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Capitalist Peripheries: Perspectives on Precarisation from the Global South and North

MARTINA SPROLL, INGRID WEHR

Precarity and precarisation can certainly be considered key concepts in sociological analysis of current transformations in capitalist societies. Financialisation and flexibilisation –combined with major adjustments in welfare state regulations in the North – have led to the increasing insecurity and vulnerability of a growing part of the global population. It has long been clear that precarisation is not limited to a new group of ‘working poor’ but also points to new modes of (precarious) reproduction of other segments and social classes of society. However, there is intense debate over who exactly is affected by precarisation and in what way. Is this a new phenomenon linked to transnational dynamics of financial capitalism and thus a new mode of (neoliberal) domination? Does it mainly affect an underclass, a superfluous mass of unemployed and excluded persons, say a new *precariat*, or rather different classes, and in what way? Is it specific to countries of the Global North with historically strong forms of welfare provision exposed to deregulation or rather an encompassing global development? Can the concept thus be used in the context of highly segmented and precarious labour markets marked by structural heterogeneity, seen as typical for the Global South?

Debates are certainly not limited to the countries of the Global North; nevertheless, little has been said so far about the shape and scope of precarisation in different regions of the world and their possible interrelation. Do precarisation and the related reconfiguration of social inequalities mean the same in Europe, Latin America or other regions? How can we compare and evaluate processes of precarisation in different regions? Among others, these questions have been discussed in a workshop on *Precarity and Precarisation: European and Latin American Perspectives on Changes in the*

Regulation of Labour and Labour Markets. This workshop, which took place on 25 October 2013 in Berlin, was organised by the research network on interdependent inequalities in Latin America (desiguALdades.net). Most of the articles of this special issue are based on presentations and discussions held during this workshop.

The articles discuss different theoretical approaches and debates about precarity/ precarisation of labour and labour markets as well as empirical cases from both Germany and Brazil, with the exception of the article by Stuart Rosewarne, which gives some insights from Asia and moreover discusses precarisation not only concerning labour markets but also in relation to 'reproduction' (in the case of migrant domestic workers).

In the German context, the terms 'precarity' and 'precarisation' generally refer to the profound labour market reforms having taken place since the 1980/90s which led to a marked increase of atypical forms of employment, such as temporary, part-time, subcontracted, self-employed work, etc. These changes point to the end of the dominance of a Fordist mode of regulation of labour and the Fordist standard employment relationship, together with a marked debilitation of welfare state structures. Some scholars have criticised this reference point as being overly normative and too limited to provide an adequate understanding of processes of precarisation, as debates on precarity and precarisation have often been based on narrow definitions of work, excluding reproductive and care work and focusing on white male skilled workers. At the same time, the longstanding precarious reality endured by unskilled workers, women, migrants or young/elderly workers has been widely ignored.

For these reasons, precarity and precarisation remain highly contested concepts which require further theoretical precision. Furthermore, it is unclear whether German or European debates and definitions of precarisation can be transferred to a non-European context and vice versa. Furthermore, within certain countries there is no objective measure of what is precarious/precarised. We understand precarisation as a phenomenon which can only be conceived and adequately analysed in a relational perspective. This means considering its historicities and embeddedness within specific contexts, which are shaped through social struggles like processes of negotiation and contestation, depending on the strength and organising capacity of social actors.

But what is the connecting factor, if there is one, which explains precarisation beyond national evidence? Although nation states are still relevant in defining the contexts of labour markets via labour market regulation and other public policies, current changes concerning precarity and precarisation can only be adequately understood if we take inter- and transnational factors into consideration. First of all, processes of precarisation (or formalisation) of labour markets are closely connected to overall changes in capitalist accumulation models. Although states or groups of states might be affected differently due to their different forms of social organisation and state structures, transnational changes in capitalist production and global markets do have repercussions on both labour markets and the forms of organising labour and capital. The current phase of expansion of financialised capitalism has fostered a new wave of labour flexibilisation, which has triggered a new phase of precarisation processes on a global level. Whereas in many parts of the so-called Global North this has increasingly challenged post-war welfare state arrangements, which guaranteed high standards of social rights to workers and employees (although with a bias against women and migrants), in Latin America precarisation has gone hand in hand with a certain level of welfare regime expansion and post-neoliberal labour market and social regulations. As pointed out by several of the articles in this volume, the growing formalisation of employment in the last decade has simultaneously created new forms of precarisation and social inequalities. It is certainly the case that in Latin America, as elsewhere in the Global South (and also beyond), heterogeneity has always been a structural characteristic of labour markets. Even in Brazil, the majority of the labour force has been historically excluded from so-called 'regular' and/or stable employment conditions. On the other hand, some researchers point to the profound restructuring of labour markets since the 1980s, which has given rise to an increase in and new forms of precarisation. These processes have been reinforced within the context of the commodity boom, which has led to a growing reprimarisation of Latin America's economies, leading to a considerable de-industrialisation and strengthening of export models, which have been characteristic since colonial times.

Since the 1990s, these dynamics have been fueled by the ongoing transnationalisation of production and value chains, which in Europe as well as in Latin America has caused changes in the organisation of work and

production and has led to a weakening of sector boundaries, particularly through outsourcing. At the same time, a global trend towards the deregulation of labour rights can be observed. This implies a debilitation of traditional frameworks of labour market regulation (i.e. collective bargaining and actors like trade unions) especially, but not only in Europe, and goes along with a massive deregulation in traditional sectors, such as the automotive, chemical, banking and/or public sectors. On a large scale, qualified and highly regulated employment is being replaced by temporary or subcontracted work. The same is true for less regulated sectors like agriculture. Outsourcing and a growing dependence on migrant workers, often suffering from a lack of access to quality employment, equal pay and social rights, have become overall tendencies in the current phase of capitalist expansion.

Nevertheless, it is still to be discussed whether and how far concepts like ‘structural heterogeneity’, ‘precarisation’, ‘precarity’, and ‘formal vs. informal work’ are valuable as analytical tools, transferable, and applicable in diverse societies, and how far the widespread use of the term ‘precarisation’ should be viewed as an adoption of hegemonic Eurocentric discourses. Different historical, economic, political, social and cultural contexts have shaped specific arrangements of welfare states and of labour market regulation. These arrangements include corresponding forms of social inclusion and exclusion such as rights, social protection, citizenship, and so on. In the course of a profound and transnationally entangled restructuring of such arrangements, new forms of social inclusion and exclusion, respectively social inequality (in relation to categories like class, race, gender, age, qualification, etc.) may also vary according to their national/regional conditions and historical embeddedness. The Brazilian case, for instance, shows that the partial inclusion of formerly excluded social groups (i.e. as temporary workers) in the formal labour market engenders contradictory processes. The experience of (even restricted) upward mobility gave room to the official discourse on the emergence of a ‘middle class society’, which exemplifies a new narrative on this process. Nevertheless, it is accompanied by a tendency towards increasing social segmentation of access to rights and the emergence of new forms of inequality in the context of further erosion of labour rights of established workers and decreasing mobilisation capacities of trade unions.

The articles compiled in this special issue attempt to define the core concepts ('structural heterogeneity', 'formality/informality', 'precarity' and 'precarisation') and to reveal the ambivalent processes of precarisation of labour on a local and (trans-)national scale which are closely related to and the result of the ongoing transformation of capitalist accumulation models on a global scale. Unlike other comparative studies or research on 'varieties of capitalism' which are still very much caught within methodological nationalism, we try to emphasise the interrelatedness of local, (trans-)national and global factors in shaping national labour market regulations and forms of organising labour. Going beyond simplified binary juxtapositions, we trace contradictory processes of formalisation and precarisation and varieties of precarity and precarisation within financialised capitalism as a global system. This calls for a differentiated reflection of aggregated labour market data and additional empirical in-depth studies of particular sectors of the economy. In order to understand reconfigurations of social inequalities and new segmentations in labour markets and in social structures of society as a whole, which are linked to – and a result of – processes of precarisation, we need to systematically take account of diverse social categories such as gender, class, race, age and sexual orientation, among others.

By doing so, we aim to contribute to a broader comprehension and scope of the terms precarity/precarisation and we want to initiate a debate on precarisation as a global phenomenon with different manifestations in different parts of the world in its possible transnational dimension. Although the majority of the articles concentrate on the ambivalent and simultaneous processes of precarisation and formalisation and the metamorphosis of precarity in Germany and Brazil, the questions raised in this context are also highly relevant in other parts of the world as the article on domestic work in Asia clearly shows.

The issue starts with an analysis of recent trends in the Brazilian labour market by Marcia Leite and Carlos Salas (*Work, development and inequalities in Brazil*), emphasising ambivalent and even contradictory processes of change. Over the past 12 years, Brazil has made important social and economic advances as measured by rising income and diminishing poverty levels, a less inegalitarian income distribution, improved access to education for formerly discriminated groups and more decent jobs as far as social and labour rights enforcement was concerned. Nevertheless, at the same

time new forms of business organisation based on lean production and outsourcing of production have generated precarious work contracts. Based on their analysis of the latest labour market data in Brazil, Leite and Salas come to the conclusion that, despite the ambivalent co-evolution of precarity with a certain level of formalisation of labour, there is no generalised trend of precarisation or casualisation. According to their interpretation, even in the current globalised world of financial capitalism the national state remains of paramount importance in the definition of economic and labour policies and social movements have an important role to play in contesting structural inequalities.

Using the same data as a starting point, Graça Druck (*The social precarisation of labour*) draws different conclusions regarding the central changes and trends within the Brazilian labour market. After analysing the main transformations of financialised capitalism on the restructuring of production processes and labour markets, Druck develops the concept of social precarisation in order to summarise the overall characteristics of labour in the current phase of flexibilisation. The concept of social precarisation points to the fact that the impact of flexibilisation is not constrained to labour markets but affects all fields of labour, such as work organisation, health conditions, and - equally importantly - also the capacities for workers' resistance, collective organisation and contestation. Although precarious labour has always been a crucial component of capitalism, what characterises the current phase of financialised capitalism and flexible accumulation is the fact that precarity has metamorphosed in a way that converted it into a crucial and strategic instrument within the logic of capitalist domination. According to this interpretation, precarity is not something residual or peripheral but is in fact central to the development of global capitalism in all its historic phases. Although forms may differ historically or spatially, precarity remains a constant trait undergoing metamorphoses. Although the nature of the dynamics of precarious work in Brazil might resemble processes in other parts of the world, the Brazilian model is currently shaped by a peripheral, neodevelopmentalist model characterised by outsourcing as a central instrument of domination, conditions of insecurity and risks to health in the workplace and a preoccupying loss of collective and individual rights which leads to a pessimistic reading of the trade unions' capacity for contestation.

Klaus Dörre (*Precurity and social disintegration – a relational concept*) shares this view of precarity as a constant, albeit historically changing characteristic of capitalist accumulation and the interpretation of precarity as a phenomenon reaching far beyond work and labour. Similar to Druck's concept of social precarisation, Dörre develops a definition of precarity as a time-diagnostic and a relational concept. According to Dörre's interpretation, precarity addresses changes at the intersection of employment, everyday life, the welfare state and democracy. Precarity is a regime of power, control and disciplination affecting and changing societies as a whole, including both structural criteria and the subjective modes of processing insecure working and living conditions. In the context of the current crisis of Western welfare states, Dörre develops an extended typology of precarity based on Robert Castel's zone model, differentiating between zones of integration, precarity and detachment and emphasising different types of social control and reproduction of domination patterns. In line with Leite's and Sala's interpretation, Dörre emphasises the fact that the hollowing out of social citizenship by means of precarisation is an uneven process which might be reverted by the persistence of democratic institutions and welfare state structures and by trade union and political opposition.

The next contribution by Ingo Singe (*Informality in the German parcel delivery industry*) illustrates how these forms of control work within the context of the German parcel delivery services. In this sector, wage disparities have grown strongly and institutions of worker representation have lost much of their former regulatory impact due to the organisational fragmentation and informalisation of the workforce. Singe's analysis based on his own field work shows how asymmetrical power relations contribute to the active involvement of workers in the reproduction of informality. Informality, according to Singe, is not exclusively upheld by the discipline of the market and coercion but also by the consent of workers within the context of intense inter-worker competition and workforce fragmentation that is framed by racist discourses. His article concludes that a lack of power resources in conjunction with employer strategies of (selected) fraternalism, hierarchical segmentation and related attribution processes support worker's acceptance of informal arrangements. Similar to Druck's interpretation of the ambivalences of trends in the Brazil-

ian labour market, Singe's analysis of the German parcel delivery service shows that informality refers to a changed mode of regulation with a specific recombination of formal and informal regulation that is characterised by interpersonal/individual forms of regulation rather than collective or institutionalised ones.

Martina Sproll's in-depth analysis of the Brazilian banking sector (*Precarisation and new class formations: the case of call centres in the Brazilian banking sector*) based on her own fieldwork also highlights the ambivalences of the Brazilian labour market and how despite the growing formalisation of employment, new forms of precarisation and social inequalities have evolved. Again, outsourcing is identified as a central trend characterising the current phase of capitalist accumulation and production and one of the main drivers for precarisation. Additionally, the case study shows the interrelatedness of both transnational and national factors in the restructuring of this specific sector of services. Neotaylorist work organisation and a specific division of labour between bank internal and outsourced call centres imply the production and reproduction of new forms of social segmentation and identities related to class, gender, race, age and sexual orientation. These strategies also imply segmentations and fragmentation of the social space. In line with Dörre and Druck, the article thus pleads for a broader concept of social precarisation and sheds a light on how neotaylorist work organisation and the current consumerist development model in Brazil reproduce relations of exploitation and discrimination through symbolic violence. Although included within the formal labour market, call centre workers are considered as 'second class citizens' concerning their social position and rights. Precarisation is perceived as a structural element reflecting the effects of flexibilisation on the debilitation of social rights even in highly regulated sectors. Furthermore, it seriously limits the relative strength and negotiation capacity of workers' organisations and the balance of power between capital and labour, reproducing discriminations based on class, race and gender.

Stuart Rosewarne's article (*Migrant domestic work: from precarious to precarisation*) enriches the debate by including a case study from Asia and focussing on a sector of the labour market which – at least until recently – has been largely neglected by mainstream debates on precarity and precarisation: domestic and care work and the building of global care chains.

Rosewarne shows how migrant domestic work as the archetypical manifestation of precarious employment is not only the consequence of an asymmetry in the employment relations but also the outcome of unequal power relations in the global labour supply chain. The making of a new transnational class of domestic workers is framed by a set of norms, including gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age and educational attainments, showing that uncertainty and vulnerability which characterise transnational employment have deeper roots than just the formal contract of employment. Organisational and institutional arrangements also work to the detriment of this segment of mainly female workers. In order to understand the deep-rooted character of precariousness, in Rosewarne's view, we should not only narrowly focus on the employment relationship but also reflect on the different stages of organisation of this global labour supply chain and the role of the various stakeholders that contribute to the reproduction of gendered contracts and power relations.

Finally, the contribution of Guimarães, Demazière, Hirata and Sugita (*Facing labour market insecurity: Structural constraints and individual interpretations. São Paulo, Paris and Tokyo*) offers a comparative analysis of the subjective and relational dimensions in the understanding of the growing insecurity in labour markets' recent dynamics in three metropolitan centres. Based on a common mixed-method research strategy, the article highlights how working life trajectories are currently undergoing profound changes. For a growing number of workers in large metropolitan markets, labour market insecurity has become a problem, especially when unemployment increases during economic crises. The article shows how an ambiguous grey zone between employment and unemployment is expanding and how the border between unemployment and economic inactivity is becoming ever more indistinct. At the same time it shows the differences between individual and subjective responses, which are not only shaped by labour market instability but also by the role of welfare states and enterprises. Unemployment is therefore not an objective phenomenon but rather a social construction, created equally by heterogeneous subjective experiences and institutional settings. The international comparative approach thus gives insights into different patterns of subjective handling and institutional framing of precarity.

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Work, Development and Inequalities in Brazil¹

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Over the past 12 years, Brazil has made important social and economic advances in terms of rising income levels, diminishing poverty levels, a better income distribution, greater access to education, job creation, greater social and labour rights enforcement and thus a growing number of people enjoying these rights (ILO 2014; Weisbrot et al. 2014). As Brazil is a country with a long tradition of persistent inequalities, even with these advances many problems remain to be solved (Morais/Saad-Filho 2012). In the middle of this development process, the persistence of bad quality jobs has been the focus of rather polarised academic discussions. Some analysis highlights the fact that there have been improvements in labour terms in recent years (Baltar et al. 2010; Mattei 2011), while other studies emphasise trends towards more precarious work, especially related to the processes of outsourcing and the diffusion of jobs considered as atypical work as well as the persistence of gender and race inequalities in the workplace (Druck 2011; Araujo/Lombardi 2013).

In this paper we discuss these issues using a two-pronged analysis. The first element is a general discussion on the links between globalisation and labour and the notion of precarious work and casualisation. The second element of our analysis deals with national statistics and information from our recent research on occupation, labour regulation and outsourcing, stressing the links with economic policies implemented in the country over the last decade.

Our starting point is to consider that, along with the general trends of the current process of globalisation on labour, there is a need to analyse the national situation also. This means examining the particular ways in

which different countries insert themselves into globalisation, a process that implies different consequences for labour.

This text is organised into four parts: the first part develops a theoretical and methodological discussion on globalisation and labour as well as precariousness and casualisation; the second part focuses on the debate around the current development model and its consequences for labour; the third part is directed to the analysis of data on the evolution of Brazilian occupational structure in recent years. In the final section we present some conclusions.

I. Globalisation and labour

Studies on the changes in labour in the globalised world have underlined, as a rule, the different forms of flexibility encountered by workers, which explain a paradigm shift from the previous expansion of wage labour and the rights associated with it (Castel 2003; Harvey 2005; Boltansky/Chiapello 2009; Pialoux/Beaud 2009). Caused by the change in accumulation mode, these trends are based on production flexibility and are therefore structural. They have generated new forms of business organisation, based on lean production schemes and the process of outsourcing production and labour, usually accompanied by precarious contracts and bad working conditions. They have also diffused new forms of labour organisation and management based on the requirements of quick and high returns on investment, which stimulate a process of labour casualisation.

Although these trends are general, their expression in a specific country also depends on the history of that country and on the correlation of forces between the various social actors in conflict and on their capacity for action and mobilisation. As a result, the real impact of those trends is also dependent on policy decisions that can be more or less favourable to labour. For example, the outsourcing process has effects on workers and labour in general, that depend on the way in which each country regulates labour (Castree et al. 2004).

The discussion on the role of national arrangements, in the context of globalisation and the dominance of neoliberal theory, has generated a fierce controversy between two approaches. There are those who believe that

there is no more space for national regulation and there are also others who believe that, although the high mobility of the capital caused by globalisation put constraints on national policy, the internal dynamics of nations (social movements, the specifics of each national state, the past trajectory of societies and institutions engendered in them) remain important in defining the paths followed by different countries (Weiss 2003). This discussion is neither new in sociology nor irrelevant. It was also intensely pursued in a previous period of capitalist accumulation, when Fordism expanded through the industrialised economies. Although many studies have helped to understand that reality by stressing its universal aspects (Braverman 1974), those researchers that tried to show how those general tendencies expressed themselves in different national economies (see Burawoy 1985) found a complex reality where national characteristics made a difference in the development process. Although recurrent, this discussion comes back to life today with an unusual strength because of the homogenising tendencies of national realities brought about by globalisation.

A perspective that focuses on national dynamic is especially important for the analysis of emerging economies, for which the search for alternative paths in relation to international trends is crucial for coping with chronic problems of poverty and social inequality. As Boschi (2011: 13) states: "despite the constraints that globalisation imposes on the periphery economies, development processes rest on national dynamics". A similar point is raised in Hirst et al. (2009), a text that examines critically the assertion of the existence of a true globalisation, in the sense of a process that subsumes and subordinates national level processes. As they show, we are far away from such a state of things at present.

Thus, when we take into account social relationships and the dynamics of actors within social conflict, we emphasise the ability of social actors to express their wishes and needs on the political agenda and to generate alternative ways from those of the dominant powers; in short, to put the mark of their struggles upon social reality. In fact, it is an approach that assumes casualisation trends cannot be seen as inexorable, or as purely economic or technologically determined, but should also be viewed as the result of political dynamics.

Although the importance of political dynamics is widely accepted, the theoretical standpoint that stresses the general tendencies of globalisation

has ended up acquiring prominence today. The deterministic character of this interpretation and its denial of the ability of social actors to intervene in national policy decisions ultimately supersedes the analysis of national dynamics, and ends up highlighting global regularities rather than seeking specific national characteristics (Hirst et al. 2009).

This is the trap that we wish to avoid in this text, aiming to revive a perspective that looks at the internal dynamics of the country, as well as the limits and potentialities of these dynamics. We thereby stress that external trends are shaped into different realities that have specific histories and different paths, in the course of which social movements constitute themselves and become active and institutions are shaped. Specific social realities are difficult to understand without taking these movements into account.

This point of view has led us to question the applicability of the casualisation concept in the Brazilian context. As a concept created in the context of developed countries, we believe that it does not have the same explanatory power in our case.

In order to discuss the precariousness of work, we need a definition of the phenomenon that allows us to analyse it with a minimum of rigor. Although this is not a simple task, we will use some elements of the discussion by Leite (2011). As was stressed in that text, the primary consideration in the analysis of this process is to differentiate between precariousness and casualisation, noting that they cannot be taken as synonyms. Casualisation is a relational process that has to be defined by taking into account changes during a specific historical period, while precariousness concerns certain forms of occupational conditions that fall short of the rights historically acquired by the working class. Whereas the concept of casualisation (the process of becoming more precarious) conveys the idea of decay, degeneration, or loss associated with previously acquired labour rights, that of precariousness does not carry the idea of damage or loss. A particular type of work can be precarious, and yet feature more satisfactory indicators in social terms than had presented in earlier periods, a situation that tends to be rather common in less developed countries.

An initial meaning attributed to precarious work is to consider it as work that differs in any way from the paradigm of homogeneous and stable employment that prevailed in developed countries until the 1970s, as Castel

(2003) shows. In refining the concept, it is helpful to recall the contribution of Gery and Janine Rodgers (1989), arguably one of the most important efforts already made within the literature on the subject. In the important state of the art section that opens the book, Gery Rodgers highlights the different dimensions of precariousness: (i) the degree of instability; (ii) the degree of workers' control over working conditions, wages, rhythm, etc.; (iii) the protection of the work through legislation or from collective bargaining agreements, and; (iv) income associated with the job. For the author therefore, the concept of precariousness involves instability, lack of protection, insecurity with regard to social protection and economic and social vulnerability. Yet the author warns that identifying these dimensions does not eliminate ambiguity, since "it is the combination of these that identifies precarious work" (Rodgers/Rodgers 1989: 3).

Here it is also important to note that the practices associated with precariousness are not new; rather they are usually older, re-signified practices, which were generally in place from the 1970s, promoting a process of social regression. In his account of European countries, Rodgers also identifies the growth of precarious work and points out the different forms taken by such growth in specific countries. The author emphasises the diffusion of almost all characteristics associated with precarious employment, such as temporary, part-time or home-based work, as well as self-employment throughout the European Economic Community (Rodgers/Rodgers 1989: 6-9). Thus we can say that the labour situation in European countries may be described as experiencing a process of casualisation (or precarisation) as well discussed by Castel (2003) to explain the French case.

According to Rodgers, the structural nature of instability is evident when taking into account several important conditions of the labour market. These conditions include unemployment, as it tends to relate to the most unstable, insecure and temporary jobs. Other elements include productive restructuring, which disseminates outsourced, insecure and short-term work, the institutional framework (the changing role of the state and the labour legislation, which tends to deregulate labour rights) and workers' resistance, which has been diminished by the weakening of trade unions. As trade unions lose their strength, precarious employment reaches primarily certain sectors of the labour force upon which employers

are better able to impose wages, working conditions and discontinuities in terms of hiring (Rodgers/Rodgers 1989: 9-13).

This theoretical endeavour around the concepts of precariousness and casualisation is important to understand in the labour trends in Latin America, and specifically in Brazil, where work has never ceased to be precarious, although this does not allow us to talk about casualisation of work in general terms. The differentiation of such concepts does not enable us to speak of precariousness in reference to working situations, which, although not resembling the stable and homogeneous labour model, have been improving in terms of associated salary, stability and rights. These are precarious jobs, but they may not necessarily have entered into a process of casualisation.

In this sense, we agree with Ramalho when he points out the challenges to the current Brazilian sociology of work, highlighting the inability of the conceptual instruments used within a literature emerging from the reality of industrialised societies to capture the complexity of a different reality; the inability of concepts created in the context of a formal labour market, to “explain the specificity of the employment, the labour market with the brand of informality, the late industrialisation process and, consequently, different characteristics assumed by the trade union organisation” (Ramalho 2013: 23).

In fact in European countries and in the United States, especially in the post-war period, the development of a wage society meant the diffusion of stable and permanent forms of employment, accompanied by an important range of labour rights. By contrast, in Brazil, precarious work without access to labour rights persisted during the industrial development process, creating a huge group of workers who were always inserted precariously in the occupational structure.

On the other hand, the institutional advancement created by Brazilian social movements in the 1980s allowed the institutions of popular sectors to continue acting and exerting pressure upon the government in subsequent years. Thus, casualisation trends (such as those associated with outsourcing and labour flexibility) have been countered by improvements in labour market conditions, as well as policies that improve labour regulation, although the latter also coexist with flexibilising trends.

If we take into account that the concept of casualisation makes sense only if used in a relational way to indicate a deteriorating condition, there is a clear conceptual imprecision when we try to apply it to the analysis of a complex reality such as that of present-day Brazil. In fact, we consider that the question of whether there is or is not a process of labour casualisation in Brazil is not the main issue. It is more important to analyse a social reality that has become more complex in recent years, given the presence of features that show an important process of social development coexisting with many aspects of social regression. We consider it inadequate to describe the current historical period in this labour market, which is going through a process of positive restructuring, as the ‘casualisation’ of the labour market in Brazil. We address these questions in the following sections, in which we aim to analyse labour in Brazil, starting with a brief discussion of the development model.

2. The development model

The question of development is present in Latin American sociology from its inception in the last century. Faced with the reality of developed countries, sociology as a discipline sought to discuss the transition from a rural and traditional to an urban and modern society, based on the modernisation theory. Such transitions from rural to urban, or from traditional to modern, were understood as linear, uniform and unavoidable processes that would eventually lead all societies to converge, with the economic and social conditions of developed countries.

This sociological interpretation was strongly criticised in later years because of its simplifying assumption that complex processes of social change could be explained by derivation from general explanatory models, seen as valid for any reality. This optimism, however, can be understood in terms of its coexistence with the national developmentalism of the years 1950–1960, during which Latin American countries developed by applying an import substitution model, anchored in the strong growth of the global capitalist economy occurring during the post-war years, with the tariff protection of our nascent industry and strong state intervention.

Brazil is one of the Latin American countries that advanced the farthest along this development path. Achieving high rates of economic growth through this period, the country reached the 1970s with a broad and integrated industrial base, especially for the consumer durables and non-durable goods industries. It should be noted that the integration of the general population within the development process was accomplished through work, and particularly registered work³. As explained by Santos (1979), the existence of a huge number of workers with no access to labour rights allowed the country to be urbanised and industrialised, while keeping most of its workers away from the rights pertaining to citizenship. The model excluded not only the rural population but also a huge number of urban workers who were employed as unregistered wage labourers, self-employed workers, workers in small businesses, as well as domestic workers or those in activities geared towards self-employment.

This highly exclusionary model produced a social structure characterised by the presence of a huge mass of workers existing at the fringes of the activities that fuelled the development process. It was based on a complex relationship between the various sectors of the economy where, as Oliveira (1972) showed, the development of the 'modern' sector was sustained by the 'backward' sector, as the latter provided low cost products, allowing the wages of modern sector workers to remain relatively low. In the 1970s, the model resulted in a general process of social exclusion that had reached dramatic levels by the end of the decade. This situation explains the fact that the country had one of the greatest income concentrations in the world.

In the early 1960s, a social and political crisis ensued that eventually turned into an economic crisis. With the 1964 military coup, the model survived for more than a decade of economic growth accompanied by high levels of income concentration and no wage growth. However, this development model finally ended in the early 1980s. After a decade of economic instability, by the beginning of the next decade new political and economic trends were imposed with the strengthening of neoliberal principles embraced by the core countries in response to the open crisis present since the beginning of the previous decade. Under the economic policies inspired by the Washington Consensus (Fine/Jomo KS 2006), the country

began to adopt privatisation measures, public spending restrictions and trade liberalisation, among other rules included in the Consensus.

For Brazil, as well as other Latin American nations, this disruption of the development process was calamitous in social terms: rates of unemployment and precarious forms of work rose dramatically, while the average real wage and percentage of registered working population dropped. Concomitantly, social inequalities, income concentration and levels of poverty and misery in the population increased. This situation would only change in the following decade, when new economic trends at the international level began to favour Latin American countries and new political influence rose in the region. The beginning of an international economic situation favourable to Latin American countries, driven by a strong demand for commodities produced in the region, facilitated the action of social actors clamouring for changes in economic and social policies, as well as for the problems of the least privileged social groups, historically left out of development, to be addressed.

Clearly, one would need to consider that the Brazilian social movement experienced a setback in the 1990s, having had a significant upsurge during the 1980s, one of whose more relevant advances includes the 1988 Constitution. Many of these advances were not put into practice, however, due to the neoliberal wave that took over the country during the 1990s and put the social movement on the defensive. Meanwhile, most of the institutions that were created and strengthened in the 1980s (especially trade unions and those related to feminists and the black population) continued acting during the 1990s and were strong enough not only to elect a new government in 2003 but also to apply pressure to it in order to ensure it met their demands (Gohn 2010).

As detailed in the next section, this is the context in which the union movement managed to negotiate with the government a new policy establishing the minimum wage and the movement of women and black people through the Secretariat for Women's Policies and the Secretariat for Promotion of Racial Equality, which put forward a set of policies to promote gender and race equality at work.

In fact, when the political situation changed with the coming to power of political groups opposed to the neoliberal trends, policy measures addressed the strengthening of the state and the resumption of economic

growth. At the same time, policies were enacted aiming to reverse the social exclusion process evident during previous periods. Moving away from the recommendations proposed by neoliberal economic theory, the government sought support in theoretical tools aimed at a new development strategy supported on the one hand by the state and a strong market and, on the other, by a set of coordinated policies necessary for the realisation of a national development programme (Mattei 2011: 15).

This is the context in which the new development model came into being: characterised both by the action of social movements and by the institutionalisation they had won, and the economic trends of international capitalism. The specific way in which the new model is expressed in Brazil has features that characterise it as a form of distributive developmentalism led by the state ('social developmentalism', to use the terminology of Carneiro et al. 2012; Bastos 2012). It therefore has an important social orientation that was not part and parcel of national developmentalism.

The impacts of this process on labour are of enormous importance, producing a significant movement towards better conditions in the labour market. However, this does not mean serious problems that needed to be addressed to improve the living conditions of Brazilian workers were absent. They represent the inheritance of a social structure marked by a huge amount of precarious work and a high income inequality along with inequalities based on gender, race and skin colour, as well as by the emergence of new economic issues that impact on work, as discussed below.

Note that improvements shown in national labour data do not invalidate the existence of a set of general structural trends of this stage of capitalist accumulation that have important effects on labour. The first of these is the trend towards outsourcing work, which, as made explicit in the first section, relates to new forms of business organisation and has been widely applied in the country. According to many studies (Leite 2011; Dau et al. 2009), this trend has had important effects on labour precarisation and could spread further if the business sector wins the ongoing dispute around changes to the current legislation (Biavaschi 2013).

The second concerns the organisation and management of work, which are also a result of the current context of capitalist accumulation and the preponderant influence acquired by financial capital. This has made firms the hostages of financial capital, subjecting them to its short-

term logic, that has consistently led to the adoption of a set of cost-reduction techniques based on redundancies, strictly applied production goals, the requirements of involvement with the company and adherence to its objectives (Boltanski/Chiapello 2009; Gaulejac 2007) among other ways of establishing control over workers. Clearly such policies, which have spread in both private and public companies, also point toward a process of precarisation of labour, especially in terms of working conditions and occupational health.

The third general trend at this stage of accumulation refers to labour regulation, which has also been affected by corporate pressures to pursue major changes, especially in the area of flexibilisation. However, there is no clear trend in this case but rather contradictory trends, showing gains and losses for the workers, depending on the capacity to exert pressure of the different social actors involved in each dispute (Krein 2013).

This means that there is some scope for the national state and its economic policy remains of paramount importance in terms of defining different forms of social conformity (Dicken 2011: chapter 6). It also means that there is space for resistance and action by social movements. In fact, these remain fundamental in defining the nature of Latin American societies, which may have very significant peculiarities.

3. Work and occupation

Changes in the occupational structure and working conditions observed in the last decade are the result not only of economic growth but also explicitly of policies geared to the structuring of the labour market taken by the new government elected in 2003. Among those policies, we find an increased vigilance on the part of the Ministry of Labour against the use of irregular labour; action by the Labour Fiscal Office; and the ongoing regulation of paid domestic work. It is also important to note the creation of the Super-Simples⁴, which resulted in MSE (micro and small enterprises) workers to have access to labour, and the policy to increase the real value of the minimum wage, which, as discussed below, has important effects on the wage structure.

The impacts of these new political and economic trends upon the structure of occupation are extremely significant. They are expressed in the data on employment levels, income, increases in registered labour work and a decrease in the number of unregistered workers, although there are continuing problems obtaining relevant figures for self-employment.

A process that epitomises progress since 2003 concerns the decrease in unemployment, particularly in major metropolitan areas of the country. As can be seen, the decrease in unemployment nationally is quite significant, from 9.3% in 2005 to 6.2% in 2012. It should be noted, however, that female unemployment rates are consistently higher than male rates, although the drop in women's unemployment rates (4.0 percentage points) is greater than the drop in men's rates (2.5 percentage points). Likewise, unemployment among blacks is consistently higher than among whites, even though the fall (3.2 percentage points) in the former rate is slightly greater than the one for white workers (3.0 percentage points).

	2005	2012
Sex		
Male	7.1	4.6
Female	12.2	8.2
Total	9.3	6.2
Race		
White	8.2	5.2
Non-white	10.3	7.1
Total	9.2	6.2

Table 1: Unemployment rate by sex and race, Brazil

Source: Own calculations based on IBGE, National Household Sample Survey (PNAD)

	2004		2012		2004– 2012
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Growth rate (%)
Agriculture	17,879,703.00	21.2	13,781,590.00	14.6	-22.9
Other industrial activities	679,673.00	0.8	720,825.00	0.8	6.1
Manufacturing	11,659,802.00	13.8	12,493,318.00	13.2	7.1
Construction	5,340,487.00	6.3	8,243,623.00	8.7	54.4
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	14,586,805.00	17.3	16,836,341.00	17.8	15.4
Accommodation and food service activities	3,010,853.00	3.6	4,523,135.00	4.8	50.2
Transport, storage and communications	3,872,493.00	4.6	5,266,381.00	5.6	36.0
Public administration	4,192,186.00	5.0	5,179,232.00	5.5	23.5
Education, health and social work	7,380,265.00	8.7	9,104,624.00	9.6	23.4
Paid domestic work	6,452,374.00	7.6	6,418,859.00	6.8	-0.5
Other community, social and personal activities	3,483,557.00	4.1	3,761,432.00	4.0	8.0
Other activities	5,678,104.00	6.7	8,312,357.00	8.8	46,4
Undefined activities	226,365.00	0.3	71,169.00	0.1	-68.6
Total	84,442,667.00	100	94,712,886.00	100	12.2

Table 2: Workers distribution by economic activity

Source: IBGE, National Household Sample Survey (PNAD)

Analysis of the occupation structure by economic sector reveals two important trends: on the one hand, a significant reduction in agricultural labour (which tends to provide low-paying jobs) and some significant growth, with a decrease in recent years, in domestic work (also characterised by low pay). On the other hand, they reveal a less auspicious reality, in terms of a slow expansion in the industrial sector, which traditionally generates the best jobs in terms of qualification and remuneration. These data might indicate a worrying trend of de-industrialisation in the country, as suggested by several recent analyses (Barbosa 2013; Mattoso 2013; Beluzzo 2013). It is important to take into account that the new forms of production organisation, with reduced company size and the externalisation process that accompanies it, has tended to decrease proportionally the numbers of industrial jobs in almost all parts of the world. It is worth noting, however, that in the Brazilian case, studies of industry have pointed out that the rapid and uncontrolled process of trade liberalisation undertaken in the 1990s excluded the country from the production circuits of the most dynamic sectors. This situation, which the changes in economic orientation started in 2003 were not able to reverse, certainly has an impact on industrial employment (Krein/Baltar 2013).

It must be noted, however, that the slow expansion in manufacturing employment has not been reflected in the average labour income, which has shown upward movement across all economic sectors and occupations.

	2004	2012	Growth rate (%)
Waged worker with labour card	1,121	1,433	27.8
Military	1,821	2,514	38.1
Public employee	1,754	2,435	38.8
Waged worker without labour card	610	918	50.5
Domestic worker with labour card	518	811	56.6
Domestic worker without labour card	303	487	60.7
Self-employed	839	1,305	55.5
Employer	3,263	4,503	38.0
Total	908	1,352	48.9

Table 3: Monthly average wages (2012 prices)

Source: Own calculations based on IBGE, National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) and IBGE, Consumer Price Index (IPC)

The positive development in terms of income can be considered as the result of two processes; on the one hand, the fall in the unemployment rate, which improves the bargaining conditions of employees, and on the other hand, the increase in the real value of the minimum wage, which, as was made explicit earlier, has an impact not only on the lower levels of the wage structure, but increases the wage floor for all categories of workers. Another important effect is derived from the minimum wage growth, as pensions and retirement payments are regulated by the minimum wage.

It is also worth noting that the increase in real wages occurs both for women and for men, and for both blacks and whites, but also that it is more significant for women than for men and more for blacks than for whites.

	2004	2012
Sex		
Male	1,070.98	1,552.01
Female	681.61	1,080.84
Race		
White	1,179.72	1,746.69
Non-white	612.72	1,001.60

Table 4: Monthly average wages by sex and race (2012 prices)

Source: Own calculations based on IBGE, National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) and IBGE, Consumer Price Index (IPC)

Between 2004 and 2012, the increase in the average income of women (58.5%) significantly exceeded that of men (44.4%), which supported a decrease in the difference between the average income of men and women (moving from 36% in 2004 to approximately 30% in 2012).

We may assume that the efforts of women to participate in the labour market, including attaining higher levels of education than men, is an important element in reducing this difference. It is also worth noting that confronting this inequality has been the subject of special attention from recent governments and is a central objective of multi-year policy planning (Leite/Garcia 2012). Although many of the policies geared towards the promotion of gender-related equality of opportunity have only a weak impact on paid employment, given that most of them focus on promoting entrepreneurship, it is possible that they have also had an effect on women's income.

In the case of black citizens, it is important to consider that the system of self-declaration adopted by the Brazilian social statistics on race may be amplifying the levels of growth shown in the data for this population, when considering its historical evolution. It should be noted, however, that other data concerning the occupational structure also point to an even more significant improvement of the situation of black citizens, as set out below.

In relation to income inequalities by race, the gains are also significant: while the average income of the white population increased by 50.5% between 2004 and 2012, it grew by 63.5% for the non-white population during the same period.

It is also worth noting that the changing structure of employment by gender reveals an important trend: women remain concentrated in the agricultural sector, trade, education, health and social services, and in domestic services. These data evidence the enduring character of structural gender inequality.

These data show that a major consequence of the gender division of labour (which assigns the reproductive activities to women, and those related to production to men) still stands strong in Brazilian society: occupational segregation by gender. This has been repeatedly highlighted (Souza Lobo 1991; Bruschini 2007; Lombardi 2009) at the same time as an obstacle to women's autonomy and a promoter of gender inequality in the workplace, in view of the devaluation of activities considered feminine.

Regarding the changing structure of employment by race, data indicate a very large increase in the employment levels of the black population, compared to whites: while the occupation of the latter increases by approximately 1.5%, black citizens' employment grows by 23%. This sharp increase in the employment levels of the black population, make its presence grow in all sectors of activity, with the exception of agriculture, where it decreases, although at a lower rate (just over 20%) than among whites (about 50%).

Further evidence of an improvement in occupational conditions can be found in the significant real growth of the minimum wage. As the table below shows, the minimum wage increased approximately 64% in the period 2004–2012. This increase is the result of an explicit policy to recover the purchasing power of the minimum wage, which was negotiated with the Brazilian unions.

The positive evolution of the occupational structure is also evident when analysing the data on occupational status. Indeed, as shown in table 9, there is a very significant increase of registered employed persons (over 45%) and civil servants (approximately 25%), in parallel with a decrease in the number of unregistered workers. The same trend is shown in the increased numbers of domestic workers with a formal contract and the concomitant reduction of those who are unregistered. Perhaps

this movement is closely related to incentives to formalise employment, promoted since 2006, involving income tax reductions related to the employer's expenses incurred through formalisation. It is also highlighted by the significant decrease in unpaid work (over 50%), while the increase in self-employment reveals a worrying increase in a sector of workers without protection, who usually work in low-productivity activities.

An important trend shown by these figures, when analysed by gender, is a more significant increase in registered jobs among women than among men, although the decrease in unregistered work is less pronounced among women than among men. However, the data on unregistered paid domestic work also reveals an improvement in the working conditions of women, with such work showing a decrease of almost 6%, in the case of women while remaining practically stable for men.

Data broken down by race are especially interesting, as the growth rates of registered jobs among non-whites (in excess of 75%) are higher than among whites (just over 26%). Jobs in the civil service also increase more significantly among non-white citizens (almost 40%) than among whites (less than 15%), although unregistered employment decreases significantly among whites (20%) while it is still increasing among black citizens (at a rate of nearly 4%). Even if unregistered work, unregistered domestic work, and self-employed work among blacks increased, this fact does not necessarily indicate a worsening in their labour conditions. In the past, many poor and in particular black people were excluded from work altogether. As job creation gained strength, the overall numbers of new job positions includes both registered and non-registered jobs, and these numbers were large enough to incorporate many non-whites into the Brazilian labour market.

The data examined and discussed above, show an improvement in the occupational structure of the country, which has had important effects in reducing income inequality in Brazil, as expressed in the evolution of the Gini index. This index shows a remarkable decrease between 2004 and 2012, going from 0,612 at the start of that period to 0,530 in 2012.

Further improvements in employment and income levels and in social protection may have a limited effect because of structural constraints on the Brazilian economy, particularly the segmentation of economic activity. Such segmentation is shown in the importance and persistence of self-employment, particularly in agriculture and in the tertiary sector.

Agriculture
Other industrial activities
Manufacturing
Construction
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles
Accommodation and food service activities
Transport, storage and communications
Public administration
Education, health and social work
Activities of households as employers of domestic personnel
Other community, social and personal activities
Other activities
Indefinite activities
Total

Table 5: Distribution of workers by economic sectors and sex

Source: Own calculations based on IBGE, National Household Sample Survey (PNAD)

	2004				2012			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
	12,168,016	24.7	5,711,687	16.2	9,764,101	17.9	4,017,489	10.0
	603,555	1.2	76,118	0.2	628,183	1.2	92,642	0.2
	7,325,556	14.9	4,334,246	12.3	7,817,688	14.3	4,675,630	11.7
	5,206,965	10.6	133,522	0.4	8,008,721	14.7	234,902	0.6
	9,001,650	18.3	5,585,155	15.8	9,839,549	18.0	6,996,792	17.4
	1,511,441	3.1	1,499,412	4.3	1,981,254	3.6	2,541,881	6.3
	3,410,737	6.9	461,756	1.3	4,592,067	8.4	674,314	1.7
	2,629,394	5.3	1,562,792	4.4	3,036,439	5.6	2,142,793	5.3
	1,669,106	3.4	5,711,159	16.2	2,096,889	3.8	7,007,735	17.5
	433,441	0.9	6,018,933	17.1	496,746	0.9	5,922,113	14.8
	1,442,362	2.9	2,041,195	5.8	134,5091	2.5	2,416,341	6.0
	3,564,948	7.2	2,113,156	6.0	4,930,525	9.0	3,381,832	8.4
	206,514	0.4	19,851	0.1	60,180	0.1	10,989	0
	49,173,685	100	35,268,982	100	54,597,433	100	40,115,453	100

Agriculture
Other industrial activities
Manufacturing
Construction
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles
Accommodation and food service activities
Transport, storage and communications
Public administration
Education, health and social work
Activities of households as employers of domestic personnel
Other community, social and personal activities
Other activities
Indefinite activities

Table 6: Distribution of workers by economic sectors and race

Source: Own calculations based on IBGE, National Household Sample Survey (PNAD)

	2004				2012			
	White		Non white		White		Non white	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
	7,162,470	16.2	10,717,233	26.6	4,961,486	11.1	8,820,104	17.7
	350,013	0.8	329,660	0.8	343,354	0.8	377,471	0.8
	6,957,530	15.8	4,702,272	11.7	6,725,601	15	5,767,717	11.5
	2,341,895	5.3	2,998,592	7.4	2,990,471	6.7	5,253,152	10.5
	8,258,405	18.7	6,328,400	15.7	8,393,297	18.8	8,443,044	16.9
	1,606,195	3.6	1,404,658	3.5	2,019,382	4.5	2,503,753	5.0
	2,214,669	5.0	1,657,824	4.1	2,567,452	5.7	2,698,929	5.4
	2,326,570	5.3	1,865,616	4.6	2,620,813	5.9	2,558,419	5.1
	4,560,071	10.3	2,820,194	7.0	5,063,552	11.3	4,041,072	8.1
	2,738,335	6.2	3,714,039	9.2	2,331,847	5.2	4,087,012	8.2
	1,828,188	4.1	1,655,369	4.1	1,841,729	4.1	1,919,703	3.8
	3,659,849	8.3	2,018,255	5.0	4,859,427	10.9	3,452,930	6.9
	76,625	0.2	149,740	0.4	24,598	0.1	46,571	0.1

Waged with labour card
Military
Public employee
Waged without labour card
Domestic worker with labour card
Domestic worker without labour card
Self-employed
Employer
Workers in production for self-consumption
Workers in self-construction
Unpaid worker
Total

Table 7: Workers distribution by employment type and gender

Source: Own calculations based on IBGE, National Household Sample Survey (PNAD)

	2004				2012			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
	16,522,780	33.6	9,013,234	25.6	22,918,450	42.0	14,283,383	35.6
	254,083	0.5	6,859	0	334,619	0.6	15,034	0
	2,189,258	4.5	3,107,233	8.8	2,592,975	4.7	4,033,363	10.1
	10,507,722	21.4	4,911,270	13.9	9,440,548	17.3	4,906,382	12.2
	173,632	0.4	1,487,636	4.2	243,280	0.4	1,656,292	4.1
	259,809	0.5	4,529,883	12.8	253,466	0.5	4,265,821	10.6
	12,815,778	26.1	5,749,994	16.3	13,357,568	24.5	6,203,867	15.5
	2,575,927	5.2	893,151	2.5	2,536,348	4.6	1,027,686	2.6
	1,083,757	2.2	2,330,580	6.6	1,674,848	3.1	2,019,414	5.0
	85,768	0.2	13,149	0	68,848	0.1	8,359	0
	2,704,766	5.5	3,224,579	9.1	1,176,483	2.2	1,695,852	4.2
	49,173,685	100	35,268,982	100	54,597,433	100	40,115,453	100

Waged with labour card
Military
Public employee
Waged without labour card
Domestic worker with labour card
Domestic worker without labour card
Self-employed
Employer
Workers in production for self-consumption
Workers in self-construction
Unpaid worker
Total

Table 8: Workers distribution by employment type and race

Source: Own calculations based on IBGE, National Household Sample Survey (PNAD)

	2004				2012			
	White		Non white		White		Non white	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
	15,228,753	34.5	10,307,261	25.5	19,214,688	42.9	17,987,145	36-0
	141,130	0.3	119,812	0.3	181,402	0.4	168,251	0.3
	3,106,094	7.0	2,190,397	5.4	3,571,231	8.0	3,055,107	6.1
	7,036,185	16	8,382,807	20.8	5,699,370	12.7	8,647,560	17.3
	807,079	1.8	854,189	2.1	745,391	1.7	1,154,181	2.3
	1,930,686	4.4	2,859,006	7.1	1,586,456	3.5	2,932,831	5.9
	9,293,524	21.1	9,272,248	23.0	8,899,805	19.9	10,661,630	21.3
	2,517,173	5.7	951,905	2.4	2,400,592	5.4	1,163,442	2.3
	1,380,361	3.1	2,033,976	5.0	1,238,267	2.8	2,455,995	4.9
	43,890	0.1	55,027	0.1	23,019	0.1	54,188	0.1
	2,594,965	5.9	3,334,380	8.3	1,182,788	2.6	1,689,547	3.4
	44,080,815	100	40,361,852	100	44,743,009	100	49,969,877	100

	2004		2012		2004–2012
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Growth rate (%)
Waged with labour card	25,536,014	31.6	37,201,833	40.9	45.7
Military	260,942	0.3	349,653	0.4	34.0
Public employee	5,296,491	6.5	6,626,338	7.3	25.1
Waged without labour card	15,418,992	19.1	14,346,930	15.8	-7.0
Domestic worker with labour card	1,661,268	2.1	1,899,572	2.1	14.3
Domestic worker without labour card	4,789,692	5.9	4,519,287	5.0	-5.6
Self-employed	18,565,772	22.9	19,561,435	21.5	5.4
Employer	3,469,078	4.3	3,564,034	3.9	2.7
Unpaid worker	5,929,345	7.3	2,872,335	3.2	-51.6
Total	80,927,594	100	90,941,417	100	12.4

Table 9: Workers distribution by employment type

Source: Own calculations based on IBGE, National Household Sample Survey (PNAD)

4. Conclusion

The first aspect to be highlighted in all the analysed data is that a very different picture emerges compared to other periods of Brazilian history, including the national developmentalism period (as discussed in Section 2), a time when the country experienced both economic growth and an increase in the concentration of income. As can be derived from the previous discussion, public policies aimed at improving the occupational structure in the context of growth in recent years have played a significant role in improving the conditions of Brazilian workers. Those policies, together

with other social policies, were responsible for the drastic decrease of poverty and extreme poverty in the country. They also combined to remove Brazil from the World Hunger Map (FAO 2014). It is noteworthy that policies aimed at gender and race equality at work seem to start showing some effect, although it is necessary to stress the fact that there is still a long way to go before women and men, blacks and whites enjoy equal opportunities in employment, income and access to labour and social security rights in Brazil. Clear evidence of this is the continuing presence of waged workers without a labour card, and thus without access to social security.

The second aspect that must be stressed is related to the discussion of concepts of precariousness and casualisation as developed in Section 1. Data provide evidence of a persistent precariousness, as exemplified by the number of unregistered waged workers, yet also disprove the existence of a generalised casualisation process. Thus the data support the criticism of the imprecise use of the concept of casualisation to characterise the evolution of occupational structure, which shows evident signs of improving, even where precariousness continues to exist.

As discussed in Section 2, there are contradictory trends in Brazilian occupational structure: On the one hand, structural trends of a process of casualisation – related to outsourcing, forms of labour management and flexibility – have been operating in Brazil as in other countries. But on the other hand, we must consider that such trends have been partially countered by labour regulation and public policy aimed at improving the occupational structure of Brazil.

Two aspects that the data bring to light still deserve further attention. The first relates to the relatively slow expansion of the manufacturing labour force, which may be a consequence of the difficulties that the industry has faced in recent years, as previously noted. The intensity with which the sector lost workers during the period 2008–2011 is something that needs to be considered, although it should not be forgotten that these were years of crisis, and that the relative recovery in 2012 indicates a less worrying situation at present.

A second problem concerns the steady increase in self-employed workers over this period. If we take into account the working conditions for such occupations (especially at low-income levels), it is evident that current policies have not been sufficient to reduce this precarious occu-

pational condition, which represents a pocket of low labour productivity. However, this might also be evidence of new jobs being created because of the better overall economic conditions and growing incomes. This is an important hypothesis that nonetheless warrants deeper research.

Finally, in reference to the discussion developed in the first section, one should not forget the contribution made by black movements, the feminist movement and the trade union movement to the current reality. Ignoring these movements would be to disregard a history of struggle without which one may understand very little of the current situation in Brazil.

- 1 This text was written within the Project Fapesp 2012/20408-1.
- 2 Christian Duarte prepared all the tables that use PNAD –National Household Survey-microdata.
- 3 In Brazil, access to labour rights is guaranteed by means of a contract registered upon a labour card issued by the Ministry of Labour.
- 4 From 2006, a tax scheme was implemented for micro- and small enterprises (MSEs) in Brazil: The National Simple Tax Scheme (or ‘Super Simples’). This scheme unifies federal, state and local taxation, enables certain tax exemptions, provides a new tax bracket, and thus lessens taxation pressures on micro-economic units. This policy has enabled medium-sized and small firms to register both themselves and their employees, which allows firms and workers access to credit.

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Abstracts

This article examines the labour situation in Brazil. Based on official occupation statistics, the impacts on labour of the economic policies applied in the country during the last decade are analysed. The article begins with the theoretical assumption that although the current globalisation process has universal implications for labour, it is important to analyse national realities by examining their internal dynamics. From here it is possible to show major improvements in job creation and in income distribution in Brazil, which have a great effect on the occupational integration of women and the black population. But although much has been achieved, great inequalities of gender and race still persist in the Brazilian labour market and this poses important challenges for Brazil's future development.

Der Artikel untersucht die Arbeitsmarktsituation in Brasilien. Auf der Basis von Beschäftigungsstatistiken werden die Auswirkungen der Wirtschaftspolitik auf den Arbeitsmarkt in den letzten zehn Jahren untersucht. Der Artikel beginnt mit der theoretischen Annahme, dass es trotz der überall beobachtbaren Auswirkungen des gegenwärtigen Globalisierungsprozesses auf die Arbeitsmärkte wichtig ist, bei der Analyse nationaler Realitäten die internen Dynamiken zu beachten. Dadurch können große Verbesserungen bei der Schaffung von Arbeitsplätzen und der Einkommensverteilung hervorgehoben werden, die sich entscheidend auf die Integration von Frauen und AfrobrasilianerInnen in den Arbeitsmarkt ausgewirkt haben. Doch obwohl viel erreicht wurde, bestehen auf dem brasilianischen Arbeitsmarkt weiterhin große Ungleichheiten bezüglich Gender und ethnische Zugehörigkeit. Dies stellt eine große Herausforderung für die weitere Entwicklung Brasiliens dar.

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The Social Precarisation of Labour in Brazil

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1. Introduction

During the transition from the 20th to the 21st century, the socio-historical contradictions of work do not allow for definitive conclusions regarding disruptions and new forms of labour or social relationships, because alongside the emergence of new conditions and social labour situations, old forms and modalities reproduce and reconfigure themselves in a clear process of social metamorphosis.

I intend to explain why the social precarisation of labour is both a new and an old phenomenon, existing in different but equal forms, and is both a past and present phenomenon, characterised by its macro- and micro-social nature and global and local processes, using the Brazilian reality as a reference. According to my understanding, precarisation is not associated exclusively with the labour market (i.e. atypical forms of employment, unemployment, temporary, part-time jobs, etc.) but with all fields of labour, such as work processes and work organisation and the working and health conditions of workers, as well as in forms of resistance and the role of the State.

The conception of the social precarisation of labour that will be developed in this article can be briefly described with the following points: (1) the centrality of work and its historical forms justify an emphasis on the *social* character of precarisation; in addition, the social precarisation of labour is considered *social* because it has become a strategy of domination used by capital at particular historical moments, combining the crisis of Fordism and the welfare state, the financialisation of the economy, neoliberal policies and productive restructuring, which compose a new regime of flexible accumulation; (2) precarisation is not a result of the flexibilisation of

labour, as stated in many studies, but rather, precarisation is flexibilisation and vice versa; (3) although precarisation is characterised by some national historical specificities it is also global because it disrupts certain dualities, such as that of the excluded and the included, the employed and the unemployed, and the formal and the informal. This is due to the fact that there is a precarisation process that extends to all regions and all segments of workers, as an “institutionalisation of instability” (Appay/Thébaud-Mony 1997); (4) the implications of these changes in labour extend to all other dimensions of social life: family, study, leisure and restriction to access to public goods (health, education and habitation, etc); (5) precarisation is not restricted to the employment relationship, atypical forms of employment or the loss of the typical wage condition of Fordism, but includes *all* fields of labour, in its various dimensions, i.e. different forms of insertion, contracts, informality, outsourcing, deregulation, the flexibilisation of labour legislation, unemployment, sickness, workplace accidents, wage loss and the fragility of trade unions.

Therefore, in this study, the thematic concept from which I depart to construct indicators is that of *Social Precarisation of Labour*, understood as a process in which the institutionalisation of contemporary flexibilisation and precarisation of labour is established economically, socially and politically (Appay/Thébaud-Mony 1997).

2. Current flexible accumulation on a global scale: precarisation as a strategy of domination

In the current historical moment, labour has assumed a particular configuration that has become hegemonic in global terms over at least the past four decades. This era is identified as one of an unprecedented globalisation of capital, grounded in a neoliberal political and economic scheme and materialising essentially through a long and intense restructuring of production and labour.

We are living through a new stage of capitalism referred to as “flexible” by Sennett (1999) and as “flexible accumulation” by Harvey (1992). Underlying this denomination is the understanding that the historical development of the capitalist system has produced significant transformations, particularly

in terms of labour and workers' struggles, that have redefined the configuration of the capitalist system while maintaining its essence as a system whose social relationships are based on wage labour, that is, via the appropriation of labour by capital through the purchase and sale of the workforce in the market regardless of the existing or predominant forms of contract.

Different patterns of accumulation have been established during the history of capitalism that resulted from a set of economic, social and political factors, prominently including workers' resistance struggles that have imposed limits on accumulation, redefining and implementing social and labour rights, as well as society and the State's acceptance and legitimisation of social protection as a guaranteed right.

The various historical conjunctures and the transitions between eras indicate transformation processes by which old and new forms of labour and employment coexist, are combined, and, at the same time, redefine themselves, indicating the typical process of metamorphosis, which is currently occurring under the aegis of a dynamic that ultimately predominates over others: the dynamic of the social precarisation of labour.

I agree with the thesis that there has always been precarious labour in capitalism, but in the recent metamorphosis of contemporary work, metamorphosed precarity now has a strategic and central position in the logic of capitalist domination. It is no longer something residual or peripheral, but has become institutionalised in all regions of the world, both in developed and core countries, as well as in countries like Brazil.

Flexible accumulation has its origin in the quest to overcome crisis resulting from another pattern of capitalist development, marked by Fordism and a regulatory regime. I do not intend to resume the debate on the crisis of Fordism, but it is worth comparing the characteristics of that crisis and the current context after 40 years of alternatives to the old Fordist pattern of development.

A consensus was reached in the analyses of the crisis of Fordism that pointed to mass production saturation, along with a falling rate of productivity in the major countries of the world and a decrease in profitability; although economic growth has slowed, in flexible capitalism profitability has increased and capital gains have never been so high and so rapid, within the socioeconomic environment of the countries that have been welfare states or have implemented public policies for full employ-

ment, as a response to the crisis of 1929. According to Boltanski and Chiapello (2009), in the context of the 1960s, in addition to a standard of living that allowed for social progress planning, there was also a political environment of significant mobilisation and criticism of capitalist standards, which resulted in the events of May 1968. Social struggles against various forms of inequality in the workplace, at school and in the family and with regard to gender, race and generation were strongly expressed and led to protests all over the world.

In this era, transformations brought about by the rupture of the Fordist pattern generated another way of work and life, guided by the flexibilisation and precarisation of labour as requirements of the financialisation of the economy that have enabled the globalisation of capital to a degree never before reached. An evolution of the financial sphere came to determine all other ventures of capital, subordinating the productive sphere and contaminating all production practices and modes of work management, centrally grounded in a new configuration of the state that has begun to play an increasingly important role as ‘manager of the bourgeoisie’s businesses’ because it now acts in defense of the deregulation of markets, particularly the financial and labour markets.

This hegemony of the ‘financial logic’ goes beyond the strictly economic aspect of the market and permeates all spheres of social life, providing content for a new way of work and life. The current social time is unprecedented in its rapidity; it does not appear to extend beyond the *continuous present* and is sustained on the unlimited volatility, ephemerality and disposability of everything that is produced, and mainly on those who produce it – working men and women. The short term – as the central element of financial investments – requires agility for both production and work processes, which in turn requires workers who subject themselves to any conditions to meet the new pace and rapid changes.

These circumstances represent the “new spirit of capitalism” (Boltanski/Chiapello 2009), with which capital pursues to the greatest extent possible the sole goal of making more money from money, without establishing ties or bonds and without commitments of any type except commitment to the market game (financial in the first instance), guided by a limitless international competition that does not allow for any type of regulation.

Thus, it is no longer a society of full employment but one of unemployment and precarious forms of work that has come to predominate in places where a high degree of economic and social development has been reached.

According to Castel (1998), this condition explains the centrality of labour precarisation in the new dynamics of capitalism development, a process that modifies the conditions of (stable) wage labour, which was hegemonic during the Fordist period. The loss of employment or the loss of a stable insertion into the labour market creates a condition of insecurity and a precarious mode of life and work including both objective and subjective dimensions, thus constituting mass vulnerability, weakened social cohesion or social exclusion (*'unbelonging'*).

To say that the social precarisation of labour is at the heart of the dynamics of flexible capitalism also means understanding the precarisation of labour as a strategy of domination. That is, capital uses *force* and *consent* to achieve this degree of accumulation without moral and material limits. The *force* materialises mainly in the imposition of precarious work and employment conditions in the face of the permanent threat of structural unemployment created by capitalism. In a general way, Marx and Engels' thoughts regarding the main political function of the industrial reserve army apply here: the creation of strong competition and division among workers and thus the guarantee of nearly absolute submission and subordination of labour to capital is the only way of ensuring worker survival. The *consent* is achieved from the moment at which workers themselves, influenced by their political and union leaders, come to believe that the transformations of work are inexorable, and as such, must be justified as the results of a new age or a new spirit of capitalism.

The above mentioned explains why I use the term precarisation rather than precarity. These words are not synonyms, although they have the same etymological root. Precarisation emphasises the process and historical character of the phenomenon and the fact that it leads to social regression. It cannot be interpreted as a 'return to what was before' but as a new, modern condition, as it reconfigures the old, retains it and aggregates new elements.

It is, therefore, a metamorphosis of precarity, which, although present since the origins of capitalism, assumes new contours as a consequence of historical processes marked by different patterns of development and workers' struggles.

The content of this (new) precarisation is provided by the conditions of instability, insecurity and fragmentation characterising workers' collectives and the brutal competition existing among them. This precarisation affects everyone indiscriminately, and its manifestations differ in degree and intensity but are similar in the sense of being precarious no longer in a provisional, but rather a permanent sense, thus configuring a reality in which the more traditional forms of resistance and struggle degrade and weaken, thus reinforcing the idea of 'economic fatality'.

In the words of Bourdieu (1998), this transition relies on flexibility as a "policy of precarisation", inspired by economic and political factors, the product of a "political will". Then precarisation is a "political regime [...] part of a mode of domination of a new kind, based on the creation of a generalised and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing the workers into submission, into acceptance of exploitation" (Bourdieu 1998: 124-125).

At this historic conjuncture of capitalism in the world – the flexible accumulation, a political regime sustained by the strategy of precarisation – it is necessary to understand the specificities and particularities of each country or region in the context of concrete realities.

3. The specificities of the social precarisation of labour in Brazil

In order to understand the specificities of the Brazilian case, it's necessary to mention its past history. Brazil is a colonial country sustained on slave labour, which has specialised into an agro-export economy and whose late industrialisation, through the import substitution model, has condemned it to a subordinate position in relation to the core economies.

This was the most general process that has characterised the specificities of capitalism in Latin America and which gave rise to different interpretations about the central-peripheral relation or development-underdevelopment.

It is considered that the world development of capitalism occurred unevenly and combined, creating an international division of labour, in which former colonies, such as Latin America, became dependent countries and raw material exporters, while the industrial dynamics of technological matrix advanced in the core countries – implying heterogeneous

processes among core countries and among peripheral ones. In the case of Brazil, industrialisation, although late, made the economy more complex and dynamic, establishing the main durable consumer goods industries in the country, and differentiating its productive structure from those of other Latin American countries.

Industrialisation in Brazil since the Second World War, the implementation of the import substitution model, inspired by the American pattern of industrialisation, that was sustained through mass production of consumer durables and mass consumption, was marked by a strongly exclusionary character. It incorporated a minority segment of workers into the formal labour market and created a consumer market, which was selectively restricted to this minority segment of the population. This model was implemented via state coercion and management of labour by capital, without a social compact that would integrate workers in the distribution of economic results obtained with the advancement of Brazilian industrialisation. Lipietz and Leborgne (1996) define this case as peripheral Fordism: “it remains peripheral in the sense that in the world wide circuit of the industries, skilled labour (especially in engineering) remains to a large extent external to these countries. Further, the outlets follow a particular combination of local consumption by the middle classes, a growing consumption of durable goods by the workers and low priced exports to the core capitalisms”.

The social protection system (CLT – Consolidation of Labour Laws) was established in 1943 and was conditioned by state control over the trade unions and also a set of social and labour rights restricted to the urban sector, claimed by workers since before 1930. It represented an important step toward the ‘wage condition’, a frequent object of studies in terms of the European experience. It should be pointed out, however, that Brazilian social policies followed a trajectory different from those in Europe. It is also from this perspective that the advances included in the Constitution of 1988 stand out: some rights were extended, existing rights were consolidated, and new public policies of a universal nature were created, such as the universal retirement pension provided for rural workers and the SUS (*Sistema Único de Saúde* – Unified Health System), which has made workers’ health an integral part of public health. However, the difficulties of enacting these achievements became evident in the scenario that was

already developing at the beginning of the 1990s: the neoliberal project that emerged victorious in the 1989 elections, and that contradicted fundamental principles of the new Constitution.

Currently, after 20 years of systemic manifestations of the Fordist crisis in Brazil, it can be stated that the precarisation of labour has become a new phenomenon, whose main characteristics, modalities and dimensions suggest unprecedented social precarisation has taken place in the country over the last two decades. This has been revealed by changes in forms of work organisation/management, labour and social legislation, the role of the state and its social policies, the behaviour of the trade unions and forms of action taken by public institutions and civil associations.

The character of this new social precarisation of labour rests on the idea that it is a process that economically, socially and politically stimulates the institutionalising of precarisation all over the world, renewing and reconfiguring the historical and structural precarity of labour in Brazil, now justified – in the vision made hegemonic by capital – by the need to adapt to the new global reality, and marked by the inevitability and inexorability of a worldwide process of precarisation that is also increasingly occurring in developed countries.

The nature of the dynamics of precarious work in Brazil is the same as in other countries in the world, but their forms and characteristics are typical of a Peripheral Liberal Model (Filgueiras/Gonçalves 2007), a development model in place since the 1990s. This was developed in the context of profound changes concerning five dimensions of socio-economic and political organisation of the country: (1) the relationship between capital and labour, (2) the relationship between the different fractions of capital, (3) the (economic and financial) international integration of the country, (4) the structure and functioning of the state and (5) the forms of political representation. A new pattern of capitalist development emerged, making use, during the past two decades, of distinct regimes of macroeconomic policies. It can be summarised in terms of the following characteristics: structural external vulnerability, passive insertion into the world economy, macroeconomic instability and difficulty in maintaining higher rates of growth. In short, it is a liberal model, because it is founded on neoliberal reforms and economic policies, under the hegemony of financial capital and peripheral as implemented in the

specific context of a peripheral country like Brazil (Filgueiras/Gonçalves 2007; Filgueiras et al. 2010).

In Brazil, this precarisation is 'new' because it has been reconfigured and expanded, leading to social regression in all of its dimensions. As a consequence, it extends to both the more developed regions of the country, such as São Paulo, as well as the regions most traditionally marked by instability, such as Bahia; it is present in the most dynamic and modern sectors of the country and in cutting-edge industries (through the practice of outsourcing), as well as in more traditional forms of informal work and self-employment, among other sectors; it affects both more highly qualified workers and the least skilled workers and it occurs in both the private and in the public sectors. This process breaks with the traditional duality between formal and informal work and all the implications of this.

'Precarisation' in Brazil, similarly to the rest of the world, is marked by a different historical climate, characterised by the hegemony of financial capital, which permeates the economy as a whole, redefining the occupational structure, leveraging the growth of services, and driving the emergence of new segments of precarious work, such as in the tele-marketing sector (Sproll 2013). The financial capital appropriates the state itself, imposes a reduction of public and social policies and creates a permanent economic instability, which is the origin of the current financial and economic crisis.

In Latin American countries, the dynamic nature of the precarisation of labour is the same as in the core countries, but its potential for generalisation is different because only a minority group of workers have had relatively stable earnings, i.e., the social vulnerability was always very large, but also differentiated between the workers themselves and today even those protected by law ('formal employment') are also exposed to precarisation, as will be discussed later.

4. The social precarisation of labour in Brazil: some indicators

4.1 The labour market has remained precarious over the last two decades

The indicators of labour precarisation developed for the analysis of the last two decades are intended to account for various dimensions by combining the quantitative and qualitative aspects. In an attempt to avoid reductionist visions that sometimes consider one or another fact of reality absolute, these indicators are grouped in six types or dimensions of precarisation (Franco/Druck 2009).

The first dimension is the form of workforce commodification, demonstrated empirically by the evolution of the Brazilian labour market, highlighting the indicators of occupational insertion, income, unemployment rates and employee turnover rates. When neoliberalism arrived in the 1990s in Brazil, the country's entry into globalisation was subordinated and exposed the instability of the international financial system. During this period, Brazil saw the highest rates of unemployment in its history, with the deepening of productive restructuring, leading to the expansion of informality and outsourcing for all sectors of the economy. This included a number of changes in the labour and social security legislation that reduced and flexibilised the rights of workers (Krein/Baltar 2013).

The main labour market indicators for the 2000s exhibit a trend toward job recovery, with a reduction on unemployment rates and an increase in the numbers of formal employees. This trend was interrupted by the global crisis of 2008. The rates of urban unemployment in Brazil rose after the global crisis during the period from October 2008 to March 2009, during which the number of unemployed grew by 19% in just six months, rising from 1,743 million to 2,082 million. This percentage change is the same as that observed for the five-year period from 2003 to 2007, when the number of total unemployed *decreased* from 2,608,000 unemployed to 2,100,000 (IBGE 2010). That is to say, what the country had recovered over five years was lost within six months, indicating the vulnerability of jobs in Brazil and the difficulties of overcoming the high levels of unemployment resulting from the country's mode of insertion into globalisation. However, since August 2009, a new process of job recovery has begun that includes an increase in formal employees and a decrease in the total

unemployment rate in metropolitan regions from 14.0% to 10.5% in 2012 (SEADE/DIEESE 2013).

The growth of formal employment in the private sector in recent years has not been sufficient to decrease the turnover rate. In 2002 this was 41.8% and in 2012 43.1%, demonstrating the degree of flexibility of labour contracts. Furthermore, the duration of employment was short; in 2012, 45% lasted less than 6 months and 66.5% of those laid off had not yet completed one year of employment (DIEESE 2014a), indicating the high degree of instability and vulnerability of jobs created.

With regard to income, the salary range of formal employees that grew the most during this period (2002–2012) was up to two minimum wages (142%), whereas employees who receive more than two minimum wages increased only 24% (DIEESE 2014a). This is an indicator of income redistribution that occurs between workers themselves.

The minimum wage has been the object of valorisation and recovery since the mid-1990s but has been characterised by higher rates of correction in the 2000s, with a valorisation of 171% occurring between 2003 and 2009, which has had positive impacts on the economy as a whole. In 2009, 9.7 million workers, or 7.8% of the total number of those employed, earned the minimum wage, whereas in 2001 they numbered 5.9 million or 7.8% of the employed. However, it is important to note that the nominal value of the Necessary Minimum Wage (*Salário Mínimo Necessário* – SMN),¹ calculated by DIEESE, should have been R\$ 2,227.53 in December 2009, but was in fact R\$ 510.00, i.e. 4.4 times lower than this.

4.2 Outsourcing: the main form of social precarisation of labour

Management standards inspired by Toyotism can be identified as a second dimension of the social precarisation of labour. Within the context of an intensification of work (the imposition of unachievable performance goals, the extension of working hours and versatility, among other aspects) this has led to extremely precarious conditions grounded in management through fear, and in discrimination created by outsourcing, which has spread to epidemic levels. Additionally, this process has been accompanied by forms of abuse of power through moral harassment, which has been widely denounced and made the subject of lawsuits in Labour Courts and at the Labour Department of Justice.

Studies at the beginning of the 1990s were, to a large extent, conducted in the industrial sector, with an emphasis on the automotive, chemical/petrochemical and oil industries. At that time, important trade unions, such as the Metal Workers Union of the ABC region of São Paulo (Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos do ABC) and the Chemical and Petrochemical Industry Workers Union of Bahia (Sindicato dos Químicos e Petroquímicos da Bahia), began to denounce and position themselves against outsourcing, arguing that it ceased to be applied only in peripheral activities of the factories, being also adopted within the productive core (Druck 2011).

In the 2000s, the growth and spread of outsourcing characterised an ‘uncontrolled epidemic’, as a modality of work management and organisation in an environment controlled by the logic of financial accumulation that requires total flexibility of the work process, working conditions and labour market at all levels, thus introducing a new type of precarisation that has come to guide the relationship between capital and labour in all its dimensions. Additionally, in a context in which the economy is heavily coined by very short-term financial logic, companies are in a position to pressurise workers to maximise time, attain high rates of productivity and reduce costs through labour and ‘volatility’ in the form of contracts. Outsourcing meets these requirements as no other mode of management does (Druck 2011).

Outsourcing has grown in all sectors of the economy, prominently in the public sector and in state companies. This new trend, which can be explained by the fact that successive government adopted neoliberal policies, on behalf of the fiscal surplus recommended by the ‘Washington Consensus’, suspended government procurement. In this context they sought to remedy the need for civil servants through outsourcing in different ways: intern hiring, the use of workers cooperatives² (particularly in health), the transfer or outsourcing of public services to the private sector and the subcontracting of private companies.

Likewise, in the private sector, outsourcing has grown significantly in core company areas and begun to take on new forms, such as cooperatives, one-person companies (*pejotização*) and working from home, also called telecommuting.

Due to the difficulty of obtaining information from companies, precise statistics on outsourcing in Brazil are currently not available. The Employ-

ment and Unemployment Survey (Pesquisa de Emprego e Desemprego – PED) conducted by DIEESE, estimates that in 2009, 11.6% of urban workers in the major metropolitan regions were subcontracted through outsourced services and self-employed individuals who worked for companies in 2009. In a more recent study, CUT/DIEESE (2011) reports that in 2010, typically outsourced sectors corresponded to 25.5% of formal employment in Brazil.

Pochmann (2012) shows that the evolution of the number of formal workers in typically outsourceable activities jumped from 110,000 in 1995 to over 700,000 in 2010 in São Paulo. During the period of 1996–2010, the average annual growth in formal outsourced employment was 13.1% per year, and the average annual increase in the number of companies was 12.4%.

Studies conducted in the 2000s on banking, telemarketing, petrochemical and oil, in addition to state-owned or privatised electricity companies, communications and public health and education services, reveal that apart from general growth trends in outsourcing, multiple forms of precarisation of outsourced workers refer to contract types, salaries, turnover, working hours, working and health conditions and union representation.

The remuneration of employees in typically outsourced industries is 27.1% lower than that of other employees. Outsourced workers work three hours more than other workers, their duration of employment is 55.5% lower than that of other employees, and the turnover rate in typically outsourced companies (January to August 2011) is 44.9%, whereas in other companies it is 22.0% (CUT/DIEESE 2011).

All of these data are indicators of working conditions that are more precarious than those of non-outsourced workers, and if we consider the exponential growth of outsourcing, which has become widespread for all activities in the private and the public sector, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of outsourcing is one of the main drivers of the social precarisation of labour in Brazil.

Sectoral and case studies also confirm these results. For instance a study on companies in the chemical, petrochemical and oil industries in Bahia between 2004 and 2006 compares outsourcing processes in the early 1990s with those in the 2000s. The main findings are as follows: (1) Outsourcing has continually grown for all company activity areas; (2) the

proportion of outsourced worker in relation to directly employed workers has grown. Moreover, for the ten companies that have provided such information, a ratio of 63.7% of outsourced workers, in contrast to only 36.3% of directly employed workers, was found. Among these companies, there are differences in the degree of outsourcing because more than half of workers are directly employed in only two of them, whereas between 49.1% and 28.5% of workers are directly employed in the remaining companies; (3) the diversification of types of contracts offered to outsourced workers, including the following forms: Specialised Non-Industrial Service Provider Company, Other Industrial Company, Temporary Employment, Cooperatives, Service Provider/Individual Firm (child company) and NGO/Non-profit Agency; (4) a significant difference between the average cost of the directly employed worker with the average cost of the outsourced worker; for a subset of six companies that provided such information, the cost of the subcontracted worker varied from 1.4 to five times less than that of the employed worker; (5) the persistence of labour complaints despite the control and compliance with legislation declared by companies (Druck/Franco 2007).

4.3 The conditions of (in)security and health in the workplace

The third dimension of social precarisation refers to the conditions of (in)security and health at the workplace, arising from management standards that disrespect the necessary training, ignore information on risks, do not implement preventive collective measures, define unrealistic goals and use moral harassment for their achievement, among other issues, subordinated to the quest for higher productivity at any cost, including that of human lives.

An important indicator of this precarisation is the evolution of the number of workplace accidents in the country. Although these statistics are recognisably underreported, in the period between 2001–2009 there was an increase of 126%.

Furthermore, there is increase in hazardous risks and accidents as revealed by reports in the electricity, petroleum extraction and refining and steel industries. A study of DIEESE (2010), reveals that between 2006 and 2008, 239 electricity workers died as a result of workplace accidents, 193 (80.7%) of whom were outsourced workers. The average mortality rate³

among directly employed workers during the same period was 15.06 (per 100,000), whereas that among outsourced workers was 55.53 (per 100,000). It is worth highlighting that during the same period, the average national mortality rate for all economic sectors covered by the Social Security System was 9.8; that is, the risk of an outsourced worker dying as the result of a workplace accident in the electricity industry is 5.66 times higher than in other productive sectors.

In the case of Petrobrás, from 1995 to 2010, 283 deaths caused by workplace accidents were recorded, 228 of the victims were outsourced workers. In August 2011 alone, eight workers died as the result of workplace accidents at the state-owned company, all of them outsourced workers (DIEESE 2011).

In addition, micro-social studies of companies and organisations in the field of Work-Related Mental Health define a ‘psychopathology of precarisation’ as a product of the violence in the work environment, generated by the imposition of the pursuit of excellence as the ideology of human perfection, which pushes workers, ignoring their limits and difficulties, along with a radical defense and implementation of flexibility as the ‘norm’ requiring a continuous adaptation to changes and new demands for versatility and for a ‘volatile’ individual without ties, without bonds and without character, that is, flexible. This condition, aggravated by other typical imperatives of the so-called modern standards of corporate organisation (exacerbated competitiveness, rapidity or unlimited speed) is implicated in the rise of mental illness in various forms, including suicides (Seligmann-Silva 2001; Franco et al. 2010; Krein/Baltar 2013).

4.4 The loss of individual and collective identities and the fragmentation of unions

A fourth dimension of labour precarisation is the loss of individual and collective identities, the fruit of a symbolic and real devaluation that condemns every worker to be the only one responsible for his or her employability and thus subjugating him or her to the “dictatorship of success” (Appay 2005) in the extremely adverse conditions created by flexible capitalism.

The current work environment, in a context of precarisation as a strategy of domination, of “management through fear”, is extremely fertile

for the spread of “abuses”, encouraged by a wickedness that contaminates the environment, stimulating behaviours that lead to the disqualification, devaluation and depreciation of the “other”, causing damage, suffering and even sickness. This behaviour is often stimulated by competition among colleagues themselves that later becomes “company policy” (Barreto cited in Aguiar 2006).

This has effects on organisational capacities. Due to the extreme levels of competition among workers and their heterogeneity and division caused by outsourcing, unions have become increasingly fragmented and workers’ struggles and representation have become more difficult. Data on the number of strikes, unions, unionisations and agreements, among other events, are important, but they do not explain underlying trends, changes and redefinitions. The lower number of strikes in the 2000s compared with the two previous decades, the growth in the number of trade union centres – today, there are 11 trade union confederations, eight of which have been formed in the 2000s – the stagnancy or even decrease in the rates of unionisation evident in 2009 compared with 2008 (16.5 million unionised, in contrast to 17.5 million) and the type of action strategy used by most of the union leaders can only be understood in the context of ‘ideological perplexity’, as previously mentioned.

4.5 The ‘crisis of labour law’ in liberal times

Finally, the fifth dimension of the social precarisation of work concerns a ‘crisis of labour law’, questioning its tradition and existence, expressed in the attack against forms of state regulation whose social and labour laws have been violently condemned by the liberal ‘principles’ of the defense of flexibilisation as an inexorable process brought about by modernity in the times of globalisation. This idea is supported in the recent document *101 proposals for the modernisation of the labour legislation* submitted by the Confederação Nacional da Indústria – the National Confederation of Industries (CNI 2012). The main focus of the document regarding the amendment of the Brazilian labour legislation is the defense of the “negotiated over the legislated”, that is, replacing established workers’ rights by negotiated (collective or individual) agreements: “In order to promote labour modernisation in Brazil, it is necessary to observe what model of labour relations the country wants for the future. It is not difficult to find

convergences around the idea of replacing the model currently in force by another that favors negotiation, grounded on the representativeness of the actors and able to adapt itself to the different realities and maximise the gains for companies, workers and the country. A modern labour system is formed by a legal basis that addresses the fundamental rights and lays down the rules for the process of dialogue between the involved parties, the remainder being defined by negotiations that take into account sectoral and regional specificities as well as those of each company and each worker. In this respect, it would be necessary to replace a model where almost everything is defined in law and very little is negotiated, by another one that favors negotiation and reduces the homogeneous state control” (CNI 2012: 18).

In another area – the action of public power – disputes regarding the elimination of the national labour law (CLT) or its maintenance are intensified by the role performed or possibly performed by some public organisations/institutions, whose primary function is to ensure the implementation of and compliance with the legislation in force. For example, the authorisation of inspectors of the Ministry of Work and Employment (MTE) for supervision, registration and fining of companies and institutions has been queried and has already been the object of a draft law aiming to withdraw this power. A broad mobilisation of supervisory agents and trade unions has for the moment led to the withdrawal of the measure.

In reality, these institutions play a fundamental role as agents endowed with the power to limit the action of capital – through regulation – in relation to the commodification of work that has recently extended further than the purchase and sale of the workforce through salaried work by resorting to other forms of work that appeared to have been consigned to history, such as child labour and forms of labour analog. In this sense, the joint action of the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Labour Department of Justice, with the support of the Federal Police, is exemplary in the fight against labour analogous to slavery, and its results have been very impressive in terms of the number of rescued workers and the political repercussions of this action. This has revealed the degree of the exploitation of modern national and multinational companies in Brazil and given rise to the “Register of Employers caught red-handed exploiting slave labour” (*“Cadastro de Empregadores flagrados explorando mão-de-obra escrava”*),

known as the “Dirty List”, available on the MTE’s website (MTE 2010). During the period of 2000–2010, 959 operations were conducted in various regions of the country, through which 37,092 workers were rescued and the contracts of a total of 35,790 workers were formalised through the actions of the inspectors. The payment value of compensation relating to salary payables (outstanding salary, vacations, the thirteenth salary and the Christmas bonus, among other payables) reached the sum of R\$ 61.2 million during these ten years, excluding fines and reparations for moral damages.

These actions indicate, on the one hand, high growth in the use of slave labour in the context of modern labour, which becomes evident in complaints and the performance of such operations coordinated by the MTE, and on the other hand, the state’s capacity to set limits on the voracity of capital. This example, among others, is representative of the absence of moral limits exhibited by capital and makes explicit that the reason of labour law is questioned, while simultaneously indicating the need for intervention by the public power, as agents of Brazilian labour law, that significantly challenge the radical defenders of the neoliberal order.

5. Conclusions

The current conjuncture of labour in Brazil, despite the resumption of employment growth under legal protection (formal employment) and the drop in unemployment rates, cannot be analysed in terms of a ‘number fetish’. This is affirmed by Juan Somavia, ILO General Director: “besides the unemployment rate, we have the challenge of improving the productivity and salaries, reducing informality, improving social protection covering and facing inequalities, [...] It’s not only important to generate more jobs, but also that these are quality jobs” (ILO 2009).

Yet it is necessary to go beyond this, because there is a question as to what constitute quality jobs in a time when the commoditisation of workforce has reached extreme levels, trivialising the risks, the accidents and workers health, as indicated by the growth in the number of accident at work, the non-compliance with basic safety standards, revealed by the audits of the MTE, aggravated by a policy of monetising the worker’s health, which happens to guide negotiations and challenges under labour law.

Monetisation and the commoditisation that transform worker's rights into costs, always present in the perspective of the capital (e.g. the 'Brazil cost', the 'China cost'), also pervade workers' ideals and their leadership, who also internalise the logic of the market. This stimulates competition among the workers themselves. In a clear demonstration of resignation that gradually contaminates even the capacity of indignation on social injustices, the denial of rights and social protection is seen as a result of 'economic fatalism'.

The inherent violence of the capitalist offensive was of a symbolic and material nature. The restructuring of production, with layoffs, outsourcing and versatility as inspired by Toyotism, promoted, in an objective sense, the weakening of workers and their capacity to fight, which was reinforced in the subjective plan by the defense of a policy and trade unions performance in the limits of this new order (neoliberal) of the capital.

In spite of this scenario, there is a movement that deserves attention: the number of strikes by outsourced workers. Although systematised statistics are not available, consulting some newspapers of the mainstream press and search sites reveals that there are daily reports about strike movements of outsourced workers claiming unpaid salary payments, the thirteenth salary and holiday pay among other basic rights of workers under legal protection (formal employment), which are not respected by employers.

There are also important initiatives, from trade unions, their leaders, central trade unions, associated to labour law agents (labour inspectors, judges and prosecutors), to researchers/scholars of universities and research centres, who have held meetings, seminars, events related to precarisation caused by outsourcing.

In 2011, the Forum Permanente em Defesa dos Trabalhadores Ameaçados pela Terceirização (Permanent Forum on the Defense of Workers Threatened by Outsourcing) was created, which gathers researchers, institutions of labour law, trade unions, central unions, and has mobilised nationally against the approval of the Bill 4330 proposed by companies owners defending the unrestricted freedom of companies to use outsourcing. A national campaign bringing together the most diverse segments of civil society in this last year was able to stop the vote on the Bill in the National Congress.

These are important initiatives and struggles, although they still remain too scattered. However, the organisation of opposition forces within a framework in which the balance of power is still very unfavourable to workers, has demonstrated that the current social and political actors are multiple and are diverse in nature. They are in the trade unions, civil associations, public institutions, associations and movements of all kinds that are drawn from those hardest hit by precarisation, as well as those who practice solidarity, creating solidarity networks and political engagement replacing the traditionally vertical character of organisations, such as trade unions, with horizontal structures. These are struggles, movements, organisations and networks, either created or reinvented, and focusing on health, life and the defence of decent employment rights - rights that flexible capitalism was not able to guarantee, but instead, has come to deny.

- 1 According to Brazilian Labour Law, the legal minimum wage should cover expenses for a family's daily needs in terms of food, housing, health, education, clothing, hygiene, transportation, leisure and social security services. DIEESE (a Brazilian research institute linked to trade unions) calculates the actual costs of a basic monthly food basket in São Paulo as the basis for a "necessary" minimum wage to cover real expenses for the mentioned items (DIEESE 2014b).
- 2 Workers cooperatives have been (and are increasingly) used as an important strategy of outsourcing of services and also productive processes by both public and private enterprises aiming to reduce enterprise costs. Workers are not employed but are associated members of these cooperatives (disguised employment) and therefore subjected to precarious conditions and an unstable and marginal inclusion, because labour rights and social protection do not apply.
- 3 The mortality rate is a statistical indicator that establishes the relationship between different populations and deaths occurring in this group of individuals, negating the influence of the group size. The mortality rate compares sets of workers of different sizes and characteristics, in order to establish the relationship between sets of 100,000 worker deaths, allowing for a more accurate assessment of the risk of accidental death while at work.

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Abstracts

This paper presents a conceptual discussion and an analysis of labour in the context of globalisation of capital, marked by the hegemony of financial capital, and the restructuring of production and labour, which indicate a new historic moment of capitalism. In this context, the precarisation of labour suffers a metamorphoses and occupies a central place in the new dynamics of capitalism development in all the world. The conception of precarisation refers not only to the changes in the labour market (different types of employment and unemployment), but also to all fields of labour – in relation to the form of organisation of labour, work and

health conditions, worker resistance and trade unions as well as the role of the State, through different types of regulation, particularly that of labour and social legislation. This paper comprises five sections: an introduction; a discussion of precarisation in the current flexible regime of accumulation; a summary of the main specificities of social precarisation of labour in Brazil, a presentation of the core dimensions of precarisation, based on an analysis of Brazilian empirical reality in the last decade, and finally a few conclusions.

Der Artikel analysiert die gegenwärtige Phase von Globalisierung, die durch die Hegemonie des Finanzkapitals sowie eine tiefgreifende Restrukturierung von Arbeits- und Produktionsprozessen gekennzeichnet ist. Prekarisierung von Arbeit ist ein struktureller Ausdruck dieses Wandlungsprozesses, der die Dynamik kapitalistischer Entwicklung weltweit prägt und dabei selbst eine Metamorphose durchläuft. Der Begriff der Prekarisierung bezieht sich hierbei nicht nur auf die Veränderungen auf dem Arbeitsmarkt, also auf verschiedene Beschäftigungstypen und Arbeitslosigkeit, sondern auf alle Bereiche der Arbeit. Damit werden die Form der Arbeitsorganisation, Arbeits- und Beschäftigungsverhältnisse, Gesundheitsrisiken, Widerstandsformen und gewerkschaftliche Organisation von Beschäftigten sowie die regulierende Rolle des Staates, insbesondere bezüglich der Arbeits- und Sozialgesetzgebung, mit einbezogen. Der Artikel gliedert sich in fünf Teile: eine Einleitung, eine Diskussion von Prekarisierung im gegenwärtigen flexiblen Akkumulationsregime, eine Zusammenfassung der zentralen Charakteristika sozialer Prekarisierung von Arbeit in Brasilien, eine Darstellung der zentralen Dimensionen von Prekarisierung, die in den letzten zehn Jahren empirisch für Brasilien kennzeichnend sind, und einige Schlussbemerkungen.

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Precarity and Social Disintegration: A Relational Concept

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Precarity has become a major theme in the social science diagnoses of our times (Aulenbacher 2009; Bourdieu et al. 1997). The precarity debate, however, is marked by dissonances that go well beyond the common parameters of scientific controversy. Diverging emphases not only mark the precarity debate in the Global North and South, but also the discussions within the English-speaking world and beyond. Within the Anglo-Saxon academic world, studies have mainly focused on the flexibilisation of labour markets (Koch/Fritz 2013; Kalleberg 2011) and on Standing's thesis of the precariat as 'a class in the making' (Standing 2011; critically: Munck 2013). With the exception of some of Bourdieu's work (Bourdieu et al. 1997; Bourdieu 1998), the central European debate on precarity has hardly been taken notice of in the English-speaking world. This also holds true for Robert Castel's work (2000, 2005, 2011), which was an important stimulus for German research programmes on precarisation (Castel/Dörre 2009). Whilst in the North, the main concern is with wage labour becoming disembedded from its protective, social welfare shell (Brinkmann et al. 2006; Bourdieu et al. 1997), in the South there has been a strong interest in the social instability of precarious societies and forms of violent, 'unregulated' conflict (Lee/Kofman 2012; von Holdt 2012). Here, interests have been in precarity's root causes beyond the sphere of wage labour. Others, however, have formulated a more generalised criticism of precarity diagnoses and have rather emphasised increasing structural heterogeneity and fragmentation of labour markets (Burchardt et al. 2013) and class relations (Antunes 2013).

In what follows, we will introduce precarity as a sociological concept (1), offer a definition that captures precarity as a relational concept (2) and will refer to our own empirical studies in order to come up with an

extended typology of precarity (3). We will then recapture the state of the precarity debate in Germany and Central Europe (4), before offering some suggestions regarding the (comparative) precarity debate in North and South in the conclusion (5).

1. Precarity as a sociological concept

In the German language, the term ‘precarious’ literally means revocable, insecure or delicate. The origins of the term can be found in the Latin *precarium*, referring to a loan (of an object, of land or rights), the right to use of which could be revoked at any time. Precarity thus describes an insecure, unstable relationship that is subject to cancellation at short notice. The relationship is one of dependency: the recipient of a good becomes dependent on the donor. The opposite would be a stable, secure relationship, constituted by equal rights. In sociology, the term ‘precarity’ refers to insecure and unstable conditions of work, employment and life in general. The more recent precarity debate among scholars of the Global North has resulted from the emergence of low-paid, temporary and unprotected employment, which became more common even among academically qualified workers. For these groups, *lavoro precario* (Bologna 1977), an Italian term coined during the 1970s, was characteristic. In France, the implementation of the ‘*revenue minimum d’insertion*’, designed with the purpose of re-integrating the long-term unemployed (Schultheis/Herold 2010: 244; Barbier 2013: 17), made *precarité* an issue of public debate. Henceforth, sociologists used the term ‘precarity’ as a broad category in order to bundle a whole range of social phenomena together. André Gorz used the term with reference to ‘marginal workers’, external staff, and also the increasing numbers involved in domestic services (Gorz 1989: 100-102, 200), which expanded as work and employment became ‘flexibilised’. In the works of a group surrounding Pierre Bourdieu, the concept was used to analyse the ‘de-collectivisation’ of the industrial working class and processes of social exclusion, especially of the migrant population, in the French suburbs. In the German social sciences, precarity meanwhile remained marginal. Those who did address phenomena of precarity rather subsumed these under terms such as ‘atypical employment’ or ‘poverty’.

This has in fact only changed quite recently. Today, however, precarity, precarisation and precariat have become well-established categories in Germany, not only in professional sociology but also in everyday discourse.

Robert Castel's works on the transformation of Fordist societies based on wage labour were highly influential in Germany. To Castel, the remarkable integrative capacities of Fordist wage labour societies and full employment resulted from a double movement. For many decades, the secular trend towards a social generalisation of wage labour was accompanied by the embeddedness of the employment relationship in welfare state arrangements. This resulted in what has been retrospectively termed a socially protected normal or standard employment relationship (Mückenberger 2010: 403-420). To the vast majority of wage labourers, especially men, embedded wage labour brought about a relative decoupling of income and employment situations from market risks. Fordist capitalism in continental Europe was still marked by class-specific inequalities and by gendered, asymmetrical labour market integration. Male full employment was unimaginable without unpaid care work, provided mainly by women. Migrants (so-called 'guest workers') left the Southern periphery of Europe for the centre and took up badly paid and low status jobs. However, for the majority of workers, salaried employees and their families, the post-war era marked a transition from a wage labour contract to wage labour as a recognised social status, i.e. social citizenship. Wage labourers now disposed of 'social property' (Castel 2005: 41)² and rights built up for citizens (Standing 2011, 2014). Poverty and precarity did still exist, but were pushed to the margins of continental Europe's societies of full employment.

The recent precarity debate reflects the fact that the close linkage of wage labour and social property, so central to continental welfare states irrespective of their specific characteristics, has been successively disrupted since the 1970s (Albert 1992; Crouch/Streeck 1997; Hall/Soskice 2001). Under Fordism, even alienated wage labour had strong socially integrative effects as it came with rights to social integration and participation. In general, these rights have lost their protective function and post-Fordist societies based on wage labour are splitting into three zones (Castel 2000: 360), differentiated according to levels of security. The majority of employees are still in protected standard employment and remain fairly well integrated into social networks. Below this 'zone of integration' there

is an expanding 'zone of precarity'. Here we find a heterogeneous conglomeration of the vulnerable. These groups have to confront insecure employment and living conditions and frequently experience social network erosion. At the bottom of the hierarchy, there is a third zone, a 'zone of detachment'. In this zone, relative social isolation accompanies more or less permanent exclusion from labour markets.

Precarity thus is by no means a new phenomenon; however, its current central European forms are specific indeed. In the post-welfare states of the Global North, contemporary forms of precarity do not equal absolute misery and pauperisation. Rather, these forms are defined in relation to the status of social citizenship, which came to life during Fordist prosperity and remains constitutive of the conscience of mainstream society in the centre of continental Europe (Paugam 2009). Social insecurity is returning to the Global North and thus affects societies that, in an historical perspective, remain wealthy and secure (Castel 2005). We are thus not observing a return to the pauperism of early industrialisation. In addition, concepts of social exclusion, focussing on labour market exclusion, cannot fully capture the specific nature of today's precarity. Rather, Europe's post-welfare states are witnessing a transition from *marginal* forms of precarity towards *discriminatory* forms (Paugam 2008; Dörre 2009). Discriminatory precarity in post-welfare states successively captures previously secure social groups; it not only affects fringe groups of workers but also extends to the very core of employment.

2. Definitions of precarity

Many researchers have successfully used Castel's zone model as a heuristic template, and its analytical usefulness has been vindicated by empirical research on precarity in Germany and beyond (Baethge et al. 2005; Brinkmann et al. 2006; Bude/Willisch 2006; Schultheis/Schulz 2005; Holst et al. 2009; Busch et al. 2010; Pelizzari 2009; Scherschel et al. 2012; Castel/Dörre 2009). Whilst precarity research has flourished in recent years, there is broad scope when it comes to defining the term and to empirical operationalisation. Given this diversity, it is currently difficult to define something like a basic consensus in the field. However, two

manners of use of the term precarity can be distinguished. As a *time-diagnostic concept*, precarity addresses changes at the intersections of employment, everyday life, welfare state and democracy. It refers to an encompassing trepidation of society (Ehrenberg 2011) and remains rather vague. This vagueness has an advantage to it, however, as it helps us to see relations between singular phenomena (Dörre 2009). Only this notion allows us to understand precarity as a regime of power, control and disciplinatio that is affecting and changing societies as a whole. These time-diagnostic uses of the concept can be distinguished from rather narrow, *empirically oriented and workable notions*. Empirical research requires clearly defined terms that can be operationalised. For this purpose, a differentiation between precarious *employment* and precarious *work* needs to be made. Logically, this means that precarity can take on a broad variety of forms. One can also imagine the entanglement and mutual enforcement of these two dimensions.

Definitions of precarity can include not just structural criteria but also the subjective modes of processing insecure working and living conditions (Dörre 2005; Sander 2012). Structurally precarious employment is not necessarily subjectively conceived as such. If one integrates self-perception and ascription, precarity neither amounts to total labour market exclusion, nor to absolute poverty, to complete social isolation or political apathy. Rather, precarity is a relational category, always linked to societal definitions and standards of 'normality'. According to a preliminary definition by the Jena research group, employment is precarious if it does not permanently allow for subsistence above a certain cultural and socially defined level. Employment of this kind does indeed discriminate because it does not allow employees to realise their potential at work, it is not gainful employment, and is disregarded by society. It has a lasting discriminatory effect as it negatively affects social integration, opportunities for political participation and the capacity to plan one's life. Precarious work and its social constitution imply that those individuals or groups working and living in precarious employment fall below standard levels of protection and integration as commonly defined in welfare states. At the level of subjective experience, precarious forms of employment and/or work evoke feelings of meaninglessness and perceived disdain from others.

3. Precarity – an extended typology

We are using Castel's zone model as a heuristic template in order to develop an extended typology of precarity, which systematically includes subjective orientations and ways of processing insecurity. This typology has as its empirical base a qualitative study which led us to reconstruct nine typical processing modes of social (in-) security (chart 1). Empirically, this exploratory study consisted of 100 theme-centred interviews with workers in both open-ended and precarious employment, and with people who were out of work. Additionally, 36 interviews with experts in the field and two focus group interviews with temporary workers were conducted. Research was conducted across a broad range of sectors, including the automotive and financial industries and temp agencies. Our typology proves the relevance of Castel's zone model for the German 'labour-based society'; it does, however, generate differentiated results about the subjective processing of precarity.

The typology illustrates that perceived threats do not increase in a linear manner as one moves to the bottom of the hierarchy of types. What rather seems to be the case is that the anticipation of social decline is particularly present in those groups that still have something to lose, i.e. those who find themselves in the 'zone of integration'. Experiences of insecurity thus cannot be confined to the 'zone of precarity'. But then again, precarity is not, at least not to the same extent, 'everywhere' (Bourdieu 1998). The most important findings of our study may be summarised as follows:

Zone of integration
1. Secured integration ('the secured')
2. Atypical integration ('the unconventional' or 'self-managers')
3. Insecure integration ('the insecure')
4. Threatened integration (the 'threatened by social decline' type)
Zone of precarity
5. Precarious employment as an opportunity / temporary integration ('the hopeful')
6. Precarious employment as permanent arrangement ('the realists')
7. Attenuated precarity ('the satisfied')
Zone of detachment
8. Surmountable exclusion (those 'willing to change')
9. Controlled exclusion / simulated integration ('the left-behind')

Chart I: (Dis-) integration potentials of employment – a typology

Source: author's elaboration

(I) *Attitudes towards the future and life-planning*: In the 'zone of precarity' we encounter phenomena reminiscent of those analysed by Bourdieu (2000) in his early studies of the Kabyle sub-proletariat in Algeria. Then as today, precarious situations do not provide a base for long-term life planning. This is what sets the precarious groups apart from the proletariat in the old centres of capital accumulation. For the proletariat, stable employment and regular wages were the conditions on which a rational, calculating and future-oriented consciousness could develop something like a life plan as well as ideas of how to achieve the desired future. The proletariat had thus achieved some authority to dispose of their lives in the here and now and on this basis only it could envisage a (collective) appropriation of the future. The precariat, in contrast, were living below an economic and cultural threshold that, for Bourdieu, pre-conditioned the development of a rational approach towards time and the capacity to envisage societal alternatives. The fact that precarious employment does not provide a base for long-term life planning is the most important aspect when respondents evaluate employment conditions (type 5, 6). While the predominantly young respondents amongst those in type 5 still

articulate an aspiration for the ‘normalisation’ of one’s occupational biography, to the ‘realists’ (type 6), precarious employment represents a kind of access to a ‘labour-based society’ to which there is hardly any alternative. There appears to be a consolidation of precarious employment if one considers the sequence of occupations of these individuals. Older respondents in particular describe their working life as a permanent move between temporary jobs not adequate to their skill-levels and intermittent periods of unemployment. They seem to have accepted that any half-decent, but temporary, job is bound to be followed by spells of unemployment. And quite naturally, they have accumulated an arsenal of everyday techniques allowing them to survive in the midst of this volatility. They internalise experiences of insecurity, which strongly indicates that the ‘realists’ are coming to terms with the idea of living a life within the ‘zone of precarity’. The main goal of this group is to at least temporarily find regular work with somewhat decent pay in order to avoid plunging into the ‘zone of detachment’.

(2) *Changed meaning of employment:* In sum, the typology contains many indicators pointing to a profound shift in the meaning of employment. Not only for the precariously employed, but also for the ‘insecure’ (type 3) and those ‘threatened by social decline’ (type 4), who remain formally integrated via a standard form of employment, wage labour is losing its function as the main social ‘adhesive’, i.e. as a medium of integration. One consequence is a weaker inclination among employees to voice demands concerning the quality of work even though aspirations related to work content have by no means fully disappeared in the groups of the ‘hopeful’ and of those ‘threatened by social decline’. This is exemplified by the fact that precariously employed people, once they actually do make it into the core workforce, soon start to think about options for their ‘small ascent by further training’. But ultimately, qualitative demands with respect to work are at least temporarily put aside. The aspiration of temporary workers is to become part of a core workforce (Castel 2000). In this sense, the reproductive dimension, the aspiration for income and employment security, conditions the work consciousness of many of those who are precariously employed.

On the basis of our typology, we can grasp more precisely what constitutes a life in the ‘zone of vulnerability’. Characteristically – and here

there is a significant difference to the traditional sub-proletariat – there is precisely not the kind of total social uprooting and pauperisation. Rather, precariously employed people are in a peculiar sense in ‘abeyance’ (Kraemer/Speidel 2004: 119pp). On the one hand, these weakly resourced workers still envisage that they will catch up and keep in touch with the ‘zone of normality’ and must mobilise all available energy in order to perhaps attain that goal one day. On the other hand, permanent efforts are required just to ward off social decline and a plunge into the ‘zone of detachment’.

(3) *The disintegration paradox*: This is what constitutes the specific vulnerability of the precariously employed. For them, the old promises of welfare state capitalism, according to which a male standard employment relationship is the basis for a slow but steady increase in prosperity, have been revoked. Yet nonetheless, their lives are not ruled solely by experiences of disintegration. As paradoxical as it may sound, that peculiar ‘abeyance’, accompanied by severe effects of disintegration, is in fact a source of motivation for extraordinary efforts towards re-integration. These efforts demonstrate that the economic habitus has not yet been completely destroyed and the capacity to plan their own life with a view to the future is still present, at least as an aspiration. For this reason, the *primary* integration potentials (employment and income security, social recognition, identification with one’s work) can then be replaced by *secondary* integration potentials.

Secondary integration potentials imply that the prospect of socially protected wage labour structures the expectations of those aspiring to stable employment. This is the case when the precariously employed consider their employment as a jumpstarter to get back into the ‘zone of normality’ (type 5). In such cases, precarious employment is considered unavoidable. One has to endure such conditions temporarily in order to retain the prospect of secure employment. Thus rather ironically, the attractiveness of precarious work lies in the possibility of its supersession. Obviously, the strength of such expectations varies markedly according to gender, ethnicity, age and degree of qualification. Particularly younger, better qualified respondents (i.e. agency workers hoping to be recruited by the hiring company) speculate on the ‘adhesive effect’ of insecure employment. This finding does come with one important limitation, as it mainly depicts subjective orien-

tations of young German employees. As precarious employment becomes the new normal for social groups these ways of processing will evaporate. This becomes apparent in another type: We also speak of secondary integration when the fear of social decline motivates efforts for re-integration (type 6). This is the case with the precariously employed, who see a precarious employment relationship as the last remaining option for escaping permanent exclusion from the employment system altogether. In such cases, the anticipated exclusion effects of long-term unemployment subjectively hold greater weight than those discriminations that accompany precarious employment. And finally, secondary integration potentials also work through accepted gender or ethnically related inequalities and self-definitions. This can be observed when female part-time workers in retail consider themselves to be ‘additional-earners’, whose main identity is that of a traditional homemaker. The same is found with young migrants, who accept informal work because it seems more gainful to them than professional training (type 8, 9). What marks this group is that its members by no means consider themselves to be ‘excluded’ or ‘left behind’. Far more common here are such self-descriptions as ‘working unemployed’, stressing their ability to make ends meet even in the shadow economy. By reference to these ways of processing we can define the concept of discriminating precarity more precisely. Even in the heyday of the Fordist welfare state (and especially under the conservative welfare model) integration based on full employment was mediated by domination for large groups (e.g. wives of workers in standard employment) or was not realisable at all (for so-called ‘guest workers’). This can increase an individual’s readiness to accept precarious employment. Secondary integration thus refers to subjective adjustment to forms of secondary exploitation. Unlike primary capitalist exploitation, this frequently very brutal form of exploitation is not based on – even in its contractual fixation – an exchange of equivalents. Secondary exploitation implies fraud or even robbery of resources (Federici 2013) and is legitimised by discriminating social constructions of ethnicity and gender (Dörre 2012: 108-III).

(4) *Disciplination*: Of course, integration means something completely different in the ‘zone of vulnerability’ or the ‘zone of detachment’ than it does in the world of standard work relations. The primary integration potentials with respect to the world of work (satisfaction of reproductive

and qualitative work-related aspirations) are weakened; this loss can at most be partially counter-balanced by secondary integration potentials, but can never be fully compensated for. Proximity, in terms of the world of work, to the 'zone of precarity' has an impact on the integration potential of permanent employment. Members of the core workforce begin to get a vague idea of their own substitutability when they become aware of the work performance of external workers, the mere visibility and perception of a 'zone of precarity' alone has a disciplining effect.

In the world of work, fears of precarisation foster forms of integration that are based less on participation than on subtle force, i.e. mechanisms of disciplination and processes of social closure. In this sense, the emergence of a zone of insecure employment enforces the adjustment to a new mode of social control. The social cohesion provided by the standard employment relationship is eroding. The place of a mode of integration that – not exclusively, but largely – rested on the material and democratic participation of wage-earners is now being taken by forms of integration in which the subtle effect of competitive mechanisms of disciplination are increasingly important (Heitmeyer 1997: 27).

4. The state of the debate

Irrespective of future research, one can register the current state of social scientific debate on precarity in Germany and continental Europe. Precarity is increasingly becoming a 'normal' form of labour organisation with its specific characteristics and manifestations (Castel 2011: 136), also in Germany. Here we are witness to the emergence of a society of precarious full employment. While the number of economically active people in Germany rose to a record high of 42 million in 2013, the volume of hours worked and paid for has decreased significantly by more than 10 % since 1991 (Destatis 2013). Work volume is not only distributed among ever more wage-earners, but it is moreover distributed rather unevenly. Employment expansion is taking place, not exclusively but largely, via precarious jobs, performed mostly by women in personal service occupations (Holst/Dörre 2013). Even though not all non-standard employment relationships are precarious, their expansion to nearly 40% (Struck 2014: 129) of the total is a

strong indicator for precarisation. More than 50% of those in non-standard employment now find themselves in the low-wage sector, 24.3% of the economically active population (IAQ 2013; Bosch 2014). Women (30.8%) and non-German nationals (62.6%) have an above average risk of ending up in low-wage employment (Bosch 2014).

A historically new form of discriminatory precarity has thus taken hold in Germany, which operates as a mechanism of disciplination and control. The new form of precarisation establishes power asymmetries that penetrate the different segments of the 'wage labour society' and the relations of social reproduction. Discriminatory precarity originates from the construction of a special societal status. From the perspective of still-protected groups, as well as in the self-perception of those in insecure conditions, this special status constitutes the problem of a minority only.

In the interplay between attribution and self-perception, precarity constitutes a hierarchy, and those who live under the most difficult of conditions while commanding the fewest power resources, consider themselves to be part of minority groups. Their daily conduct of life deviates from the standard as defined by 'mainstream society'. While this special status is also constructed by gender, nationality and ethnicity, it is nevertheless something specific, and something that is politically constructed.³

Precarity in wealthy societies thus not only refers to specific social positions and is not just a temporary pathology. The regime of power and disciplination unfolds across labour-based societies and their labour market segments. It destroys social citizenship by producing status groups of precariously employed people and denying them fundamental participatory rights. Compared to workers in standard employment, these groups are less often unionised, they are hardly represented in the institutions of workplace co-determination, and as the conservative German welfare system is still based on the standard employment relationship, they do not command full social rights (Koch/Fritz 2013). Precarious groups have, at least in Germany, a below average turnout in elections and are underrepresented when it comes to other forms of political participation (Schäfer 2013; Dörre et al. 2013: 391-395). This partial deprivation of rights for these modern 'vagabonds' hollows out existing democratic institutions.

However, one must add that the hollowing out of social citizenship by means of precarisation is an uneven process. It is influenced by the persist-

ence of democratic institutions and encounters trade union and political opposition. For this reason, the destruction of social capitalism rather resembles what Luxemburg described as the ‘gnawing to pieces’, ‘assimilation’ and as a ‘crumbling’ of the old mode of production (Luxemburg 1975 [1913]: 364). In Germany, the process of creative destruction was pushed only to a point at which the relics of social citizenship constitute something like a second reality in the upper echelons of the labour-based society – an exterior, not yet fully subject to the principles of competition. The so-called German model, which again is the subject of so much discussion these days, is a hybrid. It is a regime structured by finance capitalism that has preserved the social aspect of social capitalism as a subdominant structure. This simultaneity of the unequal explains the authority-conserving effects of precarity. Secure core workforces, commanding organisational power and social and co-determination rights, do still exist. They represent a form of existence that many of the precariously employed are striving to achieve. Conversely, the ‘zone of precarity’ reaches deep into the core of the workforce. Those in open-ended employment constantly have the precarised groups in their sight, and this is a constant warning for them. For this reason, they begin to regard their employment condition as a privilege, which needs to be defended ‘tooth and nail’.

5. Conclusions: gaps and further research

Thus far, we have focused on precarity in the post-welfare societies of the Global North. Elsewhere (Dörre 2013), we have hinted at several controversies and gaps in theorising precarity (including gender dimensions, formal and informal precarity, precarity and capacity for collective action). The concept of discriminatory precarity, developed in Europe against the background of the demise of Fordism, can hardly claim to capture change in parts of the world where standard employment relationships have never really taken hold and encompassing welfare states did not exit (Neilson/Rossiter 2008).⁴

This aside, one needs to add that mature welfare states also always excluded certain social groups (women, migrants). Conversely, in state-socialist countries, or in South Africa for example, forms of open-ended

employment did exist and served as a positive point of reference for workers. Certainly, the central European discussion on precarity needs to be brought into much closer contact with perspectives beyond those of central Europe (see for example von Holdt 2012; Lee/Kofman 2012; Lindell 2010; Webster et al. 2008; Munck 2013; Arnold/Pickles 2011). Precarity can mean very different things even within Northern or Southern societies. At the same time one should not rule out processes of convergence within transnational production chains. This throws up further research questions, a few of which we will now outline.

(1) The first thematic field touches upon the connection between production models and care regimes. Germany's strength as an exporting nation of industrial goods is traditionally based on the abasement of paid and unpaid care work. Currently, there is increasing pressure on the provision of care services as a public good, because reproductions costs are to be reduced and state-financed demand for these services is insufficient. Political actors react to this situation by creating quasi-markets on which public and private providers of care compete, with wage costs being a main competitive factor. Work intensification, precarisation of employment, skills shortages and a re-allocation of care to private household ensue. Gaps in care and other services are partly filled by informally and precariously employed migrant workers, who often have to leave their children in their respective countries of origin. As transnational production systems become established, so do care chains, characterised by precarious forms of life. More research is required in order to establish how exactly regular employment and work in households intersect (Dörre et al. 2014).

(2) The economic crisis and the politics of austerity have led to a situation in some European societies where societal majorities now find themselves in precarious situations – similar to countries in the Global South. In Greece, unemployment rose from 7.7% in 2008 to 27.3% in 2013, with youth unemployment (persons below the age of 25) reaching 58.3% in 2013 (Eurostat 2014). Average incomes fell by 8% in the two years of 2010/11. Meanwhile, the share of jobs not subject to social insurance contributions has risen to 36%. Against the background of drastic pension cuts and growing numbers of homeless people, the number of suicides has reached record highs (Markantonatou 2014). In other words: Greece has, very much like other countries, turned into a *precarious society*. In these societies it is not

just wage labour that has become fragile but also those binding social norms that used to govern social coexistence. In these societies the frames of reference and the relations of precarity are shifting. The effects might best be explored from a comparative, North-South perspective.

(3) Possibly the most important issue for future research should be the capacity of precarious groups to develop structures of self-help as well as capacities to resist and protest collectively. The precarity discourse in developed capitalist countries still focuses on the destructive, disuniting effects of social insecurity. This, however, begins to change as precarious workers' involvement with trade unions and social movements as well as their participation in riots and other forms of social unrest have become visible (Schmalz/Dörre 2013). Here, a broad field of (comparative) study has opened up, especially since many countries from the Global South can point to extensive experience with precarious groups' social movements and political activism.

Whether or not precarity will function as a catalyst for powerful collective actors is a question that must remain unanswered for the time being. One thing, however, is certain: discriminatory precarity in wealthy societies is linked to phenomena of precarity in the Global South, where majorities of people have lived in precarious situations for a long time (Jütting/De Laiglesia 2009; ILO 2012; OECD 2012). In some countries of Eastern and Southern Europe, welfare states exist in rudimentary form only and precarity now impacts the majorities of the populace (Sola et al. 2013; Matković 2013; Van Lancker 2013; Lehndorff 2012). Above all, different types and shapes of precarity are being interrelated (Lee/Kofman 2012) by transnational production networks (Butollo/Lüthje 2013; Burchardt et al. 2013) and care chains (Hochschild 2001: 131). This is certainly not a comprehensive list but it indicates that, even though social conditions are different, at least on this level the precarious societies of the Global South are irreversibly linked to precarity in the wealthy countries of the Global North. Here, safeguarding the wealth of selected groups comes at a price. This price is being paid by the new 'vagabonds' of the 21st century, those plebeian masses (Therborn 2012) condemned to 'unworthy labour', the modern precarians of North and South.

- 1 Ingo Singe provided the translation of the original German version of this article and critical comments. I am also grateful for detailed and stimulating comments by two anonymous referees that helped to improve the manuscript.
- 2 “Social property could be described as the production of equivalent security services as could previously be acquired only through private property” (Castel 2005: 41p).
- 3 ‘Politically constructed’ here refers to the fact that the ‘Hartz IV’ reforms contributed to the creation of a status below the threshold of social respectability. The socially very heterogeneous group of benefit recipients was thus homogenised by force and this status increasingly becomes the low point of reference of precarity.
- 4 This is an oversimplification, as international research on welfare states has convincingly argued that this neglects the fact that some countries in Latin America and Asia did in fact develop welfare programmes as part of development strategies in the first half of the 20th century (see for example Bayón 2006; Wehr et al. 2012).

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Abstracts

This contribution conceptualises precarity as a relational category that must refer to definitions of social normality standards in order to be meaningful. Within the post-welfare states of the Global North, a new form of discriminatory precarity has taken hold. As a regime of disciplination and domination, this new form permeates all segments of societies based on wage labour. Building on Castels' zone model and empirical research, we develop an extended typology of wage labour's (dis-) integration potentials. This typology combines structural criteria with subjective ways of processing insecurity. Finally, we recapitulate the current precarity discourse in Central Europe and discuss potential research that could bring approaches in the Global North and South closer together.

Der Beitrag versteht Prekarität als relationale Kategorie, deren Aussagekraft wesentlich von der Definition gesellschaftlicher Normalitätsstandards abhängt. In den post-wohlfahrtsstaatlichen Kapitalismen des Globalen Nordens hat sich eine neue Form diskriminierender Prekarität herausgebildet, die als Disziplinierungs- und Herrschaftsregime alle Segmente der Arbeitsgesellschaft durchzieht. Aufbauend auf dem Zonenmodell Robert Castels und umfangreichen eigenen empirischen Erhebungen entwickelt der Beitrag eine erweiterte Typologie der (Des-)Integrationspotenziale von Erwerbsarbeit, die subjektive Verarbeitungsmuster von Unsicherheit einschließt. Schließlich werden der derzeitige Status der kontinentaleuropäischen Prekaritätsdiskussion dargelegt und mögliche Forschungszugänge für eine notwendige Annäherung der Prekarisierungsdiskurse im Globalen Norden und Süden erörtert.

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Informality in German Parcel Delivery

INGO SINGE

Just ten years ago, Germany was frequently considered the sick man of Europe, suffering from sluggish growth, labour market rigidities and chronic high unemployment (Dustmann et al. 2014). The days of doom, however, are gone: while much of Europe continues to be in state of economic and social crisis, Germany is Europe's economic superstar (ibid.). Enthusiastic references to the German model frequently point to successful labour market reforms and predict 'fat years' ahead (Rürup/Heilmann 2012). Much less attention is given to the dark underbelly of Germany's success: more than 20% (1991: 12,8%) are now in atypical employment and Germany boasts one of the largest low wage sectors in Europe, with nearly 25% having hourly wages below the low wage threshold of 9.14€/h (IAQ 2013). Wage disparities have grown strongly (Giesecke/Verwiebe 2009; Dustmann et al. 2014), and the institutions of worker representation have lost much of their former regulatory impact. At present, they only cover minorities of workers in the private sector (Ellguth/Kohaut 2013). While the erosion (Hassel 1999; Dörre 2010) of the traditional regulatory framework has been well documented, much less is known about work and employment regulation in those areas – including segments of the expanding German parcel industry, the subject of this contribution – that are no longer covered by these mechanisms.

As the world of work in the Global North has increasingly fragmented, concepts of informality have met with growing interest among scholars concerned with analysing change in work and employment as well as the intersections of paid employment, non-paid work and social arrangements beyond the workplace (Glucksmann 2005; Marcelli et al. 2010; Mayer-Ahuja 2012). For our purposes, i.e. the analysis of informality and its reproduction by social agents in German parcel delivery services (i.e. paid employment

in an industry that produces perfectly legal services and cannot be defined as being part of a separate, informal economic sector), two interconnected arguments within the increasingly broad informality literature hold special relevance. Firstly, influential contributions have defined informal employment as the “[...] paid production and sale of goods and services that are unregistered by, or hidden from, the state for tax, social security and/or labour law purposes, but which are legal in all other respects” (Williams/Windebank 1998: 4). While conventionally, informal employment has been seen as separate from formal employment, as its other, recent discussion has problematised clear-cut demarcations (Williams 2014) and has conceived of “[...] formality and informality as evolving moments along a fluid continuum of work relations, [and] conditions of employment [...]” (Olmedo/Murray 2002: 422). Terms like ‘quasi-formal employment’ and ‘under-declared work’ (Woolfson 2007; Williams/Nadin 2012) try to capture hybrid forms of employment and are relevant when it comes to understanding informality in presumably highly regulated economies, such as Germany’s (Mayer-Ahuja 2012). Secondly, controversies about defining informal labour as unregulated are of interest. Castells and Portes’ (1989: 12) widely cited definition sees the informal economy as “[...] a process of income generation characterised by one central feature: *it is unregulated by the institutions of society, in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated*”. Critical comment (Williams/Windebank 1998) has called notions of unregulated employment a ‘myth’ and pointed out that institutional regulation of formal employment, as well as the state’s social policies generated (unintended) effects on the scope and nature of informality. In our research, the direct regulatory impact of the traditional German industrial relations institutions and the law is small indeed, however this does not mean that production and employment are unregulated. Rather informality in parcel delivery refers to a changed *mode of regulation*, a specific re-combination of formal and informal regulation. This is characterised by interpersonal/individual regulation rather than collective and institutionalised forms (Standing 1997). The personal aspects of regulation gain increasing weight at the expense of the law. Regulation becomes rather ad hoc and unstable. In fact, in our case the formal and the informal are mutually dependent: informal arrangements do not replace registered employment and the employment contract but rather supplement it.

Our main interest in this contribution lies with the question of how actors reproduce informality in German parcel delivery. For this purpose, we will present results from an empirical study in the sector¹ and will proceed as follows: the sector of parcel delivery in Germany and its fragmented employment landscape will be introduced (1). We will then describe the forms of informality in parcel delivery (2) before the main body of the text offers sociological explanations of how informality works in the German context (3). In line with other work (Ram et al. 2001; Ram et al. 2007), we will thus offer explanations that go beyond economic explanations and are sensitive to the interplay of coercion and consent in the reproduction of informality. We will conclude by offering some possible areas for future research (4).

1. Parcel delivery in Germany

Parcel delivery services are part of the courier, express and parcel sector (Kurier, Express, Paket; KEP). Parcel delivery can be differentiated from courier and express services by high levels of standardisation: there are limits to the size and weight of goods suitable for parcel delivery (up to 70 kg), and providers do not guarantee specified delivery times. Parcel services are a volume business characterised by high levels of automation and clearly defined processes. The KEP sector has experienced rapid growth in recent years: between 2000 and 2012, the number of shipments increased by 51% (KE-CONSULT Kurte & Esser GbR 2013: 12). The most dynamic area of growth has been in parcel delivery and especially in services that provide private consumers with goods bought over the internet. In 2012 alone, this B2C (business-to-consumer) segment grew by 9.2% (ibid.). Future growth is expected primarily in standardised parcel delivery to private consumers. As a result, all providers, including those who in the past specialised in B2B (business-to-business) services, are aggressively trying to establish or defend positions in this line of business. The German market for parcel delivery is highly centralised and dominated by a few oligopolists (Kille/Nehm 2011: 3p) In contrast to other areas of former public service provision, the German state agency Deutsche Bundespost never held a formal monopoly in parcel distribution, although major competitors such as

UPS (United Parcel Service) or DPD (Deutscher Paketdienst, renamed Dynamic Parcel Distribution) only entered the market in the mid-1970s and clearly focused on the business-to-business (B2B) side of the market. Competitors are currently locked in a 'price war', competition does not allow for increasing revenue through price increases and revenues per shipment have stagnated for a period of roughly ten years. Cost minimisation is thus a major concern for all service providers in parcel delivery. The cost minimisation imperative drives providers' organisational strategies. Albeit to different extents, all providers today rely on complex subcontracting relationships; organisational fragmentation has become a core feature of service provision. Some of the main providers, i.e. Hermes, DPD, and GLS, have fully transferred the operational side of parcel collection and delivery to subcontractors and do not employ any drivers themselves. It is not uncommon for subcontractors themselves to outsource some of the work – in this way, multi-tiered layers of 'sub-subcontracting' have come into existence. Others, such as DHL and UPS, have also partly externalised delivery, albeit to a lesser extent. While sorting and loading functions have largely remained in-house, formally independent, small and micro-sized haulage entrepreneurs are contracted to serve a given regional entity. Service contracts between the focal enterprises and subcontractors commonly specify quality standards of service, codes of conduct and rates per parcel delivered. These contracts can be terminated at very short notice. The big providers all aim to devolve risk, costs, flexibility and control of driver's labour process downwards along the value chain.

Small subcontractors are formally independent actors, but in fact they remain heavily dependent on the original service provider and rarely enter negotiations on an equal footing with 'big capital' (for a more detailed analysis of 'the small entrepreneur' in parcel delivery and relations with focal service providers, see Holst/Singe 2011, 2013). Focal service providers do intervene actively in the field in order to uphold a competitive order among subcontractors. They do so, for example, by 'recruiting' new subcontractors in order to keep the field competitive and by creating a dynamic hierarchy among subcontractors. These hierarchies are created by offering or retracting favourable conditions; subcontractors have to qualify and continuously re-qualify for ongoing contractual relationships by providing high quality, reliable services at a discount price.

1.1 Fragmented employment in parcel delivery: three segments of drivers

The organisational fragmentation described above leads to increasingly heterogeneous employment conditions for drivers. Using the contractual status of workers as a criterion for differentiation, one can define three segments of drivers (Holst/Singe 2011, 2013). In the *first segment* we find drivers who are still directly employed by the original service provider. The overwhelming majority of DHL's drivers and a majority (roughly 60%) of drivers for UPS fall into this category. In this segment, conditions and norms of employment continue to be defined by the traditional German industrial relations actors. DHL's drivers in parcel delivery remain covered by collective agreements and have access to well-developed structures of workplace representation. UPS has much weaker workplace structures and some of its work councils seem to function as a means of managerial control rather than as authentic organs of interest representation. UPS displays a rather 'flexible' approach to collective bargaining but generally pays in excess of rates defined by regional agreements for the haulage industry. The provisions of German labour law (employment protection law, working time legislation, dismissal legislation) continue to influence working conditions in this segment.

Our main interest in this paper lies with the *second segment* of drivers. These workers hold a formal employment contract, but are not directly employed by the original service provider but instead by a subcontractor. As subcontractors are, with some very rare exceptions, not bound by collective agreements, conditions of work and employment are not subject to collective regulation. As a rule, workplace co-determination does not exist in small haulage enterprises. Labour law does formally apply, but as we will show in the next section, its impact is *de facto* greatly reduced in informal settings. Reliable socioeconomic data on workers in this segment is unavailable and official documents issued by the Federal Office for Goods Transport contain little information on these workers (Bundesamt für Güterverkehr 2013). As in the other segments, it is exceptional to come across female drivers. According to trade union information, this segment is dominated by young men in the 20-35 age bracket, there is a high turnover of personnel and in the metropolitan regions of the former Federal Republic and Berlin there are regional depots with a predomi-

nantly migrant workforce. Many of the workers are early school-leavers, however in line with other sectors of low-pay service work there are also qualified migrants, whose skills are not acknowledged by German authorities (Artus 2008).

The third segment is made up of self-employed couriers. As solo entrepreneurs, they do not hold an employment contract but rather hold service contracts with subcontractors. Official figures on the distribution of drivers across these segments are missing, but our own research indicates that the majority of drivers (around 60%) can now be found in segment two, while the self-employed in segment three constitute a minority of around ten per cent. This fragmentation of employment stands in stark contrast to the jointly regulated employment conditions that used to characterise postal services in the past.

2. Informality in parcel services

Informality constitutes a core feature of employment in the segment of drivers employed by subcontractors, i.e. in the majority of employment situations in the industry. From a superficial, formal point of view, it seems highly questionable to speak of informality in this segment as employment contracts specifying working hours, remuneration, holidays and other elements of the wage-effort bargain are in place. Upon closer inspection, however, these contracts are little more than a formal 'shell', leaving considerable space for interpretation, adjustment and informal regulation in asymmetric power relations between smaller sized employing organisations and workers. One respondent, a works councillor representing workers (but not those drivers employed by subcontractors) in a sizeable depot in a western metropolitan region, described the situation as follows: "Oh well, it is not quite compatible with German law, including employment contracts. Our norms do not apply there, it is a little different. Labour courts do not exist in this milieu, there is nothing there, nothing really takes effect. It is just the daily grind, somehow you have got to manage. And you don't hear much about this. You'd have to really make an effort to find out or you need to be lucky and find someone out of that scene who dishes the dirt. Doesn't happen very often" (Works Council Chair, DPD, May 2011).

According to this representative, the world of subcontracted parcel delivery contrasts with the orderly, institutionally regulated (but also low-paid) world of work in the depot. Smaller sized haulage firms appear less as formal organisations than as a hidden 'scene' or a 'milieu', with distinct normative orders. We had access to a fixed term, two-year employment contract between a subcontractor and a driver. It illustrates the representative's reference to the daily struggle for survival. The contract set basic pay at 550€/month before tax, for a six day working week with extra shifts to be worked on Sundays or holidays where required. The working day was to start at 5:00 am and to end at 7:00pm at the latest (closure of depot). Total monthly/weekly working time is not specified in the contract, however it states that the legal driving limit must not be exceeded. According to the contract, the driver takes responsibility for observing working time legislation. The meagre basic pay can be propped up the different additional payments and bonuses: up to 200€/month for travel costs to/from work, a 300€ safety award, bonuses for punctuality and cleanliness, allowances (up to 102€), and a bonus for high delivery rates (above 98%). If a driver manages to secure all extra payments, he will thus end up with a monthly pay of 1,302€ before tax, which can rise to around 1,500€ after six months of service. At the same time, however, drivers can also be penalised for a variety of reasons, e.g. for not paying sufficient attention to cleanliness or the technical condition of the delivery vehicle. Drivers can also be held liable for damages resulting from misconduct.

While one cannot say that these contractual arrangements represent the norm in the segment of subcontracted parcel delivery, recent media reports indicate that they are not exceptional either. Our interview data certainly hint at a broad range of informal and even unlawful practices, including:

- topping up documented / regular income with unregistered payments ('pushing the envelope', Woolfson 2007), in order to avoid tax and social security contributions,
- re-declaration of income by using allowances and bonus systems,
- violation of working time legislation, avoidance or manipulation of working time documentation, underdeclaring the number of hours worked,
- refusal of overtime payment,

- pressurising couriers to overload delivery vehicles,
- urging couriers to pay fines in case goods get damaged or in case of delayed delivery.

The most widespread concern among drivers is the long hours. In this segment of employment, daily working times are frequently well beyond ten hours. Where working days of 12 to 14 hours constitute the norm, hourly wages are effectively as low as 5,50€ . Even according to IsSiT e.V. (Interessenverband selbständiger Subunternehmer im Transportgewerbe e.V.), an association of subcontractors, more than 90% of small and medium sized employers in parcel distribution are not capable of adhering to working time legislation (IsSiT e.V. 2010a). In another publication, a letter to original service providers, IsSiT e.V. states: “Sadly it is not possible for system partners to limit a courier’s working time to the confinements defined by law. The financial situation of system partners is such that additional staff for work in depots cannot be hired in order to disburden couriers. Due to the fact that couriers have to load in the mornings and unload in the evening, working times are sometimes up to 13 hours” (IsSiT e.V. 2010b).

For the segment of drivers discussed here, the traditional institutions of employment regulation in Germany do not directly determine the conditions of work and employment. Rather, conditions are defined largely through informal processes of asymmetric power interaction. Whether or not drivers are being compensated for overtime, whether they are being granted additional, frequently unrecorded payment, whether they can secure bonuses or are discarded at short notice is determined in interpersonal exchange between subcontractor and employee. *De jure*, drivers are of course not exempt from the safeguarding provisions of the (labour) law, *de facto* however they lack the capacity to make the law work for them. They have been stripped of many rights that underpinned workers’ status as citizens in the post-war welfare regimes of continental Europe (Castel 2011; Standing 2011). Standing’s compelling description of the *denizen*, “[...] denied certain rights or prevented from obtaining or retaining them” (Standing 2014: 8), is a fitting description of these workers.

3. The reproduction of informality: the whip of the market and beyond...

The next section considers why there is so little resistance among workers to precarious conditions and discusses how workplace actors reproduce informality. Working in parcel delivery is precarious to an overwhelming extent in two dimensions: drivers find themselves in conditions of *precarious employment*, as the regulatory effect of protective institutions (collective bargaining, workplace representation and largely even the labour law) is either weak or absent and their employment status is fundamentally insecure. The second dimension concerns the fact that the work of parcel delivery drivers is *precarious work*: the physical strain is enormous; working very long hours under great time pressure, sometimes moving five tons of cargo a day, and sometimes working in conditions of extreme heat (many vans are not air-conditioned), makes parcel delivery a hazardous task. Additionally, drivers describe working conditions as mentally stressful and thus contradict widely held assumptions about parcel delivery being a rather simple and routine kind of work. Time pressure, unforeseeable traffic conditions, difficulties in customer interaction, as well as police controls demand that drivers react flexibly to changing circumstances. Quite often, they have to take risks (speeding, parking, overloading) and disregard service standards in order to get the job done.

Thus far, the driver's job seems to be entirely a 'bad job' (Warhurst et al. 2012)². Nevertheless, the system does work and incidents of collective action are rare, as workers just seem to put up with conditions as they are. We will now discuss how informality is reproduced in parcel delivery and will argue that employer-employee interactions need to be taken account of in order to explain the phenomenon. Informality is thus conceptualised sociologically, which we consider to be an important addition to economic explanations.

The 'whip of the market' (Burawoy 1985) is certainly a major explanatory factor for the reproduction of informality. Workers employed by subcontractors are overwhelmingly in weak labour market positions. While many core workers employed directly by DHL or UPS have had some kind of vocational training, workers in segment 2 are mainly recruited from the bottom end of the labour market hierarchy. In the midst

of Germany's labour market miracle, these groups do not feel their situation has improved: "[...] for people who are new in Germany, who have been here for two or three years ... without an education, without papers that prove you have already worked, you don't get a full-time job. You just get jobs with temp agencies that blossom like the flowers outside" (German driver, employed by a subcontractor, State of Hesse, May 2011).

When it comes to organisational power and structural marketplace bargaining power (Silver 2005; Brinkmann et al. 2008; Schmalz/Dörre 2013), the workers under discussion are weakly resourced. Their capacity to pressurise subcontractors to formalise work and employment, to adhere to labour law, or even to honour individual contracts is quite limited. Informality is thus based on coercion and asymmetries of power. However, there is a "web of consent, and not just the brute fact of economic marginality, that explains how informality is reproduced" (Ram et al. 2007: 324). There is a "contradictory relationship of exploitation and consent" (ibid.: 319). We will now explore how (consent to) informality is reproduced, with special attention to worker interests and agency, and will argue that informality is not just imposed from above by powerful economic agents but is supplemented by informalisation from below. We will touch upon three factors that explain the reproduction of informality: (short-term) material interests of workers, fraternalism in smaller sized businesses and the disciplinary effect of competitive workplace orders.

3.1 Workers' immediate material interest in informality: taking out a loan on the future

Informal arrangements allow drivers employed by subcontractors to generate a typical monthly pre-taxation income of 1,400 to 1,600€. This is well below the low-wage threshold and considerably less than core workers employed by DHL can expect (around 2,000€ per month for 40 hours of work per week). As has been shown above, this income can only be generated by extending working hours well beyond legal limits, by re-declaring wages, having a widespread reliance on bonus systems, by obtaining unregistered 'under the table' payments, and by evading contributions to social security systems. While hourly wages are abysmally low, informal arrangements at least allow workers to earn a living. Their approach to employment and its regulation is a pragmatic one; work must generate the means

to survive. One interviewee described his voluntary move from handling parcels in a depot, working on a standard contract with the original service provider DPD, to working as a driver for a subcontractor thus: “I worked 7:36 hours per day for DPD, in line with the collective agreement. Now, I might work 12 to 13 hours per day, but I earn more money. In the end, it all boils down to the issue of money, sadly. The problem is, and I tell it like it is, you cannot feed a family on a single wage packet anymore. We married and had kids and that is why it did not work out anymore. And that’s why I changed jobs” (German driver, employed by a subcontractor, State of Hesse, May 2011).

Workers thus display a strong outcome orientation, and these considerations override more abstract and formal criteria, such as whether employment is regulated by collective agreement and the law. Drivers are well aware that the formal regulation does not say much about the substance of regulation. To them, collective agreements, workplace representation and labour law protection mean little as long as these institutions do not provide the required outcomes. Or, to put it more bluntly, eight hours of daily work for low wages simply do not provide for a decent life – and it does not matter whether these wages are set by collective agreements or not. Unsurprisingly, from a worker’s perspective, informal arrangements have immediate, tangible, cash-in-hand advantages when compared to formally regulated but low-paid work. Generating ‘high income’ through informal labour in the here and now is like taking out a loan on the future: the capacity to labour deteriorates quickly under hazardous working conditions, and maintaining social bonds outside work becomes difficult due to the long hours worked. Hidden payments and very low taxable income means drivers will have to rely on welfare in the case of unemployment and will only have minimal pensions. Whilst workers know that the immediate advantages of informality come at a long-term price, interviewees seemed to suppress thoughts about the future. When asked about how long they would last in the job and about future plans, they frequently responded with a shrug of the shoulders. Many were so consumed by dealing with insecurity in everyday life that they had hardly any resources to adopt a strategic approach to their own life, a finding that echoes much of the research on precarity (Bourdieu 2000; Vester 2007; Castel/Dörre 2009).

3.2 Fraternalism, social proximity and attribution

Informal arrangements offer some material benefit to drivers when compared to non-informal work in the low pay sector of the German economy. However, these benefits are relative and cannot obscure the fact that drivers have many grievances, including low income, hazardous conditions and highly insecure employment. In part, asymmetrical power relations explain why grievances mostly remain 'hidden' and workers seem incapable of developing mechanisms ensuring they have a (collective) voice (Hirschman 1970). When it comes to the effort bargain under conditions of informality, the subcontracting employer is certainly the stronger actor. Acts of blackmailing, pressurising workers, withholding pay and breaches of contract were not only reported to us by interviewees but are also well documented in various internet fora. Our argument here is that coercion is embedded in specific social relations in small subcontracting firms and that these need to be taken into account when it comes to explaining the workings of informality.

It has long been argued that employment relationships in small and medium sized firms are different from those in larger enterprises (Scase 1995; Atkinson 2008). Claims that employment relations in small firms were mainly harmonious (Ingham 1970) were contradicted by observations of dictatorial management (Rannie 1989) in 'bleak houses'. Whilst small enterprises engaged in parcel delivery are indeed quite often 'sweatshops' or 'bleak houses', very often workers are selectively integrated into forms of fraternalism (Goffee/Scase 1982; Scase 1995). In parcel delivery, fraternalism can flourish on the basis that employers are very often owner-drivers, i.e. although they manage a small business, they also frequently do the same work as drivers. Frequently, such people work alongside their employees and are seen to contribute to the business' survival. The hard work employers themselves put in serves as an example to waged drivers and supports the idea that 'we are all in it together'. In these settings, exploitative relations are therefore obscured and less tangible to drivers. Fraternalism is supported by close social proximity and a common habitus, as many subcontractors were once employed drivers themselves. Even their advancement to the status of entrepreneur is in many cases not reflected in material advancement, as competitive pressure and pricing policies of

the original service providers often mean that the economic situation of subcontractors themselves is highly precarious.

Fraternalism however needs to be actively reproduced by subcontractors, who need to be able to achieve discursive hegemony. As Scase (1995: 589) has argued, small employers “[...] legitimate their actions by reference to the competitive forces of the market economy. [...] they will openly acknowledge to their staff that the wages which they can offer are unacceptably low but claim that these reflect circumstances beyond their own personal control.” In parcel delivery, subcontractors can legitimise ‘bad conditions’ by pointing to the cost saving exercises of the big focal firms, i.e. the large service providers, and to greedy members of the public being unwilling to pay adequately for parcel services. Diverting responsibility for abysmal conditions can also include blaming other subcontractors. In a highly competitive field, subcontractors are continuously fighting to secure contracts from the original service providers. Unable to challenge the policies of focal firms collectively, subcontractors frequently undercut each other in order to secure business. Holding each other responsible for distorting prices quite often has racist undertones, with migrant subcontractors depicted as ‘price breakers’. In this way, internal cohesion and ‘them vs. us’ attitudes can be fostered; ‘them’ being the original service providers, as well as other subcontracting firms. Attribution processes, which are essential to any transformation of grievances into (collective) action (Kelly 1998), are frequently shaped by a small employer discourse, which successfully redirects blame to others. Organisational fragmentation in the form of multi-layered subcontracting thus leads to situations in which workers attribute blame for their situation to powerful actors far beyond their reach. In this scenario, accommodation often seems to be the only mechanism likely to improve one’s situation.

This last aspect is of crucial importance, as informality allows small employers to construct competitive hierarchies amongst drivers and these hierarchies in turn are a barrier to drivers developing the collective capacities required to challenge informality from below. Informal relations allow subcontractors to privilege some workers over others and to selectively grant better conditions to some than to others. Those who perform well and display high levels of loyalty and flexibility can hope for an employer’s benevolence when it comes to bonuses or unregistered payments. Subcon-

tractors might reward them by extending contracts, by preferring ‘good drivers’ when it comes to holiday planning or by assigning them delivery districts that are a little less demanding than others. In informal conditions, preferential treatment can, however, be revoked at any time. Drivers thus have to continuously qualify and re-qualify for slightly improved conditions and security by means of their excellent performance and reliability. The mechanisms of selective preferential treatment can be defined as tests situations and constitute an effective mechanism of control (Boltanski 2010; Dörre 2011; Dörre et al. 2013a). It has disciplining effects on those who are slightly better off but also on those who try to make it to the ranks of ‘privileged drivers’ and slightly improved conditions. In our research, we came across racialised hierarchies, with migrants at the bottom of the pile. Respondents described them as being unable to understand the economics of the business (i.e. the systemic limits to wages), or as being unreliable, untrustworthy and unsteady. However, some also ascribed certain survival competencies to migrants. With recourse to strong social and family ties beyond the workplace, migrants had solidarity networks that helped them move across regional labour markets and to thus grasp any opportunity on offer.

Intense competition between workers and workforce fragmentation, sometimes framed by racist discourse, work to the detriment of any collective challenge to widespread grievances. A lack of power resources, in conjunction with employer ‘strategies’ of (selected) fraternalism and attribution processes, encourage workers to reach accommodation with informal arrangements. Short-term material gains foster workers’ interests in informality from below. Informal orders in parcel delivery are thus upheld and reproduced by a combination of coercion and consent.

4. Conclusion and scope for further research

The main purpose of this paper has been to offer a sociological explanation for the spread of informality in a rapidly expanding sector of the German economy. In the case described, informal and formal elements of employment intersect and hybrid forms manifest themselves. Informality spreads as service provision fragments, due to focal companies’ interest

in outsourcing much of the operational side of the business. While focal employers mostly adhere to the established forms of employment regulation when it comes to 'their' core workforce, externalisation is a way of shifting work to small firm contexts of low wages, intense exploitation and rather informal regulation of work and employment. Whilst employer interest might be easy to define, we have argued that informality in this setting is not exclusively upheld and reproduced by the whip of the market and coercion. Rather, there is also consent from workers, and workers actively take part in the reproduction of informality in the small firm ('informality from below'). Further research should shed some more light on worker subjectivities and agency. This leads to another consideration: While we have tried to be sensitive to workers' perspectives, interests and processes of interaction with employers, the theme of worker resistance has been underrepresented in this paper. There are strong indicators in our empirical material that point to worker resistance. Theft of goods, 'pulling a sickie', using company cars for private purposes, forging signatures and other ways of violating service standards have been mentioned. It is of course rather difficult to gauge the extent of these practices; however, they do exist and represent ways of 'having a go at the boss'. Fraternalism clearly has its limits and future research should be sensitive to these forms of 'resistance', traditionally ignored by the German sociology of work with its strong focus on forms of institutionalised conflict but theorised elsewhere (for example Edwards et al. 1995; Thompson/Ackroyd 1995; Ackroyd/Thompson 1999; Hodson 1999). Further inspiration should be drawn from research in the Global South, which has seen the development of collective organisation in informal settings (Lambert/Webster 2001; Agarwala 2007; Lindell 2010; McNally 2013).

While the micro-processes of informality certainly deserve more attention, they need to be integrated within broader structural change in the regulation of work, employment and social policy. The impact of (re-)regulation of formal work and employment, of labour market reforms (the Hartz legislation) and of social policy on the dynamics of informality need to be taken into account. These policies have nurtured the low wage sector and the spread of insecurity (Dörre et al. 2013b; Bosch 2014) and have laid the structural foundation for conditions in which 'disciplined' workers see some benefit in informality. While recent minimum wage legislation

has been welcomed by trade unions, its effects cannot be evaluated yet. There is some reason for skepticism: in quasi-informal settings, enforcement problems are to be expected (Ram et al. 2001), as workers, especially recently migrated workers, are often so weakly resourced that they do not know how to make the law work for them. Also, the current rate of 8.50€/hr. is far too low to make formally regulated employment attractive for many workers. Furthermore, some respondents in our study predicted that minimum wage legislation would result in further fragmentation, as employers would replace employees by self-employed drivers.

Further research should move on beyond the workplace and adopt a household perspective. We know too little about those social and gender arrangements beyond work that support or inhibit informal employment as described above (Aulenbacher/Riegraf 2011) and how workers and households reproduce (Jürgens 2012). What exactly are the ‘background conditions’ (Fraser 2014) that enable the forms of informal exploitation we have just described? Almost certainly, the long working hours and overwork that come with employment in parcel delivery are only feasible under the condition that others (i.e. partners and/or the wider family) shoulder most of the reproductive tasks. In this case, male workers’ long hours strictly confine female labour market participation and thus contribute to the persistence of gender inequality. As the quote in section 3 has shown, informality also feeds on workers’ aspirations to uphold family structures and thus to ensure a little bit of normality under fundamentally insecure conditions.

Informal labour comes at a huge long-term cost – both to individual workers and to society. The low cost business models now favoured by large focal companies are based on short-term considerations and a reckless exploitation of labour. At the end of the parcel service chain, we find workers who are half-citizens, or *denizens* (Standing 2011). The marginalisation of these groups might incur great costs to democracy and thus add to the short-term damage to workers mentioned above.

- 1 This contribution is based on results from the 2010/11 SODIPER research project (Social Dialogue and Participation Strategies in the Global Delivery Industry: Challenging Precarious Employment Relations). The project was funded by the European Commission and led by the Austrian FORBA institute. It included case studies from Austria, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The empirical basis of the German case consisted of 27 interviews with management representatives, drivers employed directly by focal service providers as well as those employed by subcontractors and experts in the field (i.e. union officers and a representative of a small federation of subcontractors). Additional data was generated by focus groups with drivers and subcontractors and from document and media research. On the German side the project was coordinated by Hajo Holst, related publications include Holst/Singe (2011, 2013).
- 2 When it comes to work itself, drivers do mention some positive aspects: getting a job done under adverse conditions can foster sentiments of pride and worth, especially when performance is recognised by others, including the employer. Some refer to customer interaction as making the job worthwhile and prefer the relative freedom on the road to close supervision they regard to be typical of work on the factory floor. Ever greater time pressure and the introduction of electronic devices that allow for tight control of the work process are further undermining these positive sides to working as a parcel delivery driver.

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Abstracts

This empirically based contribution analyses informal work and employment in German parcel services. In expanding segments of the industry, the formal regulation of work is supplemented by informal practice. While processes of informalisation are driven by the interests and strategies of capital, informal arrangements do find some resonance amongst workers. In asymmetrical power relations with capital, workers as actors are actively involved in the reproduction of informality. Social hierarchies amongst the fragmented group of workers are also marked by patterns of racialised classification.

Dieser empirisch basierte Beitrag analysiert informelle Arbeit und Beschäftigung von ZustellerInnen in der deutschen Paketbranche. In weiten Segmenten dieses Feldes wird die formelle Regulierung von Arbeit durch informelle Praktiken ergänzt. Informalisierungsprozesse resultieren einerseits aus Kapitalstrategien und -interessen, aber gleichzeitig können informelle Arrangements auf Resonanz bei den Arbeitenden treffen. Als Akteure sind diese in machtasymmetrischen Konstellationen an der Reproduktion von Informalität beteiligt. Soziale Hierarchien in der fragmentierten ArbeiterInnenschaft werden nicht zuletzt durch rassistische Klassifikationsmuster geprägt.

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**Precarisation and New Class Formations:
The Case of Call Centres in the Brazilian Banking Sector**
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1. Introduction

Following the ‘lost decade’ in the 1980s and a significant intensification of social inequalities in the 1990s as a consequence of neoliberal reforms, the Brazilian labour market has shown a remarkable trend reversal since 2003. Due to economic growth and new policies under the governments of Lula and Dilma Rousseff, open unemployment has fallen significantly (from 12.3% in 2003 to 5.5% in 2012, IBGE 2012), the minimum wage and real average earnings have increased, and most importantly: 18.7 million new jobs were created between 2003 and 2012, located in the formal sector (DIEESE 2012a, 2014; see also Leite/Salas in this special issue). This implies significant social changes as the mainly young and recently formalised workforce thus benefits from labour law and social provisions. At the same time, more than half of Brazilian workers continue to be excluded from the formal labour market, a fact which points to persistent and blatant inequalities. Increasing formalisation at the first sight is no doubt a positive development, but what kind of jobs have been created for which kind of workforce? In order to qualify and understand possible underlying dynamics of precarisation, some further points need to be taken into account. First of all, in the course of neoliberal restructuring the decade of the 1990s was marked by deregulation and flexibilisation of labour relations. These changes have facilitated employers’ flexibility in hiring and firing. According to Paulo Baltar, most of the new formal jobs are on unlimited contracts, but this does not imply job security, but rather an extensive practice of job rotation: “[...] in 2009, in the midst of the crisis, just under a million formal jobs were created within a total of 33 million

employees registered in Brazil. But that was the net job creation figure. There were 15.2 million dismissals as well as 16.2 million new hires” (Baltar 2010).

Hence it can be concluded – and this is one of the central propositions of this article – that we have a contradictory situation of simultaneous formalisation and precarisation. I argue that this kind of precarisation is structural and reflects the effects of flexibilisation, which have led to a debilitation of social protection rights based on formal employment even in highly regulated sectors. For example, compensation payments in case of dismissal (Fundo de Garantia do Tempo de Serviço) or unemployment insurance are linked to the period of employment. At the same time, questions arise regarding the quality and qualification of new formal jobs.

Precarisation is a dual process, which on the one hand refers to social changes on the local and national level with its specific (de-)regulations, and on the other hand, can only be understood within a transnational framework of analysis of the corresponding economic, political and social implications of restructuring value chains. In times of finance-led accumulation, deregulation and flexibilisation have led to precarisation which is not restricted to the informal realm but is widely institutionalised also in the formal parts of labour markets. Outsourcing as an intrinsic strategy of finance-led restructuring is one of the main drivers and catalysts of precarisation and implies profound changes in the relative strength and negotiation capacity of workers’ organisations and the balance of power between capital and labour. At the same time, it entails a profound change of workers’ profiles with regard to gender, race and class, and thus new strands of social inequality. To take this into account implies a broader and intersectional perspective on ‘precarisation’. This term is most frequently used in a limited way, solely regarding contractual forms of labour like unlimited vs. fixed term or temporary work, full time vs. part time, etc. I refer to social precarisation in a relational sense, which includes shifts in social segmentations. Changes in the social space (class structures, identities, etc.) correlate with dynamics of restructuring labour markets and labour processes.

This article discusses the complex and intertwined process of precarisation based on an empirical study of the Brazilian banking sector, which can be distinguished by its prevailing tendency to outsource banking serv-

ices to call centres. I will draw on the results of empirical research I carried out in São Paulo in 2011 and 2012 in the context of the research network desiguALdades.net¹.

In part 2, I will outline the restructuring of the Brazilian banking sector in the context of financialisation of service relations. Outsourcing appears as a strategic outcome of these changes and as a main driver of precarisation. In part 3, I will analyse the social effects of precarisation in relation to the segmentation of the workforce both within banks and outsourced to call centres (regarding gender, class and race, but also age and sexual orientation). I will also show that the segmentation of workers correlates with new social segmentations in the social space. This is closely linked to the orientation in favour of consumerism in Brazil and the narrative of the ‘new middle class’. I conclude that consumerism is a new form of social regulation, which reinforces forms of social precarisation, because inclusion into society as a consumer does not mean being included as a citizen with social rights.

2. Restructuring of the Brazilian banking sector

The Brazilian banking sector provides an impressive example of deregulation and precarisation. In her important study about women as bank workers, Liliana Segnini characterises Brazilian banks as “a sectoral island of modernity in the Brazilian society” (Segnini 1998: 20). She refers to diverse aspects of the sector’s significance, such as its economic weight in relation to its participation of the GDP that makes it one of the most important subsectors of the Brazilian tertiary sector, but also in relation to the highly developed technological diffusion and the extraordinarily high level of education among its workers (*ibid.*). Evidently, the banking sector has always been a target of rigid state regulation. Furthermore, it is characterised by a longstanding tradition of trade union organisation. Relatively high salaries and benefits and a series of rights and standards show the bargaining power of the trade unions and the comparatively privileged situation of bank workers. On the other hand, the Brazilian banking sector is an example of an extremely comprehensive tendency towards automation and outsourcing. In the 1980s and 1990s, automation led to the most

dramatic job losses in the history of Brazilian banking, aside from other restructuring effects and outsourcing, which came into strong effect some years later. The overall number of bank workers was more than halved from approx. one million in 1986 to approx. 393,000 in 1999 (Sanches 2006: 38). More recently, due to economic growth and the record net incomes of banks, there was a partial recovery of bank jobs, reaching up to half a million bank workers in 2011 (DIEESE 2012a).

Automation changed the profile of productive operations, as low-skilled work was largely eliminated and substituted by the use of information technology. This not only had an impact on gender relations, as such (low paid) workplaces had predominantly been occupied by women. Informatisation modified the working environment in all areas of banking activity and changed hierarchies as well as modes of control. This led to contradictory effects: on the one hand, qualification requirements increased and bank workers were transformed into multi-skilled, flexible quasi-entrepreneurs with responsibility for productivity (sales of financial service products) and the quality of services. On the other hand, they suffered a substantial intensification of work and a devastating regime of variable remuneration depending on individual performance, but without further autonomy or participatory elements of work organisation. This points to a reorganisation of banking work shaped by an exclusively market-driven orientation (Jinkings 2006: 197) and at the same time by the revitalisation of Taylorist principles, to which Pereira and Crivellari (1991) refer with the term “bank-factory” (ibid.: 100).

2.1 Financialisation, changing service relations and outsourcing

The further liberalisation of the Brazilian financial system in the course of the 1990s entailed an extensive adoption of the dynamics and ideology of a flexible and finance-led regime of accumulation. This required not only the adaptation of international benchmarks like mergers and acquisitions through privatisation and the entrance of foreign banks (with the effect of creating a pronounced market concentration among five big banks) but also adjustments of organisational structures, as revealed by the formation of big financial holdings (cf. Sanches/Davanço 2010). The focus upon ‘shareholder value’ goes together with a significant redefinition of the profile of the operative business of banks. This includes a new focus

on capital markets and an unprecedented level of purely speculative activities, a multiplied diversification of financial services and the development of a series of new financial products (Jinkings 2004: 211-212). The diversification of financial services on the one hand involves a virtually unleashed process of outsourcing and subcontracting on the other hand, which goes far beyond simple decisions of externalising less qualified and less strategic activities. Moreover, outsourcing points to a decoupling of material and immaterial production processes as a consequence of a new regime of finance-led accumulation and subsequent changes in customer relations. Call centres are the new organisational expression of this changed service relationship.

Outsourcing, alongside automation and changes in corporate governance, must therefore be considered as one of the most important factors in the ongoing transformation of the Brazilian banking sector. The expenditures of banks upon outsourcing have grown from R\$ 2.2 billion in 1999 to R\$ 10.5 billion in 2010, with a clear tendency towards increasing further (Sindicato dos Bancários 2011: 4). This points to the fact that outsourcing as a central strategy has accelerated only in the course of the last decade. Banks began to implement outsourcing as a strategy as early as the beginning of the 1990s. At that time, outsourcing still referred to services that could easily be externalised, such as staff restaurants, cleaning, janitor and security services. In a subsequent second period beginning with the end of the 1990s, banks not only intensified outsourcing but began to outsource activities which, to a great extent, can be considered 'core business'. These include check clearance, data processing, cash management, credit cards, opening of bank accounts, cash withdrawal or remittance, debt collection, customer registry, preparative steps for credit accommodation, canvassing, fraud prevention and corruption, services related to automated teller machines, IT support and, above all, customer services in call centres (Sanchez 2006; author's interviews with employees and company representatives in banks and call centres, São Paulo, April 2012). In effect, subcontracted workers are doing the same basic activities as bank workers, but with fewer rights, less salaries and benefits and lower employment status. As mentioned above, banks have benefitted significantly from the recovery of the Brazilian economy in recent years, but this has not entailed a proportionate expansion of employment inside banks. Instead, there has

been significant growth of employment in subcontracted sectors – and this means in sectors with weak or no trade union organisation. Large-scale outsourcing undermines traditional forms of labour regulation. Since one of the main motivations for outsourcing is to reduce costs, especially labour costs, it is evident that outsourcing includes a shift from highly regulated to less regulated branches with lower wages and less codified rights. In a nutshell, outsourcing can therefore be considered as one of the main drivers of precarisation².

2.2 Flexibilisation of sector boundaries – the case of telemarketing

One of the most important and recent waves of outsourcing was carried out in relation to call centres. These have become a crucial instrument for the management of customer relations, enabling the handling of higher numbers of customers as well as of diversified and commodified financial services. Call centres (and contact centres) have themselves been the subject of reorganisation within the banks – all of which have one or very few centralised internal call centres, but most of the call centre infrastructure was targeted for large-scale outsourcing to companies in the telemarketing sector. Telemarketing – the common term in Brazil, which refers to all forms of customer relations, especially sales, via telephone communication – emerged in the end of the 1990s in the course of the liberalisation and privatisation of telecommunications and the technological diffusion of the Internet and telephony. Both political deregulation and technological changes led to an enormous proliferation of telephone lines and mobile phones – i.e. the technological preconditions for call centres.

According to the Brazilian Association of Company-Customer Relations (Associação Brasileira Das Relações Empresa Cliente – ABRAREC), during the last decade the sector has grown by 200%; in 2011, sales accounted for R\$ 26 billion. Approximately 1.4 million workers attend the impressive number of 1.5 billion calls per month, making Brazil one of the biggest markets for call centres worldwide (ABRAREC 2012).

Most of the telemarketing companies originate from start-ups; the new sector, however, did not only grow explosively but also became concentrated at an early stage of its existence. As a result, telemarketing is dominated by a few big players: the biggest company is Contax, a Brazil-based multinational, stockmarket-listed enterprise with about 115,000 workers

(in 2012), making it the second largest private company in the country. The second ranking company in the telemarketing sector is Atento, a Spanish multinational with more than 85,000 workers in Brazil (author's interviews with company representatives of Atento, April 2012). Brazilian telemarketing companies provide services to contractors from the most diverse economic sectors. It is not by chance that the financial sector is one of the most important contractors of call centre services in Brazil – according to ABRAREC, 60% of the above-mentioned 1.5 billion calls per month can be attributed to the financial sector. This means that there is a very considerable intersection of the value chain of banks and insurance companies (which together form the financial sector) on the one hand and that of telemarketing on the other hand, both equally dominated by global players. As a result, sectoral boundaries are no longer fixed, but are becoming increasingly flexible.

3. Social precarisation – changing workforce profiles, identities and inequalities

Having outlined the transnational dynamics of financialisation and the subsequent restructuring and focus upon outsourcing at the national level, I will now focus on how these structural changes translate into social precarisation and new strands of inequality in the call centre industry (both within banks and in outsourced call centres).

We should therefore draw attention to changes in workforce profiles (regarding class, gender, race, age, qualification, etc.), which can only be understood within the social setting of the labour process and the related interplay between identity politics and hierarchies. The case of call centres also allows us to link changes at the shop-floor level with changes in social structures and relations in the social space. Thus, the transnational dynamics of restructuring and the related financialisation already described impact not only on banks and the related labour market but also on social segmentations, class distinctions and consumption patterns. Both spheres are interconnected and reproduce each other. I draw on categories of Pierre Bourdieu's Social Theory, such as 'social space' which help to explain social stratification and the formation of social classes determined

by varying degrees of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1985, 1987). His concepts of 'symbolic violence' and 'illusio', that is the specific and implicit rules of a field, which are acknowledged by all actors through social practices, serve as a framework to understand the dynamics of power and domination (Schmidt/Woltersdorf 2008).

In a first step, I will focus on social relations inside call centres and the respective labour process, recruitment strategies and profile of the workers. A comparison of the profile of workers within banks in their internal call centres with the profile of workers in subcontracted call centres clearly shows the effect of outsourcing on the segmentation of the workforce. I subsequently analyse the correlation of segmentation inside banks and call centres and in the social space. The related processes of precarisation are shaped by a development model based on consumerism and the narrative of a new middle class.

3.1 Social relations in banks – workers profiles and gender divisions

Almost half of all those working within banks are women, 81 percent are white, and only eleven percent are black men whereas black women account for a meager seven percent³ (FEBRABAN 2010: 31). Bank workers belong to the social middle class and two-thirds are between 25 and 44 years old (FEBRABAN 2008). In recent years, a remarkable increase in the level of education of bank workers can be noted: 85 percent possess an academic education (DIEESE 2012b); with only a few exceptions, this has now become a precondition for recruitment.

A look at the gendered division of labour shows that the use of female workers has changed over time. After a period of reduction due to the elimination of less qualified work through automation and outsourcing, the increasing market orientation of work organisation, i.e. increasing sales of diversified financial products and services, has helped to reinstate women as an important and more highly qualified part of the labour force in banks. In spite of their higher level of education, women are still underrepresented in leading positions; nonetheless, women have made considerable progress since the 1990s and are now increasingly occupying positions as supervisors, operations managers and department directors (Jinkings 2002: 194-195). These changes may be related to the impact of the programme

“Valorisation of Diversity” (mapa de diversidade), which has been driven by social movements (see also Sproll 2013: 29f).

Although the move to adopt a market-oriented focus helped the promotion of women to higher qualified positions, call centres demonstrate the opposite development. Workers in the internal call centres of banks differ from the general profile of bank employees, having a higher proportion of women, at 71.6% (DIEESE 2012b)⁴. This shows the persistence of a traditional gender division of labour, as women have traditionally worked as telephone operators. Unsurprisingly, call centres form a new ‘low wage segment’ inside banks, located at the bottom of the hierarchy in terms of status and pay. Thus, there is no linear upward movement of women within the bank hierarchy, but rather an *increasing polarisation between different groups of women* and thus a complex process of gendered segmentation of the workforce. Nevertheless, there is a shared feature: even at the bottom of the hierarchy, there is a pay gap between men and women and this is true for all levels of hierarchy in the banks (ibid.).

3.2 The profile of outsourced call centre operators

The profile of telemarketing workers differs fundamentally from bank workers. Outsourced call centre agents are much younger, aged between 18 and 25 years old, and 84 percent of them are female (ABRAREC 2012). Most of them live in poor neighbourhoods in the periphery of São Paulo, a fact which indicates their belonging to a lower social class and – linked to this fact – having a higher proportion of dark-skinned people. Race has always been a decisive factor for the structuring of social and economic inequalities in Brazil; correspondingly, more telemarketing workers than bank workers are dark-skinned.⁵ This is directly related to the still prevailing invisibilisation, stigmatisation and social exclusion of dark-skinned and black people in Brazil.⁶

Whereas possessing an academic qualification is a prerequisite for employment in banks, only the completion of secondary education is required of telemarketing operators. Nonetheless, most of these are university students and for many of them it is their first job, at least inside the formal labour market, which is important as it guarantees some rights according to the labour law. Thus the extremely high demand for telemarketing operators in recent years (as a consequence of outsourcing and

the related de-qualification of service provision in call centres), has led to a specific social group, whose employment opportunities in former times predominantly had been limited to the informal sector, being integrated into the formal labour market. Notwithstanding, employment in call centres is precarised work. Even though call centres also inside banks form a new segment with a low qualification level, their workforce can count on much more symbolic, economic, social and cultural capital than outsourced workers. Inclusion into a highly regulated sector not only provides more prestige but also a different material base. Outsourced call centre operators receive a minimum wage (R\$ 622 in 2012, plus possible commissions for sales), whereas internal call centre operators the basic wage of the banking sector (approx. R\$ 1,400) as well as additional benefits fixed by collective agreements (cf. Sanches 2006: 80-81). On the whole, bad working conditions, low wages, the perception of the role as an occasional job, low status and a lack of career opportunities explain extremely high turnover rates – a striking characteristic of telemarketing. Nevertheless, many people remain working in call centres because there are no better employment opportunities.

3.3 Images, identities and persisting inequalities

To understand the production and reproduction of inequalities related to gender, class and race in the banking/telemarketing sector, we have to go beyond the analysis outlined so far. We also have to take into account the (self-)classifications of telemarketing operators, which correspond to the noticeable depreciation that is also present in public discourse and comments (see also Braga 2007; Venco 2009; Souza 2012). Telemarketing operators have a very different image from bank workers not only because of factors like education, social class, skin colour, and age but also because of their visual appearance and presentation. This is related to the fact that a call centre operator is not visible for the customer, a factor that impacts on strategies for recruitment. Banks, for example, apply other criteria in relation to aesthetic stereotypes for contracting labour placed in a bank branch. It is an advantage to be white, pretty/handsome, well dressed etc., that is to say, the criteria applied to recruitment point to hegemonic gender images and stereotypes (both for men and women). The image of telemarketing operators differs completely from this, something that was also expressed

by the operators themselves in interviews with the author (April-May 2012): They described themselves as negroes, ugly, obese, homosexuals, transvestites, people with tattoos, piercings, belonging to subcultures, disabled etc. “Everybody gets in here, without discrimination” was a generalised statement made in a conspicuously uniform way by very different interviewees, be it the workers themselves, managers, representatives of employers’ organisations or trade union activists. In this discourse, call centres appear to function as a space of unexpected equality and equal opportunity not hindered by belonging to a (stigmatised) social group. Seemingly, in such an invisible environment, gender, class, age, race, sexual orientation, etc. do not matter but rather individual behaviour. This perception points to what I would define as key to the ‘illusio’ (Bourdieu) of the field of telemarketing, that is the specific rules of domination: The negation of discrimination and the idea that everything depends on your individual performance. This corresponds to current debates and recent policies in relation to anti-discrimination, diversity, quotas for black students, etc. as a normative obligation for a modern Brazilian society.

The combination of such discourses and the evident but denied existence of discrimination and precarisation is an expression of symbolic violence. In a contradictory process between self-attribution and discrimination on the one hand and a limited inclusion as (second-class) citizens on the other hand, telemarketing operators constitute a new type of working-class identity that is marked by the permanent promise of social ascendance. Nevertheless, in interviews, all operators reported that they had not noticed any gendered or racial division of labour at the level of operators (such as, for example, the exclusive or predominant use of men or women for specific tasks like support or canvassing). This points to the fact that a distinctive use of labour on this level, which forms the bottom of the call centre hierarchy, is not functional. At the same time, there is a kind of unifying factor applied to all operators: an attributed inferiority. The majority of women is joined by a minority of men, who predominantly present characteristics such as homosexual, transsexual and transvestite or black – attributes which are negatively classified in a society based on racism, sexism, heterosexual norms, etc. and that generates difficulties for these groups of people in terms of accessing other segments of the formal labour market (Venco 2009: 60). In fact, restricted opportunities to obtain

jobs other than telemarketing indicate discrimination, precarisation and stereotyping which do not disappear in call centres but are reproduced on various levels. The pronounced feminisation related to telemarketing, for example, highlights a historical continuity. As already described above in relation to the banking sector, the occupation of ‘telephone operator’ – the predecessor of the modern call centre operator – has always been conceived as feminine (Nogueira 2006: 49). Call centres are a space to which the former segments of low qualified female work inside banks have been transferred and in which they continue to exist (Segnini 1998).

Traditional strands of reproduced inequality also become visible in vertical hierarchies. Women form 84% of the operators, while 73% of the supervisors and 67% of coordinators are women. Although the latter proportions are comparatively high, the figures also show that women are not proportionally represented in leading positions. For black people and those with non-heterosexual identities, the situation is even more disappointing in relation to the ‘illusio’ of equality and equal opportunity. Several statements made during my interviews point to the fact that blacks are even less well represented in executive positions and transsexuals and transvestites are completely excluded. The latter are a particularly interesting example as they are reputed to be very good operators and salesmen, thus more productive, creative, dynamic and engaged. One interviewee (a male monitor) said: “Transsexuals don’t get a chance for a career. That’s why they quit their jobs frequently and then try it in the next call centre. They are looking for recognition and don’t get it” (interview April 2012).

3.4 Neotaylorist work organisation as transmission belt for precarisation

The recomposition of the work force described above and the related recruitment strategies correspond to a specific form of organisation of the labour process. As already mentioned in Section 2, financialisation, i.e. an exclusively market-driven orientation, has contradictory effects on work organisation. On the one hand, individual performance is being given increasing importance (in terms of enhancing sales of diversified bank services) and on the other hand, Taylorist principles of work organisation as rationalisation strategy and the related authoritarian forms of control

evolve simultaneously. Call centres are the place in which this strategic adjustment, which I call *Neo-Taylorism*, becomes most visible.

The physical layout of Brazilian call centres is very similar to others found all over the world (Holman et al. 2007). Centred on IT systems (computer-telephony-integration), each telephone operator has an individual work station equipped with a headset and a telephone switch for inbound and outgoing calls and a computer which connects them to the bank system to access and change customer data. The frequency of calls is determined by the IT system and not the workers. During calls, operators generally have to follow a predetermined script, which limits their individual autonomy in the conversation and points to the high degree standardisation, also in terms of time: there are fixed target times of between 30-60 seconds and a few minutes, depending on the task and product involved. This standardised requirement both for behaviour and performance of operators highlights characteristic features of a Taylorist work organisation (cf. Taylor/Bain 1999). It is also evidenced through the fact that most operators are only trained in relation to a specific product (i.e. credit cards or loans/credits), meaning that work is divided into small steps, with operators having no knowledge about the integral sequence of operation. There is correspondingly little training, especially in outsourced call centres. As a consequence, and even though these services play a fundamental role in increasing banks' profits, call centres as a new organisational form enable the replacement of highly educated and qualified personnel with a young, low-skilled work force as described above. It is thus important to consider (*Neotaylorist*) work organisation as a fundamental transmission belt for precarisation processes through outsourcing.

Du Tertre (2011) speaks of perverse effects of Neotaylorist reorganisation in relation to the quality of the service as well as the recognition of employees and their position in the labour process. Indeed, the way in which service relations are organised in outsourced call centres cannot but compromise the quality of services – a phenomenon well-known to everybody who has already encountered call centres. Banks apparently walk a fine line between maximising their cost reduction strategies on the one hand and jeopardising their market share and customer loyalty on the other hand (due to perceived bad services). How do they control this risk? One answer lies in the specific division of labour between internal

and external call centres and the correlated segmentation of customers. In principle, outsourced workers offer all kinds of bank services, but not for all kinds of customers. Although labour division between internal and external call centres seems to be flexible and depending on different recruitment strategies of banks⁷, most banks concentrate services related to private and corporate customers with an appropriate economic power (class A and B – see Figure 1 below) within special departments of their own operations. Operators in internal call centres can count on a more comprehensive initial training programme compared to outsourced call centres. This indicates the higher level of qualification not only of operators but also of the services provided – a key difference between bank internal and outsourced call centres.

3.5 New consumerism, segmentation of customers and the social space

The increasing number of call centre operations indicates a notable integration of new segments of the population as bank customers since the 1990s. Today, the majority of Brazilian citizens have a bank account. According to FEBRABAN (2011a), between 2000 and 2010 there was an increase of more than 120% to a new total of 141.3 million bank accounts. The number of 153.4 million credit cards in 2010 is similarly impressive (*ibid.*)⁸. This points to adjustments in the structure of the social space of the Brazilian society with respect to social stratification, sparking broad debates about the emergence of a new middle class in recent years. Due to improved economic performance and the subsequent fall of poverty rates, the Fundação Getúlio Vargas (Neri 2010) recorded shifts in the composition of social classes which are classified and ranked from A (highest class) to E (lowest class). According to Neri (2010: 4), the most significant changes can be noted in relation to the famous ‘C-class’ – 29 million people entered this so called new middle class between 2003 and 2009, which now accounts for more than half (50.5%) of the Brazilian population. With an increase of 30.6%, the upper class (classes ‘A’ and ‘B’) has grown even more, reaching 20 million Brazilians (approximately 10.5% of the population) (*ibid.*: 5). Conversely, the population assigned to the lower classes ‘D’ and ‘E’, which form the base of the pyramid, fell from 96.2 million to 73.2 million (which still represents a considerable part of the Brazilian popula-

tion living in conditions of poverty), emphasising upward social mobility. The new middle class is of extreme political as well as economic importance, “because it concentrates over 46.2% of the total Brazilian purchasing power during 2009” (ibid.: 7). This development is closely related to an increase in income, mainly due to the growth of formal employment as well as the social policy of the Lula government, which implemented transfer programmes like Bolsa Família (Family Grant) – contributing to the integration even of lower classes (D and E) as bank customers. The Fundação Getúlio Vargas therefore comes to the conclusion that “Brazil is becoming a nation of consumers, buying cars, computers and houses with cash or on credit” (ibid.: 10). The development of bank accounts, savings accounts and credit cards, for instance, reflects increased inclusion in the formal labour market or in conditional cash transfer programmes by the state. The depicted increase of purchasing power is furthermore reflected in an impressive increase in financial transactions in general. But does that really mean social inclusion? According to Sonia Fleury (2013) the narrative of the new middle class in Brazil can be understood as a new political project of ‘sociability’ in the course of flexibilisation and deregulation, in contrast to a project of active citizenship based on universal social security rights. Counter to this, the current development model emphasises income transfer, which creates beneficiaries without rights. Thus, as Fleury argues, it is producing consumers (ibid.: 78; see also Lavinás 2014). Call centres are a paradigmatic expression of such a process and a new development model based on consumerism, because they not only produce a new group of consumers (their own workers) but also provide services for enhanced consumption (while at the same time a harmful process of deindustrialisation can be noted, see i.e. Cano 2014). Obviously, call centre workers are not part of a middle class, but of a new type of working class (Antunes/Braga 2009; Sousa 2012), which is integrated into society in a precarious way. Consumerism shapes new social segmentations, which also become visible in the strategies of banks in relation to classifying customers according to their purchasing power and investment capability (see Figure 1).

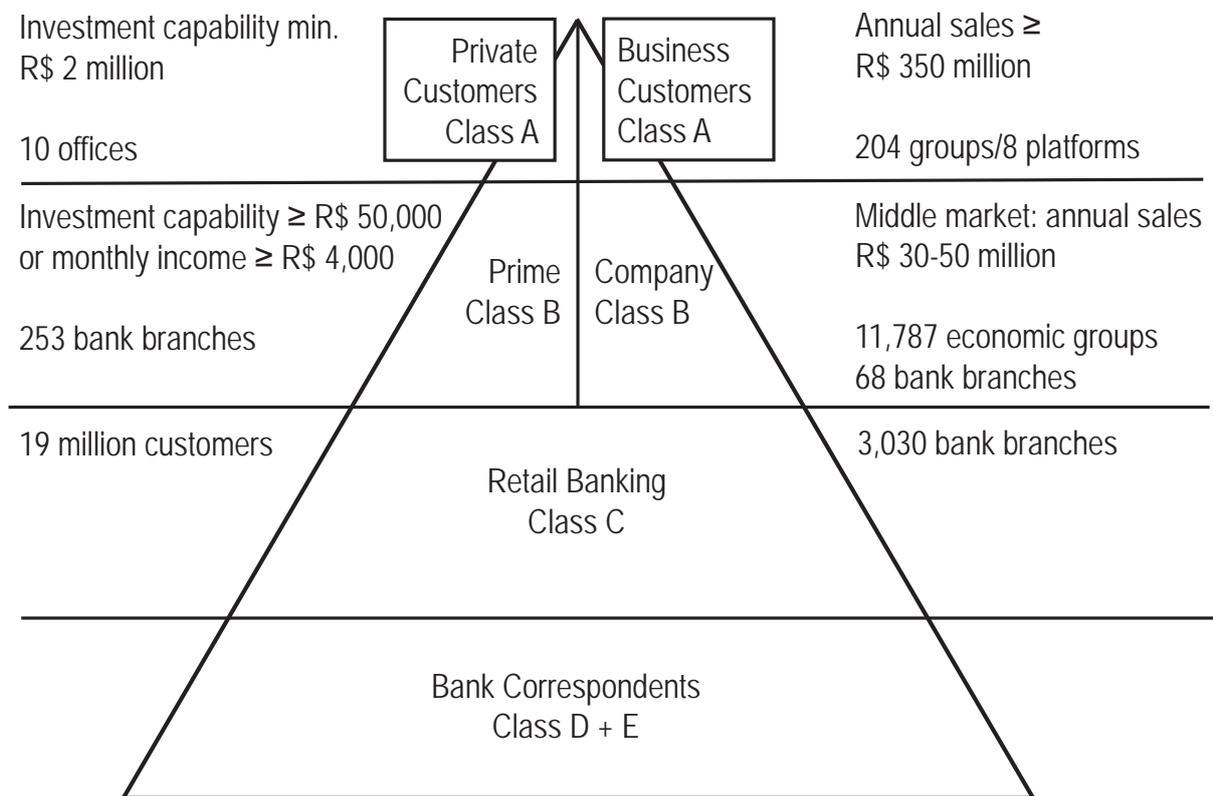


Figure 1: Customer Segmentation Pyramid: The Case of Bradesco

Source: Adaptation from Sanches/Davanço 2010 (based on the Annual Report, Bradesco 2008)

Part of this strategy is the creation of dedicated physical spaces for specific customer groups. All big banks create such dedicated spaces for private customers with an elevated purchasing power, that is to say for customers in ‘class B’. As a general rule, customers classified as ‘class C’ are expected to use the standard bank branches (with security personnel preventing them from entering branches for class ‘B’) whereas customers classified as class ‘D’ and ‘E’ are expected to utilise the services provided by bank correspondents (bank services provided in the most diverse environments like supermarkets, newsstands or lottery retailers).

This is a very important point because it shows how the strategies of individual banks (the classification of bank customers) also translate into the classification of social classes and groups, which are equipped not only with economic but also with specific cultural, social and symbolic capital.

4. Conclusion

The new profile of call centre workers points to fundamental changes in the social form and political regulation of labour markets and this also means changes in the related forms of social inclusion and of citizenship. The inclusion into the formal labour market of young underclass workers, women, homosexuals, blacks etc., whose employment opportunities in former times had predominantly been limited to the informal sector, generates a very ambiguous situation. Their access to the formal labour market signifies a clear upward mobility, which includes a number of rights and opportunities such as, for example, credit card ownership – a symbol not only for consumption opportunities but also for social integration as citizens. At the same time, these workers are included into a segment of the financial value chain that is characterised by low qualification, low status, and precarious employment conditions. This is related to identities and classifications as black, homosexual, women, etc., which imply inferiority. Therefore, they are integrated into the new ‘middle-class-society’, but as a kind of second class-citizen, meaning that they are equipped with little economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital and few rights. This shows that formalisation of work is by no means a sign of decreasing precarisation but rather emphasises the relational character of precarisation and also indicates contradictory processes as shown e.g. by the polarisation between high- and low-status women workers. This points to the importance of intersectional analyses in order to understand processes of social segmentation. Furthermore, the case analysed here shows that the orientation of bank restructuring in the context of finance-led, flexible accumulation closely interrelates with a new segmentation not only of workers but also of the social space – which indicates a new form of social precarisation based on consumerism.

Further research is needed to understand these new segmentations and the formation of a new type of working class as represented by call centre workers, aside from other segments of workers principally from the services sector (Antunes 2013). Their social position is characterised by flexible and precarious employment conditions and identities which not only differentiate these workers from traditional working classes but also from traditional middle classes. This is highly relevant because it indicates the

need for new forms of labour policy and trade union strategies. Still, little is known about the life career of these workers, who also demonstrate high aspirations regarding education and upward social mobility. To what degree these aspirations can be realised or will be contradicted i.e. through growing private indebtedness (in the view of the current consumerist development model) will have to be verified by longitudinal studies.

- 1 In this qualitative study I conducted 65 expert and indepth interviews with managers of banks and telemarketing call centres, workers in bank internal and telemarketing call centres, representatives of trade unions, NGOs and employer's associations of the banking and telemarketing sector in São Paulo in November 2011 and March-May 2012 (see also Sproll 2013).
- 2 This is not only true for the banking sector. Outsourcing can be considered a worldwide trend of organisational change, which implies processes of precarisation (see i.e. Dau et al. 2009; Lüthje et.al. 2013; Milberg/Winkler 2013).
- 3 The term 'black' is used here to refer to the classification of race (negro) used by the IBGE (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística). This distinguishes four categories: white, negro, indigenous and yellow. 'Negro' includes all people who in the official census declared themselves as black or dark-skinned (*pardo*).
- 4 In relation to the percentage of black workers in internal call centres, there are unfortunately no disaggregated data on race available, at least none that are published.
- 5 Again, there is no systematic survey of race/skin colour in relation to the racial segmentation of the labour market and the telemarketing sector available.
- 6 I refer to skin colour, as this is the base for the official census and the connecting factor for the generation of stereotype classifications based on phenotypes (cf. Bento 2008).
- 7 For more detailed information on different recruitment strategies of banks, see Sproll 2013: 37.
- 8 FEBRABAN indicates 145,382,000 adults over 15 in the Brazilian population, from which 115,187,000 have an active relationship with financial institutions (FEBRABAN 2011b).

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Abstracts

Despite the growing formalisation of employment in the last decade, the Brazilian labour market exhibits new forms of precarisation and social inequalities. Based on the empirical case of call centres in the Brazilian banking and telemarketing sector, this article shows how transnational dynamics of restructuring, above all the increasing trend of outsourcing on the one hand and a national development model based on consumerism on the other hand, produce new forms of social segmentation and identities both within banks and in the social space. Precarisation and formalisation evolve simultaneously in a complex and socially intertwined process. In order to visualise new strands of inequalities related to class, race, gender and sexual orientation, a broader concept of social precarisation is needed.

Obwohl die Entwicklung im brasilianischen Arbeitsmarkt in den letzten zehn Jahren durch eine zunehmende Formalisierung von Arbeit gekennzeichnet ist, haben sich neue Formen von Prekarisierung und sozialer Ungleichheit entwickelt. Am Beispiel der Callcenter im brasilianischen Bankensektor wird gezeigt, wie sich im Zuge transnationaler Restrukturierung, insbesondere dem Trend zu Outsourcing, Prekarisierungsprozesse entwickeln, die sich unter anderem im Profil der Beschäftigten (beispielsweise Klassenzugehörigkeit und Geschlecht) spiegeln. Dies verschränkt sich, vor dem Hintergrund eines nationalen Entwicklungsmodells, das

auf Konsumismus beruht, mit Veränderungen im sozialen Raum, die neue Sozialstrukturen und Klassenidentitäten hervorbringen. Um neue Ungleichheitslinien bezüglich Kategorien wie Klasse, Geschlecht, ethnische Zugehörigkeit und sexuelle Orientierung zu analysieren, bedarf es eines breiteren Konzepts sozialer Prekarisierung.

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Migrant Domestic Work: From Precarious to Precarisation

STUART ROSEWARNE

The negotiation of the ILO Domestic Work Convention (C189) marks a significant watershed in efforts to extend the reach of employment regulations to a category of work which is overwhelmingly the province of women. This is work that is located beyond the formal sphere of the economy and generally not subject to regulations that set minimum employment conditions and standards. In including provisions that incorporate migrant domestic workers, the Convention is particularly significant for migrant domestic workers and is especially important for the ever-increasing numbers of workers recruited across South East Asia as well as South Asia over the last three decades to work in households in East and South East Asia as well as in the Middle East. Lacking the standard protections that are afforded most occupations, and, as migrant workers, subject to quite restrictive work visa and employment requirements, and with the right to organise proscribed in most destination countries, the migrant worker experience is characterised by precariousness. For many of these women, migrating to work as domestic labour is their first experience of waged employment, and it is an experience that is frequently defined by vulnerability and insecurity, exploitative working conditions and emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Precariousness has been a defining feature in the making of this transnational work force, and C189 holds out the promise of rectifying this situation because countries that ratify C189 would be committing to gazetting minimum standards that could go some way to reducing the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers.

However, the measure of this ambition is immense, not least because of the pervasiveness and scale of the exploitative and abusive employment conditions that migrant domestic workers are subjected to (Amnesty International 2014, 2013; Human Rights Watch 2014; International Domestic

Workers Federation 2014; ILO 2013: 29-30). These studies demonstrate that while the measure of the exploitative and abusive conditions varies from one destination country to another, while the employment experience often differs depending on the origin of workers, their ethnicity, religion, levels of education and/or age, the absence of employment regulations, or the restricted nature and limited policing of such regulations where they do exist, points to a general uniformity in the migrant experience. The continuing geographic reach of labour recruitment, drawing in workers from new labour source countries, underscores this. As innumerable investigations and reports by civil society organisations, domestic worker advocates and academic researchers attest, with the absence of migrant domestic workers' labour and human rights, contemporary labour migration is placed at the heart of our understanding of the global labour market transformations associated with the ascendancy of precarious work (Goldring/Landolt 2012; Standing 2011; Vosko 2010; Fudge/Owens 2006). In so doing, we are confronted with a timely reminder that the preoccupation with exposing the so-called process of 'precarisation' as representing a retreat from the norms of the standard employment relationship – and with this one of the defining features of the neoliberal era – is somewhat misplaced.

Precariousness, from the outset, has been a defining feature in the making of this transnational labour force. The distinctive nature of the transnational employment contractual relation is critical to this, and it is essential that this be placed in the context of the gender norms and a range of other norms – race, ethnicity and nationality, religion, age and educational attainments – that frame the definition of migrant domestic work and distinguish it from other categories of work. But if our understanding of the deep-rooted character of precariousness is to be fully appreciated, our oeuvre must not be limited to focusing only on the employment relationship. It must also reflect on the different stages of the organisation of this global labour supply chain and the various stakeholders who contribute to this. It is also incumbent upon such reflection on the organisation of the labour supply chain to examine the nature of its development in the broader context of the transformation in social relations across countries that have spawned the rise of the global care chain. In so doing, this paper advocates understanding the process of precarisation in terms of a constellation of power relations that shape the migratory process, and

the organisation of domestic work as a paid activity. This entails reflecting on the array of ways in which precariousness is written into the making of migrant domestic work as well as how precariousness is being contested.

1. Precariousness, precarisation and the making of the transnational domestic worker

The migration of women from across South East Asia and South Asia to work as domestic workers in other countries, and especially within the region and the Middle East, has been one of the most significant aspects of labour force formation. Women account for between half and four-fifths of all labour migration from the principal source countries of the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, with an estimated three million women from South East Asia and South Asia employed as migrant domestic workers (ILO 2013), and this pattern is being bolstered as more and more women from other Asian countries migrate for work.

A range of factors have impelled women's employment in migrant domestic work. My field research and a large body of published research identify the prospect of a regular source of income, and the ability to escape high unemployment and underemployment in the local economy, as key motivations for migration. Overseas employment provides a potential means of improving familial as well as personal economic wellbeing, or for meeting some of the costs in providing for one's family's material needs, and/or education and health services, or for pursuing a measure of economic independence especially in the context of familial breakdown. Governments in migrant workers' origin countries have also proved enthusiastic in their support for labour migration, regarding migration as a means of addressing poverty and, much more importantly and especially with the prompting of the World Bank and other international institutions, a critically important source of export revenue in the form of remittances. Indeed labour migration has become a central plank in the economic policies of the governments of South East Asia and South Asia, and most have committed to promoting and supporting the establishment of elaborate private-sector based architectures that organise and manage labour migration.

Of course, the expansion in women's labour migration would not have been so sustained were it not for the ever-increasing demand for domestic workers. In some contexts, the increasing labour force participation of women in, for instance, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, prompted recourse to employing others to undertake the work of maintaining the household and caring for children and others. In other contexts, and this is more the case in Malaysia and the Middle East, cultural factors, such as the prestige associated with employing a migrant domestic worker, are a more important criterion. In any case, the institutionalisation of migrant domestic work is grounded in the organisation of global care chains, a transnational division of labour that, in turn, is predicated on various norms, including gender, ethnicity and religion, that justify the recruitment and employment of women from the global South on terms and conditions which would not be countenanced by their employers in their employment.

The overwhelmingly precarious nature of migrant domestic work is well documented. Women are recruited into the labour markets of most destination countries in which there are either no, or in the case of Hong Kong and to a lesser extent Singapore some limited, substantive employment protections. Labour market institutions that prescribe minimum employment standards and protections, including time free from work responsibilities, are virtually non-existent. In all destination countries, authorities issue work and resident visas that are contingent upon workers being engaged with a particular employing household; employment is offered only on a live-in basis. The absence of employment regulations can be largely attributed to domestic work being regarded as different from other occupations. The convention that household labour, including the care and nurturing of children, cleaning and preparing meals, is women's work is one dimension of this distinction. That this work is carried out in the private domain, in the intimate space of the household, and thus in the informal realm of the political economy, is another. The occupation is also unlike most other forms of waged labour insofar as it does not result in the production of a good or service that can be sold to generate revenue. Subject to the direct and personal supervision of the householder, the management of migrant women's labours vary according to the whim and prejudices of the householder, leaving workers vulnerable to exploitative practices, and psychological, physical and sexual abuse.

Moreover, the deployment of migrant women to undertake work that contributes to what is generally regarded as meeting familial needs for a defined period of a family's life cycle affirms the convention to view recourse to migrant labour as meeting a short-lived need, a reliance that is not considered an enduring or integral element in the economic life of the nation however much it has become so, and this justifies the resistance to recognising and regulating this work and to institutionalising limited-duration employment. The precarious position is exacerbated by the fact that the restrictions arising from being contracted to work for and in one household are underwritten by severe limitations on the ability of workers to break contracts and seek alternative employment. There is virtually no scope for employment mobility in the Middle East because when an employment contract is broken or expires, workers are required to exit the country, while in Hong Kong and Singapore there is a quite limited time horizon in which workers are able to seek to re-contract before they lose their resident visa. Work and visa regulations inscribe vulnerability, subservience and insecurity, and are invariably designed to circumscribe workers' industrial and human rights.

The deleterious consequences of precarity do vary across the various destination countries. Some 14 to 15 percent of Indonesian domestic workers returning home upon the completion of employment contracts report that they have experienced problems in their employment. These include breaches of the terms of their contract, underpayment or non-payment of wages, passport and identify documents being confiscated, inadequate or no private and secure accommodation, being charged exorbitant recruitment costs, and being abused (Bazzi et al. 2014). The evidence indicates that these problems are the most pronounced in Middle East destinations, and are also a real cause of concern for those employed in Malaysia (Anti-Slavery International 2014; International Trade Union Confederation 2014). One way in which the Indonesian government has sought to manage transgressions has been to ban from time to time issuing travel visas for destinations such as Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. The government has followed the lead of the Philippines in providing consular support and establishing refuges for women escaping abusive or exploitative conditions. Another response has been to try to negotiate Memorandums of Understanding with governments in destination countries with a

view to setting agreed minimum employment standards. Yet such arrangements do not necessarily afford much protection, and this is likewise the case in contexts such as Hong Kong and to a lesser extent Singapore, where there are clearly specified employment regulations where Indonesians, as well as other migrant domestic workers, are subject to exploitative practices (Amnesty International 2013; Asian Migrant Centre 2007).

Notwithstanding migrant domestic workers' subordinate standing in the global labour market, the ostensible success of migrant domestic work as an economic programme, at least as measured in terms of remittance flows, has prompted more and more governments in the global South to embrace the export of labour as a solution to economic malaise. Yet, while migrating for work is presented as a panacea to alleviate the material insecurity and uncertainty across South East and South Asia, the millions of women who seek to escape the vulnerability engendered by this malaise end up being confronted by an entirely different source of vulnerability. Asian women are drawn into the transnational labour force as waged workers, on terms in which their engagement in the global care chain is coloured by employment uncertainty and precariousness and susceptibility to a range of abuses, each of which is widely documented.

This recourse to employment in the global labour market is particularly significant because for many women, migrant domestic work is their first ever experience of working for a wage. These women's metamorphosis into waged workers becomes aligned with precariousness. The deleterious consequences of the process of proletarianisation, and its alignment with precariousness, are particularly pronounced for those young women with limited educational backgrounds, recruited from villages to work in the less appealing destinations of the Middle East and Malaysia. The link between the proletarianisation of young Indonesian women who have never worked for a wage and precariousness is well documented (ESCAP 2013; Bazzi et al. 2014).

Nor is the process of proletarianisation as the basis of women's entry into migrant domestic work unique to Indonesia. This is played out in other established labour-source countries, with increased recruitment of women from more remote provinces in the Philippines, most notably Mindanao, most of whom are being engaged in waged work for the first time, and in Sri Lanka where women with no history of working for a wage are being

recruited in former conflict zones to work in the Middle East (Looi et al. 2009; Caritas Sri Lanka 2013; Usher 2014). There are hundreds of thousands of Burmese women who have sought refuge in Thailand employed in waged work for the first time, and a similar story is evident in Bangladesh, Nepal and Cambodia, which have more recently become sources of domestic labour.

It is thus constructive to reflect on precariousness as being a corollary of the proletarianisation process that is integral to the making of the migrant domestic workforce. Marx (1968 [1845]: 37) contended in *The German Ideology* that “the utterly precarious position of labour power [...] presupposes the world market through competition”, so there is nothing new in the association proposed here. However, as has been argued, precariousness is not simply the product of the construction of the employment contract. It reflects the conjunction of a range of factors. It is a product of the lack of opportunities for advancing material wellbeing in the global South and the pressure that is brought to bear on women to enlist in the transnational labour force, to assume more responsibility by stepping into the world to seek out the means to provide for themselves and to become more self-reliant and alienated from their family and community in the process. It is as much the product of labour-export states that promote migration as a means of combatting economic malaise. And it is also the outcome of the gender contract forged on the foundations of women from the global South assuming a subordinate position in the global labour market, in the global care chain, their status framed by the intersection of gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion, age and education. In recognising the multiplicity of forces at work, we can begin to speak of the broader process of precarisation.

2. Precariousness, proletarianisation and the formal subsumption of labour

Debate on precarious employment generally emphasises the impact of labour market deregulation, which is argued to have resulted in employment contractual arrangements that infuse the work experience with inse-

curity and uncertainty, increasingly evident in contingent forms of work, flexible and non-standard employment, atypical and temporary work (Standing 2011; Vosko 2010; Vosko et al. 2009; Fudge/Owens 2006). Some critics have advocated a broader framing that reaches beyond the immediacy of the employer-employee contractual relation. These map precariousness by linking employment insecurity and uncertainty with measures of income insecurity, working-time insecurity, representational insecurity and social benefits and entitlements and the broader social forces that define the employment experience (Burgess/Campbell 1998; Vosko 2010). The employment histories of migrant domestic workers conform with this narrative, and, as a large body of research has documented, migrant workers more generally are particularly susceptible to being locked into categories of work that are characterised by these features. Institutionalised discrimination and the insecurity associated with the absence of enduring resident and/or citizenship rights, including blocking access individuals have to welfare entitlements, are seen to compound the labour market disadvantage that defines the migrant employment experience (Ellis et al. 2007; McDowell et al. 2009; Wills et al. 2010).

The reference point in the elaboration of precariousness is generally the establishment of the standard employment relation as a feature of the era when Fordism and the Keynesian welfare state prevailed. However, as Vosko argues, this was not a norm which governed employment relations and practices across the entire spectrum of the labour market. Insofar as it defined the terms of employment in some industries and occupations, the standard employment relation also gave rise to a counterpart set of norms and practices that became embedded in other occupations and industries, and this was most evidently reflected in the 'male breadwinner model' and its associated counterpart, the 'gender contract', entailing women's employment being restricted to occupations that were less secure and less rewarding, and more likely to be part-time or casual in nature (Vosko 2010: 4-7; Butler 2009). A further manifestation of this complementarity was evident in how citizenship demarcated access to the benefits afforded by the standard employment relation (Vosko 2010: 9-12).

This provides a basis for further reflection on the position of migrant domestic workers whose employment is not only constituted in terms of a global gender contract but one in which the employment relation is trian-

gulated. While household labour continues to be defined as women's work, employing a migrant domestic worker transforms the form of the 'gender contract' because it inscribes citizenship in the recasting of the domestic role. And this recasting is founded on legal restrictions that bind the migrant worker to the household, restrict her physical and employment mobility as well as the security of employment by limiting the duration of the employment contract. Moreover, unlike most other waged work that is premised on an extended social division of labour *and* the socialisation of labour, domestic work is an isolated activity, and the restrictive nature of the employment contract and the concentration of work within the physical bounds of the household compounds the isolating effects of gender and nationality.

Some sense of this was illuminated in field research undertaken among Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore in the early 2000s and again more recently. Filipina women were the established mainstay of the migrant domestic labour force in Hong Kong, but over the course of time they had developed a strong sense of community manifest in the large regular gatherings of women on their work-free days at a number of locations around the city. Supported by migrant advocacy organisations and faith groups, they had also set up quite robust pressure groups and were assertive in pressing their employment rights. Partly because of this, there was increasing recourse to recruiting Indonesian women to work in Hong Kong and Singapore, where they were as a rule paid less and subject to more onerous working conditions. Placement agents promoted the employment of Indonesian domestic workers on the understanding that they were passive and compliant, whereas Filipina workers were regarded as assertive and strong-willed. Indonesian women were paid lower wages, and this was justified on the grounds that they were less well educated, had a poorer command of English and were less likely to be acquainted with domestic technology and thus deemed to be less productive and responsible. With a generally more limited personal history of involvement in social movements than their Filipina counterparts and no faith-based organisations which could support their organising, Indonesians were not as well informed about their rights and employment standards, and understandably more circumspect about asserting their presence in public spaces. Gendered ascriptions of the migrant workers were overlaid by national

ascriptions, and in these early years of Indonesian women's employment in Hong Kong, the isolation of working in the privacy of the household was compounded by relative invisibility in public spaces. This invisibility was more pronounced in Singapore, where the government discouraged any form of collective organisation, while the constraints on migrant domestic workers appearing in public, let alone organising, are far more institutionalised in the Middle East.

These distinctions – the identification of the 'gender contract' and citizenship/nationality – provide an important pathway for developing a critical focus on precariousness, which has obvious bearing on understanding the dynamics of the terms on which Asian women workers have been incorporated into the transnational labour force. This is most obviously the case with respect to the historical treatment of the domestic work undertaken by migrant women, relegated to the informal domain of the economy and not warranting any form of regulation. But there is a further aspect of Vosko's critique of precarious employment that provides another approach to considering the dynamics of migrant domestic work. Vosko contends that in analysing labour market restructuring and the organisation of work, it is necessary to reflect on distinguishing between the function and form of the standard employment relation. This is an important distinction because too frequently reflections on precarious employment overlook the relation between function and form. However, there is a hint of something more on offer here because in elaborating on what constitutes the form of the standard employment relation, which is argued to be organised around three key 'pillars' – working time, continuous employment, and employee status – Vosko argues that it is crucial to identify the function of the standard employment relation. For her, the employment relation has assumed a particular form in order to secure a particular outcome. In the case of the standard employment relation the outcome was bound up with "achieving [worker] subordination [...] and of limiting employer control" (Vosko 2010: 5).

In focusing our attention on distinguishing between the form and function of the non-standard employment relation that is migrant domestic work, we can extend the scope for delineating the distinctive pressures that shape the degree of vulnerability and precariousness of this work. One instructive approach frames the scrutiny of waged domestic work through

the lens Marx draws between the ‘formal subsumption of labour’ and the ‘real subsumption of labour’. The former refers to the actual contract of employment which formally subordinates labour to the employer while simultaneously setting limits on the extent to which the employer can dictate the intensity of work, as Vosko noted. The latter turns the focus to the different ways in which work is organised and designed to extend the employer’s control over work. This distinction, we contend, provides a valuable basis for interrogating the forces that shape the exploitative and precarious character of migrant women’s domestic work.

There is a substantial, if not absolute, lack of symmetry in the bargaining equation that places employers in a strong position with respect to negotiating the terms of employment. This is on one hand structural, and the labour export states must assume some responsibility for this because historically they actively encouraged the migration of women in the knowledge that there were virtually no employment protections mandated in destination countries (Pizarro 2002). On the other hand, this lack of symmetry is also personal because workers are engaged to work in the household under the direct and unfettered control of the employer. The disadvantage is compounded by the limited ability of workers to enforce employers’ compliance with employment contracts.

In setting out a series of minimum standards and conditions, the Domestic Worker Convention provides a template for governments to adopt measures that would enhance employment certainty for domestic workers, and clarify and strengthen the terms of employment, which would be legally enforceable. Article 8 of C189 advocates that migrant domestic workers be provided with: “a written contract that is enforceable in the country of employment, or a written job offer, prior to travelling to the country of employment”. This clause goes to the heart of some of the problems that have institutionalised the vulnerable position of and exploitative relations experienced by workers recruited into the transnational labour force. Employment contracts are often not provided to workers, and in some destination countries are provided in a language in which workers are not literate. Contracts often lack transparency in failing to detail the terms and conditions of employment prior to the worker taking up the position, and it is not uncommon for workers to find that upon arrival in the destination country the terms and conditions and rates of remuneration that

had been offered to them when they initially agreed to a contract have been unilaterally changed to the worker's detriment.

Even if governments commit to C189, there remains the challenge of ensuring compliance and enforcement. Hong Kong has reasonably comprehensive regulations specifying minimum conditions and standards of employment, and yet this has not prevented violations of the terms of Indonesian domestic workers' employment contracts (Amnesty International 2013). A comparable problem is evident with the recent endeavours of the governments of two of the most significant labour export countries in Asia to mandate minimum conditions for migrant women workers. Responding to criticisms that governments were not doing enough to protect the interests of migrant workers, the Philippines and Indonesian governments have decreed that the issue of visas is now contingent on employment contracts meeting minimum rates of remuneration and a number of employment conditions. However, the difficulty of enforcing such arrangements has become apparent with reports of workers who signed onto contracts that do meet these conditions being presented with substitute contracts upon arrival at the place of employment, an apparently common occurrence in the Middle East.

Bilateral agreements between governments of workers' origin and destination countries to make commitments on standards and the enforceability of employment contracts continue to be frustrated by the differential treatment of domestic work, the regulation of which continues to remain outside the realm of mainstream labour law. The continuing designation of domestic work as occupying the informal economic sphere is compounded by the very fine line between informal and illicit employment. When there are few real protections afforded to workers pursuing the regulated route to work, when it is in employers' interests to engage workers, often at a lesser cost, and when unregistered labour agents are able to recruit and place workers with employers with impunity, it is not surprising that, as one estimate suggests, up to 70 per cent of migrant domestic workers who are employed by Malaysian households are undocumented, most recruited from Indonesia and Mindanao (Usher 2014; Looi et al. 2009; Phillips 2011). This problem can be exacerbated when governments mandate minimum wages and improved conditions, prompting workers to consider irregular recruitment arrangements for fear that they

could lose employment opportunities to workers not subject to such standards, which appears to be in evidence with increased undocumented Filipina and Indonesian migration. Indeed, these fears might well be justified because the Hong Kong administration and the Singapore government have both launched initiatives to broaden the reach of countries from which domestic workers can be recruited in order to ensure the continuing supply of labour at competitive rates of remuneration (Rosewarne 2014).

3. Precariousness, real subsumption of labour and precarisation

The uncertainty and vulnerability engendered by transnational employment has much deeper roots than just the formal contract of employment. The passage of Asian women's entry into the comparatively unregulated transnational labour market has been the product of a chain of organisational and institutional arrangements. The labour supply chain is critical in the making of the transnational labour force. This is especially the case for those pursuing this journey for the first time. Their entrée into global employment usually proceeds with the prospective migrant approaching or being approached by local labour agents. The agents, who invariably are not licensed, advise on the possible employment opportunities, provide some indication of or promise on the terms of employment and how these might align with the individual's preferences and ambitions. The Indonesian government mandates training programmes for domestic work, which are designed to better equip women with the skills and the appropriate temperament to assist in acculturating them to transnational domestic work. The training programmes are of varying duration and quality, and in Indonesia some are up to six months in duration, and most are normally undertaken in the capital, in Jakarta, rather than locally. Most programmes are operated by the recruitment agencies, which are licensed to negotiate placement in households with labour agencies in the destination countries. Recruitment agencies also include in their service provision for organising the appropriate travel documents, freeing their clients from the somewhat onerous and time-consuming task of navigating the bureaucracy themselves. Workers are also required to subscribe to a migrant worker insurance policy.

The recruitment process is thus not an uncostly one, notwithstanding that it is supposed to be the employing household that is normally expected to meet most of the costs associated with recruitment and placement. Prospective workers face an upfront expense, and given most individual's financial circumstances, they have to call on family resources or seek loans from money lenders or the recruitment agencies. The evidence indicates that loans are commonly secured at a relatively high rate of interest.

Indebtedness is thus a routine feature in the constitution of this transnational work force, and successfully engaged workers can dedicate the first few months of their earnings to servicing the debt and repaying the loan. Interestingly, while rates of remuneration vary considerably from one destination to another – with Hong Kong offering the highest wages and the Middle East and Malaysia the lowest – as a proportion of actual earnings the relative cost of the recruitment and placement seems not to vary all that much across the spectrum of employment locations. The charges imposed by recruitment and placement agencies are generally in proportion to the relative rates of remuneration (Rosewarne 2014). Although the practice is supposed to be prohibited, there are frequent reports of the placement agencies sequestering a proportion of workers' wages to ensure that loans are serviced and debts repaid.

The multi-tiered employment chain has the effect of subordinating migrant domestic workers to the organising functions of a range of stakeholders engaged in the business of migration, the so-called 'merchants of labor' (Martin 2005). The real measure of migrant domestic workers' labour market subordination has to be considered in the context of the labour supply chain, to look beyond the actual employment contract to understand the role that different stakeholders play in contributing to the definition of the employment relation. The Indonesian government, like many others, handed responsibility for the recruitment and placement of workers to the private sector limiting its own direct role in recruitment and placement. This labour supply chain has institutionalised a system in which several stakeholders have a vested interest in promoting migrant domestic work as a profit-making enterprise, and this can be pursued by fair or foul means. Each engages a link in the chain with the object of making a claim on the wages of labour migration, and this engenders a number of ways that worker subordination can be effected. Indebtedness

lies at the heart of this system and, in such practices as bonded (or forced) labour, forms the lever for pressuring delivery on the claim.

There are still further stages to the ways in which workers can be subordinated in this transnational labour market. Perhaps the most canvassed of these is the high cost of transmitting income to workers' origin country. Money transfer agencies charge exorbitant rates for managing the repatriation of money, and many workers avoid this costly exercise by deploying the services of friends who are returning home. This is not an altogether secure means of remitting income to family because while they may have absolute confidence in their friends, there is always the prospect of border control officials confiscating monies from returning workers. In fact there is evidence of migration and border control officials exacting financial advantage from these workers. For example, the Indonesian government established dedicated entry arrangements to expedite migrant workers' return through 'Terminal 3' at the Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, ostensibly to provide a safe-entry point, although what has transpired is the opportunity for corrupt officials to fleece workers of some of their accumulated earnings (Silvey 2007: 265-66).

The transnational labour supply chain is infused with multiple ways in which workers can be subordinated to endure exploitative practices and labour market vulnerability. Importantly, the character of this labour market position is exaggerated because there is by and large next to no regulation governing the links of the chain. The gendered and racialised nature of migrant domestic work, and the constraints on workers' employment as well as civil rights, is inscribed in a chain organised across different national jurisdictions, and this has locked in precariousness as one of the more concrete manifestations of workers' real subsumption. The challenge in combatting this requires regulating particular points along the labour supply chain, and this is no easy task given that it calls for national governments to enhance the management of recruitment and placement and to try to do so through bilateral or multilateral agreements between labour source and labour destination countries. When more countries in the global South, and South East Asia and South Asia in particular, are promoting labour exports as an economic programme, and that this is occurring at the same time as governments in destination countries are looking beyond the established labour-source countries, such as Indo-

nesia, to Bangladesh, Myanmar and elsewhere, to shore up the supplies of labour and contain the costs of securing migrant domestic workers, the global foundations of the labour market presents a structural impediment to combatting precariousness.

4. Global labour supply chains, global care chains and precarisation

In recognising the norms of women's primary role as carers and nurturers as the ingredient in the making of the migrant women worker, it is also crucial to not lose sight of the fact that the spatial framing that concentrates only on the exercise of labour within the destination country hides another oeuvre in the spatial construction and precariousness of women's labour. The gendered nature of domestic work, encapsulated in the organisation of the 'global care chain', is founded on both a gendered and racialised construct, on women's presumed role as nurturers and carers in their country of origin and of their ability and willingness to conduct this role at a lesser cost, as well as more intensively, than the host employer. For many, this gendered and racialised ascription reflects a concrete reality, one based on enduring familial connections and responsibilities in workers' country of origin. In considering precariousness, it is crucial that some accounting be made of the difficulties and the risks associated with many workers having to organise their labour across the spatial plane (Isaksen et al. 2008). The challenge in having to reconcile and manage domestic and care responsibilities across multiple households can engender a suite of uncertainties and vulnerabilities for transnational labour.

Viewed in the context of the transnational labour market, migrant domestic work has to be considered in terms of an employment relation that is constituted both within and beyond the waged workplace. The personal challenges of being thrust into the intimate context of the host-employing household require deft manoeuvring on the part of the domestic worker. The migrant domestic worker has to navigate her inter-personal relations with the different members of the household as well as the various calls upon her physical and affective labour and how these interactions are structured by the established, and likely shifting, social and power rela-

tions within the household. As a live-in worker, there is little opportunity to escape from the incessant 24/7 grind of these dynamics. Moreover, given the isolated, and isolating, physical context of the household workplace, there may be limited opportunity to seek the solace of fellow work colleagues. Indeed, there are many employing households, particularly in the Middle East, that in fact proscribe such interactions.

Extensive research on the global care chain has highlighted the deleterious consequences of migrant domestic workers' physical absence from their families (Parreñas 2005). The capacity to sustain and manage the affairs of workers' home country familial responsibilities can be very much compromised by the demands of the host employing household, and this makes for a considerably mix of emotions when families have played a part in the migration decision (Amnesty International 2014). This may also play out most directly with calls made on workers' earnings, especially when this is related to having to accommodate the demands of family members who have acted as guarantors for loans that had to be secured in order to fund the entry into the transnational labour force.

Migrant domestic work thus has a Janus-faced character, where work is organised across the two jurisdictional and responsibility planes, but where one site becomes privileged. Because one of the possible consequences is that the functioning and integrity of a worker's familial relations can be compromised, the insecurity and vulnerability that frames the migrant domestic worker experience cannot be regarded as simply the product of the waged workplace. The assumption of responsibility, or the instances recounted to me of husbands or mothers-in-law placing responsibility upon young Indonesian women to join the global labour force in order to generate money for the household is one integral feature of the process of precarisation. In taking on the task of contributing to the financial security of her family, the worker is introduced to the uncertainties of the global labour market. She has to navigate the vulnerabilities associated with maintaining a place in the global care chain, enduring and surviving the exploitative practices that are writ large in the employment relation, as well as the difficulties in contributing to maintaining the integrity of her familial household, and all the while trying to maintain her personal integrity and psychological wellbeing.

5. Conclusion

The development of the global care chain, and particularly the increased numerical significance of migrant domestic work and the ever-broadening reach in the sourcing of workers, is a remarkable illustration of the pernicious character of precarious employment. There is nothing really new in this. It has been part and parcel of the process of labour being transformed into a thing to be bought and sold in the market place. Precariousness is the corollary, and it is underscored in the case of migrant domestic work because of the refusal to recognise and accept, indeed the resistance to accepting, the value of what is defined as women's work. And it is not only women's work but work of a lesser value because it is undertaken by women recruited from the nations of the global South.

The Domestic Worker Convention is a product of the concerted endeavours to challenge the exploitative nature of the global care employment relation, to draw out from the shadows of the informal economy work that remains largely unregulated. This has been a remarkable development, and it is one that continues apace for the resolution of C189 has set in train a coordinated international campaign that brings together those groups and organisations, which have been exposing and campaigning against the exploitation and abuse of migrant women, to focus on lobbying governments to ratify the Convention. This has injected a fresh momentum into organising and campaigning for migrant domestic work rights, and we can observe this in the rejuvenation of the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union in Hong Kong.

However, the precariousness of migrant domestic work is not only the consequence of an asymmetry in the employment relation. It is also the outcome of a chain of unequal relations, the global labour supply chain, where those organising women's progression through the different links of this chain seek to profit from that involvement, staking a claim on women's earnings. And driving the promotion and organisation of this labour force are the governments that invest in the prospect of labour migration being the panacea for alleviating the economic malaise of the global South. In effect, individual workers, and their families, are charged with the responsibility for generating the export income that is regarded as the salve for this malaise, while the demand for migrant domestic workers is fuelled by

a comparable imperative, of individual familial responsibility for organising the household in the absence of institutional support for social provisioning. The precariousness that defines the world of the migrant domestic worker is not simply the product of the employment relation, but rather the reflection of the multiplicity of forces that have impelled the development of labour migration as the solution to the structural inequities in the global political economy and their translation into the organisation of the private sphere of the political economy.

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Abstract

Migrant domestic work is the archetypal manifestation of precarious employment. In most countries into which women from Asia are recruited, the absence of regulations prescribing minimum employment conditions or protections makes for exploitative and abusive work practices, and limited-duration work visas underscore this embedding of insecurity and uncertainty. We look beyond regulating employment conditions as a remedy for precariousness to highlight how gender and racial norms frame the formation of the global care chain, which in turn rests on the making of a new class of worker. The actors involved in this process of proletarianisation – the state, labour agents, recruitment and training enterprises, insurers, bureaucrats, employment placement agencies and money remitters – lay claim to workers' earnings and contribute to the more transformative process of precarisation.

Von MigrantInnen ausgeführte Hausarbeit ist die archetypische Verkörperung prekärer Arbeit. In den meisten Ländern, in denen Frauen aus Asien beschäftigt werden, bereitet die mangelnde Regulierung minimaler Beschäftigungsstandards oder von Arbeitsschutzrichtlinien den Boden für Ausbeutung und Missbrauch im Arbeitsalltag. Befristete Arbeitsvisa verstärken diese Einbettung von Arbeitsverhältnissen in Unsicherheit und Verunsicherung. Wir richten unseren Blick über die Regulierung von Arbeitsbedingungen als Abhilfe für Prekarität hinaus, um aufzuzeigen, wie Normen von Gender und ethnischer Zugehörigkeit die Herausbildung globaler Pflegeketten prägen und diese wiederum die

Schaffung einer neuen Klasse von ArbeiterInnen. Die an diesem Prozess der Proletarisierung beteiligten Akteure – der Staat, ArbeitsvermittlerInnen, Betriebe, die auf Rekrutierung und Ausbildung spezialisiert sind, Versicherungen, BürokratInnen und Arbeitsvermittlungsagenturen sowie Finanzdienstleister – beanspruchen ihren Anteil an den Löhnen der ArbeiterInnen und tragen somit zu einem stärker transformativen Prozess der Prekarisierung bei.

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**Facing Labour Market Insecurity:
Structural Constraints and Individual Interpretations –
São Paulo, Paris and Tokyo¹**

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Working life trajectory is currently undergoing a profound change. In many places in the world, various forms of atypical employment threaten the traditional forms of job relation. The concept of precarious jobs or contracts was proposed in the 1970s to describe these non-standard and degraded forms of employment (Caire 1982). With this meaning, precariousness is placed in the context of the so-called ‘wage societies’: it defines a new situation, different from the status of wage earners and different as well from the transitional condition of being unemployed (Castel 1995). This tripartite division of the labour force (stable employees, unemployed, precariously employed) has been challenged by increasing mobility and occupational discontinuities. The concept of precarisation then appeared most suitable to account for movement between jobs, unemployment and inactivity (Cingolani 2005). This dynamic or processual sense of precariousness led to an interest in exploring individual trajectories and the ways in which they are affected by insecurity in the labour market. It also investigates individual experiences in order to understand how this uncertainty is subjectively experienced. These are the two tracks that we will follow in this article.

Capturing the empirical reality of precariousness is, however, not a trivial task, once it is theoretically understood as a process of precarisation. How should relevant situations be defined, or pertinent populations selected, or the boundaries of this subject be drawn? To overcome these empirical obstacles, we will focus on situations of unemployment, considering that this condition is a good place from which to observe

the phenomena of uncertainty and insecurity associated with precarisation. We consider unemployment as a problematic condition, intrinsically marked by insecurity, rather than a social status, defined by a set of protections and guarantees (Schnapper 1989). Traditionally, unemployment is understood as a transitional period between jobs, or between two stable professional situations (Demazière 2006). The job search, into which the unemployed are forced, is the means to be able to exit from this bracket as soon as possible. In this sense, unemployment is an institutional program (Douglas 1986). However, this program is also threatened and destabilised by the rise of various forms of precarious employment, recurring periods of unemployment, long-term unemployment, etc. It is thus less often limited to a brief period of job search, or a quick transition (back) to work.

Unemployment tends to lose its institutionalised significance, because the program that sustains it (i.e. a quick exit from temporary job loss made even quicker by an active job search) is not working well any more. Individuals can therefore no longer find sufficient resources within that rationale to make their situation meaningful. They must work out their own interpretation and invent new meanings. Unemployment is a problematic situation: it is by definition transitory and thus of necessity must cease. It also bears the stamp of deprivation and can only be defined by the negative, is deemed inferior and demands reparation, is affected by devaluation and requires a change. Thus, being unemployed *ipso facto* means being turned towards the exit, and commanded to find a way out. Becoming unemployed means wanting to be unemployed no longer, having to stop being unemployed. No social obligation or inner pressures characterise the opposite situations represented by employment and inactivity, for contrary to these, unemployment is not a reference. This is exactly why it poses a problem.

A major consequence of the problematic nature of being unemployed is that it implies that the individuals concerned must involve themselves in specific occupations intended to find a way out of the situation, i.e. to invent a new future, to project oneself into a different situation, into employment. For this reason, the job search is the key factor in being unemployed, since it is only by obtaining employment that one can escape this situation. More than a way of living, a social status, the experience of unemployment means confronting uncertainty, and impels one to develop ways of ridding oneself of it. Looking for work is one of the most obvious

manifestations of this endeavour. This point of view echoes the conclusions of other investigations, which repeatedly bring home the fact that unemployment is a private and personal tragedy, destabilising identities, breeding guilt and upsetting an individual's world-view, and which, on top of all these, distends social links, throws one's life off balance, disrupts established solidarities, and leads in many cases to disaffiliation (Lazarsfeld et al. 1981; Ledrut 1966; Schnapper 1981; Castel 1995).

The analysis of the individual experiences and trajectories of unemployed persons is a revealing way to observe changes in the labour market: these experiences and trajectories are marked by insecurity and instability, and are oriented towards the control, reduction, and limitation of this uncertainty. However, such an analysis must be contextualised, since the ways in which each society treats these phenomena are quite diverse. Institutions concerned with employment and unemployment are very differently conceived and have different degrees of presence (public employment agencies, unemployment insurance, social assistance, employment policies, etc.) in different countries. Social networks may or may not have functions in the context of job seeking or in the support of deprived people. The way society views the unemployed is not the same, and the ways in which the unemployed persons perceive their situation and react to their hardship varies between countries and within a society.

Our research focused on three countries, France, Japan and Brazil. This was challenging, since taking a comparative approach to the effects of unemployment on labour market trajectories and experiences is not a simple analytical task. Comparisons needed to be carefully contextualised. To face this challenge, we selected the three mega-cities of Paris, Tokyo and São Paulo, one in each country, whose specific labour markets dynamics expresses three very distinct (almost emblematic) configurations of employment systems and welfare regimes. To wit, these are (a) a solid, inclusive public system such as the one founded in France, the apex of which coincides with the so-called 'thirty glorious years' of capitalism during the post-war period; (b) a strong (albeit selective) system based on private protection, and established in Japan during the period of the so-called 'lifetime employment model'; and (c) a recent, limited experiment in unemployment protection, such as the Brazilian one, built from the late 1980s onwards, and embedded in a highly informal labour market.

Despite these differences, they had a common characteristic that allowed comparison: all three metropolises faced a process of changing employment rules in a context of increasing globalisation and flexible productive systems that make unemployment and labour market flexibility a central issue in political and social agendas.

Albeit labour codes and relations as well as workers' rights and benefits can vary from one country to another, in all cases, work – understood as the paid participation in the production of goods and services – is the main lever in the distribution of wealth. In fact, current labour laws in France, Japan and Brazil are quite different, whether we take into account the typical work contract, the range of forms of legal contracts, the relative importance of atypical contracts, the distribution of formal labour relations, etc. Such diversity is also evident in the legal categorisations of unemployment, in the institutions responsible for handling it, in defining the system of indemnities and assistance for those who have lost their job: in a word, in the construction of a social status for the unemployed, together with rights and obligations.

On this score, if one sets out to evaluate to what extent unemployment has been institutionalised – through the existence of unemployment insurance schemes, the number of mechanisms in place to help a person get back to work, the readiness to register with an employment agency or the networks of social protection – it seems clear that it is in Brazil that such an institutionalisation of unemployment is at its weakest, and in France – where unemployment has become a long-term factor – that it is the strongest and most long-lived, while it is more recent and less developed in Japan. But even in the French case, such considerable institutionalisation implies a fragile and problematic situation for the unemployed, a fact that is even more pronounced in the other two countries.

We began by carrying out sample surveys in the metropolitan areas of Paris, São Paulo and Tokyo, followed up by in-depth interviews with a subsample of about two hundred unemployed persons. Fieldwork and data analysis occupied the authors during the first half of the decade 2000–2010 in a long-term research study sponsored by different institutions. This article is a selection of some of the achievements of this study (for a complete presentation of those results, see Kase/Sugita 2006; Demazière et al. 2013).

Our argument will be developed in two main sections and a conclusion. Firstly, we will present three different patterns of labour market instability, based upon longitudinal surveys conducted in the three metropolises – Paris, Tokyo and São Paulo. This structural background sets up the terrain for the analysis of the meanings and interpretations workers produce once subjected to uncertainty and job deprivation. Thus, secondly, we will approach insecurity related to unemployment as a biographical experience. This approach clarifies the reflexive dimension of individual behaviour in labour market competition; it also illustrates the complexity of social processes underlying the permanent fragile individual situation, as they are exposed to the difficulties in terms of matching labour force offer and supply under different employment systems and cultural contexts. Finally, we conclude by stressing that labour market instability as expressed in unemployment situations must be considered and analysed as a combination of two registers, individual and institutional; once defined as confrontation with insecurity and precariousness, unemployment is neither a purely subjective experience, nor a mere institutional program.

I. Labour market insecurity: pathways in a comparative perspective

Unemployment plays a crucial role with regard to instability, since it redistributes job positions in the labour market (Freyssinet 1997) and shapes patterns in workers' trajectories (Guimarães 2006). To capture these movements, three longitudinal surveys were undertaken in Paris, Tokyo and São Paulo in a period of growing employment contraction. The first of these surveys focused on the occupational events of a cohort of registered job seekers at the Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi (ANPE) – the French national employment agency – between April and June 1995. A prospective panel covered 33 months of research in three follow-up surveys, taken after candidate registration at ANPE. Those were years of high unemployment and increasing length of the job search period. From this group, we selected 1,624 cases in the Paris-Île de France metropolitan region. The second inquiry, a household sample survey, took place in the metropolitan region of São Paulo, Brazil, between April and December 2001, in the context of

high levels of unemployment and insecurity. It covered 53,170 interviewees (6,627 classified as unemployed, 28,189 as employed, and 18,354 as inactive) and investigated their occupational transitions during the period 1994–2001. The third survey was conducted in metropolitan Tokyo (municipalities of Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba and Saitama) at twelve agencies (*Hello Work*) belonging to the PESO (or Public Employment Security Office) and collected information regarding the period 1990–2001. Some questionnaires were filled out on the spot and others were taken home and later mailed in. Overall, 6,222 questionnaires were handed out, with a response rate of 27.1%, of which 1,685 questionnaires were filled out and 1503 were valid cases (for more detailed information on the surveys carried out, see Guimarães 2006).

Patterns of occupational transition and labour market instability differ markedly in the three cases, reflecting prevailing employment norms within their various institutional contexts. In France, where unemployment has been a mass phenomenon for quite a while, and where public institutions for job seekers form a dense network, unemployment is strongly institutionalised. People without jobs tend to declare themselves as unemployed and to register at the ANPE. However, the most precarious and poorest people do so less frequently, and long-term unemployment can lead to discouragement and even a halt to signing on and a retreat into inactivity (Demazière 2006). While there are different ways of living with the fact of being unemployed, it is in some ways more common, particularly as unemployment is less and less frequently a brutal rupture in the middle of a stable professional career. Employment conditions have changed greatly in the last decades, leading to ‘specific forms of employment’ which diverge from the norm in terms of duration and stability of job contracts (fixed-term contracts, temping, internships) or of working hours (part-time). At the beginning of the year 2000, almost 6 million of the economically active population of 24 million people were affected, of whom 3.9 million were in part-time work. Young people entering the labour market were the most numerous in such jobs, while part-time jobs were feminised to a significant degree (almost 85%). Nevertheless, women’s activity rates remained very high. Salaried work was also distributed between the generations (Gauillier 1999): entry into professional life took place later and later and was marked by unemployment (or intermediary situations between unemployment and

employment), and working life could come to an end at an ever earlier age (unemployment of older workers but also the policy of early retirement and non-obligation for the older unemployed to actively look for work). Thus the variables of gender and generation seem particularly important for the analysis of occupational trajectories and the subjective relationship to social status, as well as of institutional policies in the management of unemployment and the workforce.

Embedded in this context, the Paris-Île de France labour market has been affected by unemployment since the 1980s. According to information provided by our 1,624 interviewees on their labour market situation between 1995 and 1998, we identified nine types of trajectories, presented in Table 1.² To be in long-term unemployment was the dominant situation for a relevant number of individuals who registered with the ANPE during the spring of 1995 in hopes of obtaining employment; nearly 1/3 of the sample fell into this group. Nevertheless, among the job seekers, there were those who followed a trajectory through multiple types of contracts; predominantly becoming regular employees, directly hired, whether for permanent, long-term contracts (16.3%) or for fixed periods of time (11%), or moving from one type of contract to another (15.3%). As a result, the trajectory of half the sample can be classified under the two typical situations in a capitalist labour market: protected unemployment (30.7%) and long-term, regular wage earning (16.3%). And if we include individuals regularly engaged under short-term, fixed contracts (CDD), we reach nothing less than three-quarters of the sample.

It is certainly the case that transitions are more intense wherever aggregated trajectories refer to more 'atypical' varieties of employment (sub-contracted temporary work and other such jobs). In this vein, our analysis found the emerging importance of labour market insecurity mostly expressed in a 'recurrent' form of unemployment, a concept applied to those submitted to intense and systematic transitions inside the French labour market. Nevertheless, no matter how intense transitions are, it is always possible to identify a particularly dominant trajectory pattern. The move towards inactivity, as a permanent result of unemployment experience, did not represent more than 5% of cases in Paris, implying that transitions occurred mostly *within* labour market boundaries.

Types of trajectories		%	%
1. Unemployed	Typical labour market situations	30,7	47,0
2. Long-term contract (CDI)		16,3	
3. Transitions between short- and long-term contracts (CDD/CDI)	A-typical situations: new forms of precarisation	15,3	33,3
4. Short-term contract (CDD)		11,0	
5. Outsourced ('Interim')		7,0	
6. Vocational training	Social protection contracts	6,2	11,6
7. Social protection contracts ('contract aidé')		5,4	
8. Inactivity	The way out from the labour market	5,2	5,2
9. Other types of employment relations	Residual forms	2,9	2,9
Total		100	100

Table 1: Aggregated trajectories of the unemployed in the Paris-Île de France Metropolitan Region from 1995 to 1998 (N = 1,642)

Source: Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité, DARES (Direction de l'animation de la recherche, des études et des statistiques), Data basis TDE (Trajectoires des demandeurs d'emploi). Fieldwork : Paris/Île-de-France, 1996–1998

Unemployment is less institutionalised in Japan and in Brazil than in France, but for different reasons. In Japan, not only did it remain at a very low level until the early 2000s, but also the regulation of employment was the responsibility of the large firms rather than of the state. It is only recently that major companies have begun to make workers redundant; they had previously been kept as members of the workforce who were entitled to a stable job. In this context, for workers settled in 'life-time employment', who are almost exclusively men, the experience of unemployment remained sharply marked by social disgrace and registering at an employment agency was considered shameful. The number of atypical jobs was increasing in diverse forms (28% of the salaried workforce in 2003,

according to the Labour Force Survey): fixed-term contracts, small jobs particularly among young people, and temping work, which was concentrated among adult women. Finally the ‘part-timers’, often working comparable hours to full-timers but excluded from the different benefits accorded to regular employees by the company, were more than 90% women, most of them returning to work after having brought up their children. For the categories of the workforce that did not have regular employment, the frontier between unemployment and employment (and also inactivity) was more porous and uncertain. Periods without work were not systematically categorised and recognised as unemployment, particularly when they did not give access to unemployment benefits. One of the reasons often used to explain the low level of unemployment even during periods of crisis was that women who have lost their unstable jobs do not look for another job (Freyssinet 1984). In such a context, the norms of activity and behaviour in relation to unemployment and work are often very different according to gender (Nohara 1999) and age.

Based on the survey conducted in Tokyo, we were able to identify patterns of labour market trajectories for Japanese job seekers from 1994 to 2001. Table 2 shows the results of factor and cluster analysis procedures conducted for those 1,498 valid cases.

Types of trajectories	Frequencies	%
1. Regular employee	756	50.4
2. Unknown; impossible to identify a pattern of trajectory	579	38.7
3. Part-timers	70	4.7
4. Other types of job	54	3.6
5. Long-term unemployed	39	2.6
Total	1,498	100

Table 2: Aggregated trajectories of the unemployed in the Tokyo Metropolitan Region from 1994–2001 (N= 1,498)

Source: Survey research in agencies of PESO (Public Employment Security Office), Tokyo. Fieldwork: Metropolitan Tokyo (Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba and Saytama), August 2001

In the Tokyo case, patterns of labour market pathways stand out even more clearly as typical situations of the norm of lifetime employment: prior to their unemployment, the trajectories of no less than 50% of individuals currently seeking employment were permanently hired in a single regular job. Contrary to these cases, roughly one-third (precisely 38%) had undergone a trajectory that could be described as a situation of transit between different employment situations; that kind of labour market transition, although extraordinary in the recent past is currently growing, documenting the increasing of insecurity as a result of the dissolution of the old employment system in Japan. These cases apart, all the other types of trajectories are of very minor significance in terms of numbers of cases: only 2.6% came from long-term unemployment; 4.7% (mostly women) came from part-time employment; and 3.6% from other employment situations.

In Brazil, on the other hand, the institutionalisation of unemployment at the time when the fieldwork was conducted (early 2000s) was both weak and recent although for different reasons, producing different results in terms of labour market trajectories. The weakness of the social safety net, of government aid to the unemployed and unemployment insurance led to a substantial under-recording of the number of jobless. This resulted in a considerable blurring of frontiers between social statuses, which appeared openly in the public polemic concerning unemployment figures that lasted during the 1990s and early 2000s.

Employment conditions were very heterogeneous, between a formal economy shaped by legal norms and social protection, and an informal economy, which was particularly highly developed and diversified.³ In the context of the strong decrease in formal employment, in particular in the industrial sector, during the 1990s, informal activities (the unregistered workers – *sem registro em carteira* – and self-employed workers – *por conta própria*) constituted most of the flexibility in employment (representing more than half of all jobs), while feeding the growth of service activities and unstable jobs. In addition, the destabilisation of employment conditions from the 1980s onwards encouraged an acceleration of the transitions between regular employment and informal activities. The workers developed survival strategies based on the combination of these two types of activities, either for the same individual (having more than one job, or

job alternation) or within the family group. The majority of economically active women worked in unstable or informal posts, which were also occupied to a significant degree by the youngest sector of the active (working-age) population.

The social mechanisms of distribution of the forms of employment have structuring effects on the subjective relationship to unemployment, and overall with professional lives and activity. The social construction of unemployment is marked by a big gap between job deprivation and its designation as unemployment: the boundary between unemployment and employment is all the more fuzzy as job precariousness becomes stronger, and other identifying categories (homeless people, for example) more prevalent because of the extreme weakness of the social safety net.

In the case of São Paulo, the largest metropolis in South America, two important pieces of information are required in order to better understand the São Paulo context. First of all, the significant increase of time spent in job seeking, which doubled during the 1990s, in the ten years previous to the fieldwork; the search for employment clearly became more difficult, affecting not only individuals who were openly unemployed but also those who were seeking employment. Secondly, the rate of unemployment, both open and hidden, had risen above two digits, having reached, in more critical moments in the early 2000s, 20% of the active population.

Thus in São Paulo the coexistence of lengthy periods of unemployment and job searching with an inefficient protective system have produced high levels of insecurity with regard to employment. This is clearly expressed by the intense transition between job market situations, which illustrate individual efforts to obtain the minimum income required for survival, given the fragility of institutional protection. Table 3 presents the types of aggregate labour market trajectories we observed among those who were unemployed in the moment of our research. This result differs from what has been observed (particularly since the 1980s) in former welfare states (such as France), where the rise in long-term unemployment proved to be a challenge. In Brazil, given the absence of such an historical experience of protection, it is the intensification of labour market transitions and, above all, recurrent unemployment, which challenge our comprehension.

Types of aggregate trajectories	Frequency	%
1. Intense transitions, unknown trajectory	4,549	68.6
2. Unemployed	627	9.5
3. Unemployed or inactive	1,451	21.9
Total	6,627	100

Table 3: Aggregated trajectories for unemployed persons in São Paulo Metropolitan Region from 1994 to 2001 (N= 6,627)

Source: Center for Metropolitan Studies (CEM) and SEADE Foundation (Fundação Sistema Estadual de Análise de Dados), PED (Research on Employment and Unemployment) / Supplementary questionnaire on “Occupational Mobility”, São Paulo. Fieldwork: Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, April-December 2001

Two intriguing findings can be observed in Table 3. Firstly, for two-thirds of the cases (no less than 4,549 or 69% of them), no trajectory pattern was identifiable; the intense transition within the São Paulo labour market between 1994 and 2001 caused four out of every seven unemployed individuals to have trajectories of which all that may be said is that no regular pattern can be inferred. Secondly this intense transition occurred between activity and inactivity – and not only between unemployment and occupation, since moments of entry into and exit from economic activity may be as regular as the movement from employment to unemployment. Consequently, equally probable transitions occurred between all three possible individual labour market situations (occupation, unemployment and activity), and not only between the two that are most typical of the ordinary capitalist market (i.e., occupation and unemployment). Under these conditions, inactivity ceased to be (as it was in the cases of Paris and Tokyo) a one-way phenomenon occurring at the extremes of the occupational trajectory, during precise moments of the worker’s life cycle.

Considering the trajectories of the unemployed in the three metropolises, and bearing in mind the flexibility in the use of labour which affects them all, how might we describe the specificity of an unemployment context of the recurring type (such as in São Paulo) vis-à-vis a long-term unemployment context (like the other two) with regard to the types

of trajectories produced by them? Was Brazil a sort of perverse preview of the future that awaits countries in which relatively solid systems of social protection have been established – whether public (as in France) or private (as in Japan) – both of which are currently beset by serious crises? Ought we to endorse hypotheses such as those of Ulrich Beck (2000), who argued that the ‘Brazilianisation’ of Western societies should be expected as a consequence of their transformation into ‘risk societies’?

Comparing the three mega-cities, it is possible to conclude that, although the instability in work trajectories may have been intensified in all cases, important differences remain. In France, thanks to its strong public system, long-term unemployment unfolds among those who move in so-called ‘atypical’ work situations; recurrent inactivity represents no risk to the borderlines of the labour market. In Tokyo, also, transitions occur preponderantly between employment situations, both typical and atypical, under conditions of relatively reduced (albeit increasing) unemployment. As for the Brazilian case, given the absence of institutional support to the unemployed, a huge recurrence of transitions prevails. Whereas up to the 1980s such transitions occurred predominantly inside the labour market (between occupation and unemployment), from the 1990s a new pattern emerges. Greater employment flexibility intensified occupational transitions under increasing unemployment, also trivialising the movement of exit and entrance in the labour market.

In short, labour market insecurity becomes a factor for an increasing number of workers in large metropolitan markets, especially when unemployment increases during economic crises. An ambiguous grey zone between employment and unemployment is expanding in such a way that one often cannot characterise a worker’s situation completely as unemployment, but also not as employment in the full sense of the term. Meanwhile, the border between unemployment and economical inactivity is also becoming more and more indistinct.

Under those circumstances, it becomes relevant to investigate the ways in which growing instability have been experienced by unemployed workers, and to pay special attention to differences that underpin perceptions and interpretations of insecurity and labour market precarisation.

2. Individual interpretations: variations and shared regularities

Unemployment breaks up into a myriad of varied interpretations in the metropolises studied that are not reducible one to the other. In other words, a situation coded in an identical manner as ‘unemployment’ is thus categorised in very different ways by those who have to face it in real life. The range of meanings identified by the analysis of the interviews was similar in the three countries; the strategies that people use to cope with insecurity are transnational. But at the same time we also observe variations and modulations related to the contexts studied.⁴

Such attempts to pool the discourses together can be easily illustrated by presenting and discussing all those definitions of the situation (unemployment) that hinged on the concept of the *job search*. In these discourses, the search for a job is presented as being the person’s main activity, giving meaning to their real-life situation, occupying all their waking hours, and leading to their vision of their future employment. It is a discourse that dilutes unemployment in the activity of searching for work and in the competition to succeed. In these discourses, the subject of the utterance is placed in a position of mastery, in control of his/her situation and itinerary.⁵ This characteristic is a highly specific particularity of these discourses, compared to the rest of the corpus. Unemployed persons who have high levels of education or who have had intermediate or managerial jobs often use this definition of the situation. Mostly, however, this interpretation of unemployment presents some specific traits that vary from country to country.

Thus, it appears that in France, the significant aspect concerns the claim that the job search is being carried out in a professional manner, sustained by the belief that sooner or later there will be results, and by experiences demonstrating that one has undertaken apprenticeships and acquired certain competences. This approach is linked to the vast apparatus, mainly publicly funded, that provides assistance in the job search, whether through professional assessments, training periods, guidance interviews, or lessons on the techniques of searching for employment. Such help and assistance are particularly strong in the French context, and they are the vehicles transmitting the norms of behaviour that socialise the unemployed. Unemployed people who internalise this model

are also those who have a stable career, even if they sometimes experience long-term unemployment, or who are young entrants to the labour market.

In Japan, seeking employment is presented as a very rational act, planned and somehow optimised, and what is more, aimed at a clearly defined objective: not just finding a job but promoting one's career. The job search is thus the continuation and anticipation of one's (past and future) career, and mastering it somehow obliterates the interruption caused by unemployment. This structure reflects the continuous and upwardly mobile model of the professional career. The normative injunction to be competitive and dynamic is very strong, yet this relates less to the institutions that support the unemployed: instead, it is a model internalised as an individual requirement and a personal responsibility. This interiorisation is highest among the unemployed who have a history of regular jobs, and who have lost a 'job for life'.

In Brazil, the activity of looking for work is also perceived as getting people on their feet, and aims at picking up the threads of an interrupted professional itinerary. Defining oneself as a job seeker means first and foremost explaining one's situation as being the result of a personal decision, not one that had to be passively endured. Projecting oneself into a well-defined professional future is very prominent here: searching for employment means being able to maintain oneself in the formal labour market. This goal is difficult to achieve, and the unemployed are mobilising their personal networks to find highly insecure and irregular jobs (*bicos*). By laying claim to their job seeker status, they retain continuity with their professional background, as these unemployed people often had formal jobs previously.

An ensemble of similar meanings emerges thus around this refusal to define oneself as unemployed and the debate focused around the job search. It seems to provide a sort of escape from unemployment, a resource enabling one to define oneself otherwise. Searching actively, or at least claiming to do so, means defining oneself as an active person, far removed from the common fate of the unemployed and ultimately resembling those who are employed, who already have work. It also means positioning oneself above the mass of the unemployed, by reasserting more or less explicitly and bluntly the principle of competition that structures the

labour market, and showing a certain self-confidence stemming from the idea that one is still competitive, within the job search setting.

Nevertheless, this is not the only way to express this experience of an unstable situation. Our approach identified another concept, which we have termed *discouragement*. In this case, the definition of the situation is permeated by fatalism, coupled with the incapacity to change the situation, build a future, and get a job. As the vain attempts to escape unemployment pile up, job deprivation is experienced as being more and more unbearable and insurmountable. In these discourses, the aspect of articulating unemployment is still very much present, but the unemployed person is not positioned as an active subject but on the contrary, rather as the object, the one who must bear all the devastating and destructive effects of the situation, and feel how hemmed in he/she is with respect to his/her capacity to act. This interpretation is associated with the unemployed who consider themselves furthest from employment because they have little or no training or experiences, or are long-term unemployed.⁶ Formulations of discouragement are fairly similar in all three countries, although we also found in discourses some traces of the institutional and normative contexts particular to those countries.

In France, the corresponding discourses are strongly marked by repeated failures in the job search. The numerous setbacks are so intrusive, insurmountable and threatening that they actually become the source of the definition of the situation. Above all, these setbacks are denounced as unfair, arbitrary, and unacceptable: the unemployed have made efforts, and it is the employers (and sometimes public institutions) who are held responsible for what happens: through their having applied some obscure, arbitrary favouritism or illicit and discriminatory criteria. This interpretation is specific to contexts in which support available for the unemployed is highly developed, yet ineffective. It is also common among the categories of stigmatised unemployed persons, especially older individuals and those made redundant after a long and stable career.

In Japan, discouragement is also compounded by the difficulties encountered during the job search. The sense of injustice is not absent from the way in which these difficulties are articulated, but the expression of personal helplessness is more prevalent than the denunciation of any external agency, such as the companies, in particular, that could be

held responsible. The interviews illustrate a process whereby the narrator is progressively and quite ineluctably hemmed in and reduced to a state of inertia. It appears quite evident that the individual feels responsible for his/her situation; the causes for their failure have been internalised to a considerable degree. In some cases, discouragement takes radical forms, leading to the mention of suicide, especially among male breadwinners.

In Brazil, discouragement is strongly manifested by the very great difficulty of putting things into words: the discourse is brief and not very developed, as if verbalising one's situation were unbearable, to the point that the narrative may be interrupted, sometimes definitively, by the interviewee breaking down in tears. We nevertheless found the same basic equation as in the other countries, i.e. that the individual's super-human efforts were linked to very insignificant or non-existent results. The effect of this impasse is an identical helplessness, which may lead to a question of life and death. The feeling of being at an impasse is particularly strong among unemployed people with health problems, and for whom difficulties accumulate.

A whole set of cross-national significations emerges, based on the deterioration of the situation that is caused by the cumulative experience of failure in the job search: firstly, individuals stop searching, perceiving that activity to be senseless, they then feel trapped in a dead end situation and can no longer even imagine an alternative future that might allow them to avoid seeing their situation decline steadily. In this case, unemployment is so intrusive and omnipresent that the individuals feel completely lost and uprooted. They can no longer involve themselves in acts or conceive of perspectives that might allow them to find a way out. The only conceivable change is the probable further deterioration of their situation.

A third type of interpretation emerged from our comparative analysis of the interviews collected in the three countries. This concerns those discourses that also stress forms of *withdrawal* from employment, but this time by giving value to activities that, although they are numerous and varied, all have in common the fact that they support a sense of social utility and provide a basis for redefining the situation: they erase unemployment, lastingly if not permanently, by eclipsing the job search and filling all their spare time. Beyond this, these activities are considered to be work of a sort, different from their previous professional activity, and thus representing a type of conversion.⁷ This interpretation of unemployment,

coupled with a reorganisation of everyday life around activities disconnected from the job search varies substantially across different contexts, with different frequencies and specific forms. The categories of unemployment to which this relates are rather diverse.

In France, the activities that give rise to this sort of experience share the fact they generate hardly any income or monetary resource to speak of, but yet are the source of a sense of social utility and recognition. Whether persons are engaged in these as volunteers, members of an association, or campaigners, they feel integrated in a community that pays out symbolic recompense in exchange for their dedication. These activities also provide an escape from the difficulties encountered on the labour market and give rise to alternative universes of self-investment. These activities become all the more attractive when the persons concerned are able to consider definitively retiring from their profession in the not-so-distant future and where they benefit from minimal material security (unemployment income). These activities are seen as a positive and definitive alternative to the lost job, especially when legitimate inactive status is available in the near future.

In Japan, such activities are also positioned outside the field of employment and concern individuals who declare they do not need to work and can survive without a salary. These activities are partly linked to accepting responsibility for certain roles within the local community and partly to agricultural auto-production with a view to becoming self-sufficient. These are very specific cases, and informal work or other forms of volunteering are never mentioned, as they are not perceived as being legitimate in this context. Here, the withdrawal from professional activity is considered to be temporary, and is sometimes associated with an active albeit sporadic job search. Individuals sketch an attempt to escape unemployment, rather than a renunciation of employment, and that has a rather marginal importance, compared with the other contexts.

In Brazil, these activities are, in similar fashion, a resource permitting people to combat the spectre of unemployment and define their situation more positively. They are also, more specifically, different kinds of informal work, or substitutes for employment, in a social context where work is often less codified and formalised than in the other two countries. These activities are part of the relational networks that support self-help or dependency relationships, and even to some extent, servility. This mercan-

tile dimension is rather strong, and in a context in which the unemployed receive very little protection, in contrast to the other two countries, they can be considered to be like real work and thus to substitute for the employment that was lost.

Beyond certain differences, a set of cross-national significations appears, pointing to the fact that such alternative activities allow individuals to reduce the tension between employment and unemployment. These significations restructure the daily lives of the people involved, because they frequently correspond to a profound reorganisation of their private universe. This appears to be a totally new way of life, compared with their previous existence, and often on a par with their professional activity. These alternative activities are thus both subjective and social resources allowing a person to anticipate the future as disconnected from employment and, above all, to set job deprivation aside and de facto withdraw from the unemployment situation.

The three types of interpretation of unemployment are present in all three contexts, but with some specificities with respect to their concrete manifestations or the characteristics of the unemployed or the importance of their dissemination. Job search, discouragement and withdrawal are delineated differently when the institutional and statutory support for the unemployed is very developed (Paris), when individual and personal responsibility is dominant (Tokyo) or when the collective and community management dominates (São Paulo).

3. Some final remarks

The comparative analysis of trajectories and experiences of unemployed clarifies the processes of instability and precarisation, and sheds light on their specificities among countries and on their transnational character. A situation that is strongly codified as ‘unemployment’ in fact results from diversified individual careers, and takes very heterogeneous forms according to the different contexts in which it is found. We also demonstrated the influence of contexts on what appears to be very personal and individual: biographical experiences of unemployment. After analysis, it appears that the weight of these contexts is not uniform: discouragement is

the most stable definition of the situation; withdrawal appears more heterogeneous and has a varying legitimacy according to contextual characteristics; the job search occupies an intermediate position, since it is a general normative form, while being modulated by the ways in which unemployment is regulated in the different countries studied.

Finally, to analyse the ways in which insecurity and precariousness are lived by people (in this case, the unemployed), it is necessary not only to devote comprehensive attention to indigenous perspectives, but also to develop a contextualised approach supported by the international comparison. On the one hand it allows for the variety of experiences of insecurity to be described without diluting it in individual cases. Since it is not enough to link the typical interpretations with the characteristics of the respondents, we must also articulate them by reference to the properties of the contexts in which they occur. Meanwhile, the comparison shows that different experiences may be translations and modulations of the same phenomenon. Thus, the unemployment defined as confrontation with the insecurity and precariousness is not a purely subjective experience, nor a mere institutional programme. It must be considered and analysed as a combination of these two registers, both individual and institutional.

This approach aims to render operational the theoretical position that regards unemployment – and the insecurity related to it – as a social construct. In this sense, we conceptualise unemployment and activity as a chain of interdependencies between institutional and individual actors, as a combination of structural and subjective processes, and as an interlinking of collective regulations and individual strategies, institutional standards and subjective worlds, codified rules and actual experience. We consider that it is from these interactions that the frames of reference for working life, activity and work emerge.

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- 2 We associated two statistical procedures of advanced multivariate analysis – factor and cluster analysis – in order to identify those types of aggregated trajectories.

- 3 In fact, the hypothesis of structural heterogeneity, and its consequence in terms of occupational heterogeneity has been stressed as a crucial feature in Latin American labour markets, originally by ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America) since the end of the World War II (see ECLAC “manifesto” by Prebisch 1962 and the codification later proposed by Pinto 1970); this argument is as seminal for the analyses on capitalist development in the periphery as the concept of fordist employment regulation was for the interpretation of the “thirty glorious years” in the developed economies.
- 4 For a detailed analysis that goes deeper into the set of almost 300 narratives collected on the experience of unemployment and instability, see Demazière et al. (2013, 2006). In this section we try to summarise our main achievements and conclusions.
- 5 “*I’ve got my plan to find work*”, told us a former mid-manager in Paris, or “*I’m managing the gaps in my career*”, as described a Parisian student. Similarly to Japanese interviewees like a young job searcher who states: “*The company doesn’t choose me. I choose the company*”, the same sense found in the narrative of a Brazilian mid-manager who told us “*I always have a card up my sleeve; always waiting for an opportunity*”.
- 6 “*I can’t stand it anymore; everything is black*”, in Paris, similarly to “*I’m desperate, furious, I can do nothing*” in Tokyo, the same feeling as expressed in São Paulo by a 55-year-old former metal worker “*I’d rather die*”.
- 7 Some eloquent examples come from Parisian interviewees (“*I’m keeping busy while I wait*” or “*It’s something that’s becoming important*”) as well as from Tokyo job seekers (“*Work is not my entire life*”) and São Paulo (“*Aside from professional work I do things that fulfil me*”).

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Abstracts

Labour market insecurity becomes a problem for an increasing number of workers in large metropolitan markets especially when unemployment expands during economic crises. Instead of scrutinising types and levels of insecurity, the paper will concentrate on identifying the ways in which recurrent unemployment periods have been experienced by workers, paying special attention to differences underlying perceptions and interpretations of insecurity. Empirical evidence comes from a comparative research project conducted in São Paulo, Paris and Tokyo between 2000 and 2010 using a comparative approach. Although different in terms of their welfare regimes, in the period analysed the three metropolises experienced rising unemployment and significant changes in their employment systems. A quanti-quali combination of research strategies allowed the analysis of labour market trajectories by means of three representative surveys and enabled researchers to go deeper into subjective experiences and interpretations using biographical interviews. The article aims to highlight the relevance of subjective and relational dimensions in the understanding of the growing insecurity in labour markets' recent dynamics.

Für eine wachsende Anzahl von ArbeiterInnen in großen, metropolitanen Arbeitsmärkten wird die Arbeitsmarktunsicherheit zu einem Problem, wenn die Arbeitslosigkeit in ökonomischen Krisenzeiten zunimmt. Anstatt die verschiedenen Typen und Niveaus von Unsicherheit zu untersuchen, konzentriert sich dieser Artikel auf die subjektiven Erfahrungen von ArbeiterInnen, die wiederkehrenden Phasen der Arbeitslosigkeit ausgesetzt sind. Den unterschiedlichen Wahrnehmungen und Interpretationen von Unsicherheit wird hierbei besondere Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet. Die empirische Basis des Artikels bildet ein vergleichendes, kooperativ angelegtes Forschungsprojekt, das von 2000 bis 2010 in São Paulo, Paris und Tokio durchgeführt wurde. Trotz unterschiedlicher Wohlfahrtssysteme zeichnen sich die drei Metropolen im untersuchten Zeitraum durch eine Reihe gemeinsamer Charakteristika aus, so etwa ihre steigenden Arbeitslosigkeitsraten und signifikante Veränderungen in den Beschäftigungsformen. Eine Kombination quantitativer und qualitativer Forschungsmethoden (repräsentative Umfragen in den drei Städten und

biografische Interviews) ermöglichten es, die Analyse von allgemeinen Arbeitsmarktentwicklungen mit subjektiven Erfahrungen und Interpretationen anzureichern. Der Artikel betont die Bedeutung von subjektiven und relationalen Dimensionen für das Verständnis von wachsender Unsicherheit in jüngeren Arbeitsmarktdynamiken.

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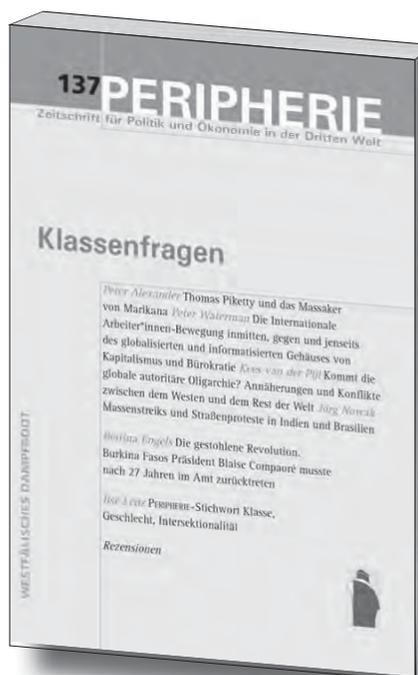
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