desirable alternatives through cooperation, genuine women’s liberation, decolonization, and anti-imperialist redistributions.

Economic inequality in Canada is worsening, and is gendered and racialized/colonized with dominant approaches to crisis exacerbating these features of precarity. The share of GDP in Canada going to wages in ratio to profits decreased over 60% by 2010 to reach 50% (Campbell, 2010); wages in ratio to profits were 64.41% of GDP in 1961 and just over 60% in 2005 (Russell and Dufour, 2007: 9 and 15). This decrease is due to both shifts from manufacturing and construction to service sectors as well as proliferation of lower-wage tiers within each sector (ILO, 2010: 27 and 32-33). Between 2008 and 2010, approximately 400,000 people lost their jobs and those who regained work found it much more precarious (Statistics Canada, 2011; CIBC World Markets, 2012). Proportions of workers earning less than CDN\$20,000 per year had already been high before the crisis with 39% of women and 19% of men in permanent jobs and almost 80% of women and 65% of men in temporary work earning such low-incomes (Chen et. al., 2005: 43). The Workers’ Action Centre (WAC) in Toronto, in its review of working conditions spanning the late 1990s to 2007, concluded that “25 percent of employers were in widespread violation of the Canada Labour Code and 50 percent were in partial violation” (WAC, 2012:

1). Of 20% of all employees whose overtime work was unpaid (an average of 8.4 hours per week) in 2010, that single measure of wage theft amounted to CDN\$12.7billion (WAC, 2012: 2). An organizer with WAC connected gathering awareness of these conditions with their self-organizing activities in an interview:

We are using a community-union model of organizing, working with people who are primarily not union members. ... We notice patterns of discrimination around what jobs are available, especially for women and racialized persons. We also want to help build a fightback to these conditions. We can't do one without the other. Without being rooted in the experiences of these workers we wouldn't know who are the bad bosses and what the conditions are that we are trying to change.

While unions in Toronto remain institutionally present in representing 22.7% of all workers, efforts at directly facing the causes of precarious conditions and shaping ways to overcome them are few. The relative seclusion of unions from the vast majority of workers is especially ominous given that in 2010 the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses had already referred to the potential elimination of laws requiring employers to automatically deduct union dues from members' wages (the Rand Formula) (Fanelli and Thomas, 2011: 158). The context of economic inequality was a prime condition for the normalization of its perpetuation within stimulus spending.

While the Canadian government's stimulus spending is widely credited with averting a sudden depression with even more massive unemployment, this stimulus actually worsens precarious working and living conditions. The overall CDN\$21.43billion stimulus spending in the 2010 federal budget included CDN\$3.18billion in tax cuts (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2011: 12 and 34). The CDN\$4.92billion for unemployed workers, mostly through Employment Insurance (EI) (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2011: 59), was still less than 10 per cent of the CDN\$57billion EI surplus accumulated largely from workers' own contributions, while through 2010 approximately half of unemployed people were ineligible for the benefits they had paid for. These cuts largely perpetuated exclusions and differentiations among workers (Vosko, 2011); acting, for example, to the detriment of most

Temporary Foreign Workers, who by 2008 had paid up to an estimated CDN\$303million into EI (Barahona, 2012; see TD Bank Group Economics, 2012). The federal government spent CDN\$661million to host the G8 and G20 Summits in Canada (Auditor-General of Canada, 2011), including for public security forces to selectively abuse human rights and arrest over 1,000 people. This was the largest number of people arrested at a single short-term event in Canadian history although human rights abuses are an everyday reality for many racialized and immigrant communities in Toronto (Asian Canadian Labour Alliance, 2010; South Asian Women's Rights Organization, 2010). In this context, the CDN\$194.5million public sector cutbacks in 2010 (Finance Canada, 2011: 198) was addressed by self-organizing against precarity when workers of colour in the public sector union discussed earlier immersed themselves in their broader communities. One participant told me "we are having these cutbacks in our public service sector. It's so very important that we get involved in the community...because other communities are the ones who are going to suffer, right, not just worker-based groups". The federal government's stimulus package provided the normalization of renewed neoliberalism, which Ontario provincial government especially relied upon to commence their own long-term austerity measures against labour unions.

The Ontario government also cut corporate taxes by CDN\$2.5billion (over three years) to among the lowest of OECD jurisdictions, while cutting welfare \$143million and lowering post-secondary education funding CDN\$100million when measured proportionate to numbers of students. The year 2010 was a turning point for the provincial government's approach to the crisis with its corporate tax cuts, privatizations, wage freezes and cutbacks to public sector workers (Fanelli and Thomas, 2011: 151-58). Only after considerable popular mobilizations was CDN\$63.5million spent to replace federal cuts and thus to save 8,500 child care spaces (Mackenzie, 2010: 1-2). Many workers at community colleges in the province were unsuccessful at determining their union leadership's direction in bargaining, according to two self-organizers in Toronto I interviewed. In their case, the priority issue of precarious workload was left unaddressed in February 2010 when only 51 per cent of voting members approved their renewed contract, after their employer hired almost 800 new workers in part-time positions following the workers voted to authorize a strike

(Ontario Public Sector Employees' Union, 2010). That summer, publicized negotiating meetings with further unions failed to reach agreement in the context of the provincial government's refusal to reduce corporate tax cuts (Evans, 2011). Both provincial and federal governments' stimuli fundamentally degraded their already deplorable treatments of labour.

The effects of Canadian capitalist and government approaches to crisis comprise a pattern of inequities: the entire working-class is further separated from the wealthiest persons, corporations, and banks; women, Indigenous, and non-white people are discriminated against in juxtaposition to their co-workers and neighbours; and precarious conditions, including precarious migration status, are further institutionalized. In this context of renewed neoliberalization, self-organizing by the Workers' Action Centre and the members of public sector unions referred to above continue what the two writers who concluded *Organizing the Transnational* called "a counterhegemonic strategy of nonstate actors, including migrants and nonmigrants" (Krishnamurti and Goldring, 2007: 257). Workers in the biggest city in Canada may thus be learning some earlier lessons from the more rural group Justicia For Migrant Workers. In the words of one of its co-founders, Chris Ramsaroop, "to develop a grassroots organizing strategy that was not beholden to a union bureaucracy" and "to consider the transnational nature of organizing. It can't just happen in Canada. It has to happen in the workers' home countries as well. Second...to get past paternalism. Migrant workers must be the ones at the forefront of the struggle. This is something that has been lacking in the organizing that has taken place" (in Inouye, 2008: 168 and 176). Such organizing is all the more imperative since the Ontario government's lowering, in 2010, of employment standards for all workers approached more closely the conditions already established for people with precarious migratory status. In the words of scholars critical of the change, "Enforcement...serves to name and contain the actions of those deemed illegitimate claimant-citizens. Workers launching complaints are subject to subtle processes of criminalization and are treated with suspicion." (Gellatly, et. al., 2011: 14). For unions and community organizations to find bases for unified action to remedy precarious conditions, the ways such approaches diverge from the dominant renewals of neoliberalism in these times of crisis need to be determined, for example, by beginning with workers' self-

organizing to connect their efforts against precarity to the related inequalities underlying contemporary capitalist development.

Towards a Conclusion: Resolving the Crisis in the Interests of the Broad Working-Class

As self-organizing against precarity faced intensifications of precarious conditions through the crisis year of 2010 and various assaults and compromises by capitalists and governments in San Salvador and Toronto, the centrality of these conditions to capitalist development was evident. Global proletarians are thus challenged with the question: For whom is the crisis to be resolved? If the crisis is from particular excesses of neoliberalism such as financialization, then renewing an improved capitalism may resolve it, albeit leaving labour open to further devaluation and exploitation. If, however, the significance of hierarchically differentiated social positions or statuses is central to capitalist development and the present crisis, then this global economic apartheid needs to be resolved in the interests of pursuing an alternative future. In El Salvador, at the same time as the Consumer Defence Centre (CDC) succeeded in pursuing consumers' self-organizing against price rises to force repayments by capitalists to people and to the state, the CDC recognized the need to construct a solidarity economy: "a new economic paradigm based on the principles of social justice, solidarity, general equality and environmental protection" (Centro para la Defensa del Consumidor, 2010: 10). And in Toronto, 2010 was the first whole year of the Workers' Assembly (Rosenfeld, 2009: 11-12), in which many hundreds of people with various lived experiences of organizing began to educate one another and self-organize actions and campaigns such as for free public transportation. These are additionally significant examples because they demystify the source of value in capital accumulation: popular struggles that begin the appropriation of the expropriators' wealth open a transformational path beyond even the US\$32trillion of offshore capital (Henry, 2012) to reclaim our very labour and lives. When reviewed in the context of dominant capitalist and government approaches to resolving the crisis, self-organizing to overcome precarious conditions continues to sporadically acknowledge its potential to help resolve the crisis of class society.

Neoliberalization generally and precarization of working conditions in specific connect workers' experiences of exploitation

involving imperialism in San Salvador and discriminations against workers of colour and Indigenous workers in Toronto. In one sense, worsening working conditions occur across both cities and are characterized by imperialism in San Salvador (mass emigration to the United States, domination by multilateral financial institutions, and neocolonially structured maquilas) and racialization/colonization in Toronto (economic apartheid between white workers and racialized and Indigenous workers). These particular experiences of exploitation deepen our understanding of what constitutes actually existing neoliberalism (see Peck and Tickell, 2002). In another sense, transnational labour self-organizing against precarization is important in both cities with regional and diaspora formations of Salvadorans in the Regional Campaign Against Labour Flexibility and Salvadorans of the World convention about migrant women and with transnationals in Toronto being incorporated into labour groups such as in the demands, analyses, and solidarity actions of the Workers' Action Centre, Magkaisa Centre, and workers of colour in a public sector union in Toronto. These transnational aspects of labour struggles are additionally powerful for deepening connections between anti-imperialism, anti-racism, and anti-capitalism which is especially necessary for transforming imperialist and racialized experiences of exploitation. Select feminist and Indigenous scholarship and organizing are also especially relevant here and include an issue of *The Commoner* on care work (Barbagallo and Federici, 2012), a Salvadoran analysis of domestic work (Vásquez and Murguialday, 2000), a history and memoir of related Indigenous and Nicaraguan liberation struggles (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2005), renewals of Indigenous self-organizing in El Salvador (Montalvo, 2010; Gould and Lauria-Santiago, 2008) including by the Salvadoran Indigenous National Coordinating Council (<http://ccnis.org>), and assertions that decolonization requires respect for Indigenous sovereignty including over lands occupied by settler colonies in Canada and El Salvador (Eve Tuck and Yang, 2012).

Experiences from San Salvador and Toronto through 2010 suggest that, given the centrality of worsening precarious working conditions in the furtherance of neoliberalization, self-organizing by working-class protagonists too often degraded by capital, state, and established labour may contribute much towards the global working class becoming a force of more liberating, powerful actors. In this way, self-organized activities to overcome precarity, including by

transnational labour and learning from gendered, racialized, and imperialist experiences of capital accumulation enriches workers' struggles.

Endnotes

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