

Dossiê “Jovens, Trabalho e Educação”<sup>1</sup>

***Pathways of work: precarious jobs and temporary entries***<sup>2 3 4 5</sup>

***Trajetórias de trabalho: empregos precários e inserções provisórias***

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**Abstract**

Youth pathways are significant for studying the reconfigurations that happen in the contemporary world, in its various social spheres. Youth is the social contingent most directly exposed to the dilemmas of our society, and nowadays unemployment rates among young people in the country are expressive. In addition to the barriers to entering and keeping a first job, the difficulties they face to remain in a decent and protected job are even greater. The data also show that informality is higher in this group when compared to the group of the adults. Regarding the condition of formal employment, the presence of young people in occupations with greater turnover and temporary entries is notorious. In this sense, aiming at unveiling the pathways of work built up by part of the Brazilian working youth, this study intends, by using singular paths and jointly triangulating with national databases, to analyze two forms of entry in the job market: the first job through the youth apprenticeship law and employment in the telemarketing sector. The young people pathways analyzed contributed to the flexible forms of employment being a gateway to the exercise of a paid activity. However, the great transformation that has occurred in recent years lies in the fact that both precarious jobs and new forms of underemployment – apprentices and telemarketing operators – assume less and less the form of a bridge leading to job stability. For many young people, this type of job stopped being a particular biographical event to become a way of life.

**Keywords:** pathways, youth, work, youth apprentice, telemarketing

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## Resumo

Os trânsitos juvenis são significativos para pesquisar as reconfigurações que tomam corpo no mundo contemporâneo, em suas diversas esferas sociais. A juventude é o contingente social mais diretamente exposto aos dilemas de nossa sociedade, e hoje são expressivas as taxas de desemprego entre os jovens no país. Além das barreiras para ingressar e se manter em um primeiro emprego, são ainda maiores as dificuldades encontradas para permanecer em um emprego digno e protegido. Os dados também evidenciam que a informalidade se apresenta mais elevada nesse grupo quando comparado ao grupo dos adultos. Já em condição de emprego formal, é notória a presença dos jovens em ocupações de maior rotatividade e inserções provisórias. Nesse sentido, com o objetivo de desvelar os percursos laborais construídos por parte da juventude trabalhadora brasileira, este trabalho pretende, por meio de singulares trajetórias e triangulando conjuntamente com bases de dados nacionais, analisar duas formas de inserção no trabalho: o primeiro emprego por meio da lei da aprendizagem e o emprego no setor de telemarketing. Os percursos juvenis analisados contribuíram para que as formas flexíveis de emprego constituam uma porta de acesso ao exercício de uma atividade remunerada. Todavia, a grande transformação que se verifica nos últimos anos reside no fato de que tanto os empregos precários como as novas formas de subemprego – aprendizes e os operadores de telemarketing – assumem cada vez menos uma ponte para a estabilidade empregatícia. Para muitos jovens, esse tipo de trabalho deixou de ser um acontecimento biográfico pontual, passando a um modo de vida.

**Palavras-chave:** trajetórias, juventude, trabalho, jovem aprendiz, telemarketing

## Initial considerations

Regarding the juvenile condition specifically, the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are marked by some advances and contradictions. If we analyze the shape of the labor market at the end of the first decade, we see significant drop in the unemployment rate, increase in formal employment protected by legislation, reduction of the domestic work in the absorption of young people, and decrease in unpaid work. On the other hand, the data also show that the informality rate was still high compared to adults, and the increase in employment observed from 2004 to did not significantly alter the unemployment situation among young people, the most unemployed segment among the age groups.

In turn, recent changes in the Brazilian labor market do not evenly affect all youth, nor the Brazilian working youth (Silva, 2012). Geographical territory, social class, sex and color/race, among other factors, make youth unemployment plural, as stated by Corrochano (2011), “just

as youth are, there are also many young unemployed people, which is noticeable both in the statistical data and in the representations of the subjects who experience this situation” (p. 52).

Considering residence, the Metropolitan Region in Salvador (RMS) is often presented as one of the Brazilian regions with the highest rate of unemployment among young people, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE (2020), through the National Survey by Continuous Household Sampling (Continuous PNAD) . Despite being registered in a space with an overwhelming black majority, in addition to dealing with their own juvenile condition, young people from the RMS experience racial barriers to access the job market. Thus, work, as an important life space in society and an important territory of paths, is configured in the place that people will occupy in the social hierarchy to a large extent. As the data show, the unemployment rate among young black people is (and has always been) higher than that of non-black people. In addition to the fact that black people constitute the highest unemployment rate compared to non-black people in all age groups, they also occupy the places with the highest rate of precariousness.

It is important to emphasize that the labor market in the Metropolitan Region in Salvador is characterized by a high rate of unemployment in all age groups. According to data from the Interunion Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies (Dieese), the unemployment rate of the RMS population aged 14 and over, in 2017, was 24.1%, the highest among the surveyed regions, and 12.9% higher than the Metropolitan Region in Porto Alegre (which has the lowest rate). Even so, by analyzing the age perspective, the behavior in the different age groups shows a drop in the unemployment rate over the years, so that the unemployment rate was 49.7% among people aged 16 to 24, while dropping to 16.3% for people between 40 and 49 years old. This performance has persisted over the years: in 2007, the total unemployment rate in the RMS was 21.7%, while reaching 39.1% for young people aged 16 to 24. For adults aged 40 to 49, this total was 13.4% (Dieese, 2017b, 2018).

Therefore, in addition to the historical barriers faced by young people, the relationships that differentiate and singularize them, such as sex and color/race, generally intensify the inequalities within the segment itself in accessing the labor market, even in economically favorable conjunctures for employment, especially when the parts overlap<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, the

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<sup>6</sup> The highest unemployment rates are found among young black women. In 2017, the unemployment rate among black women was 26.5%, while the rate for non-black men was 21.1%. Black women also earn the lowest average

barriers to entering and remaining in employment are deepened and create even more serious obstacles to the construction of work paths.

It is worth mentioning the difficulty in balancing work and study activities: in 2016, according to a Dieese survey, 60.2% of young people from the RMS aged between 15 and 29 did not study. However, most of the people who did not study (48.1%) were working or looking for work. Attention to this data is of great importance, since the interruption of the educational cycle impacts future employment opportunities, given the positive relationship between education and salary levels (Dieese, 2017a).

Thus, juvenile transits are significant to research the reconfigurations that configure the contemporary world in the various social spheres. Youth is the social contingent most directly exposed to the dilemmas of our society: “the group that makes them visible to society as a whole” (Melucci, 1992, p. 8). In other words, in the light of Hirata, Magalhães and Telles (2006), “young people can tell us something about the vectors and lines of force that destabilize previous social fields or redefine them, displace their borders, open themselves to others, and also trace the lines that draw the new figures of social tragedy” (p. 217).

For a large majority of young Brazilians, work is a locus that builds paths of the various territories traversed by youth. The youth of our country, the youth condition and often childhood itself, are strongly marked by work or by the pursuit of it. Work is always part of their biographical paths; therefore, as Sposito (2005) states, “work also builds youth” (p. 124), especially the Brazilian working youth.

In this sense, aiming to reveal the work paths built by the Brazilian working youth, this work intends to analyze two forms of insertion in the labor market evidenced in this research through singular paths and triangulating national databases: the first employment through the law of apprenticeship, and employment in telemarketing. These questions are part of a larger research, developed over six years, whose general goal was to analyze the training (2004-2007) and labor insertion (2008-2011) paths of young people who participated in social programs aimed at professional qualification, developed by Social Organizations in Salvador (BA), in partnership with the Federal Government.

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earnings among race/color and sex groups. In 2017, they had an income of R\$1,373. In the same period, non-black men earned R\$1,675 (Dieese, 2018).

To analyze these two forms of labor insertion, the methodological option constructed was based on what Norbert Elias (1980) defines as microsociological studies, understanding that they can reveal aspects found on a larger scale, in society as a whole: “small-scale problems of a community’s development and a country’s large-scale problems are inseparable. It does not make much sense to study community phenomena as if they occurred in a sociological void” (p. 16).

Therefore, we started the research path by elaborating a review of the theoretical framework, considering the concepts and categories that circumscribe the questions of this research. At this point, the recovery of existing academic sources and productions that analyze the central categories of this work had fundamental importance.

The field research, of a more qualitative nature, was carried out in the city of Salvador and the Metropolitan Region in Bahia<sup>7</sup>, in 2009, 2010 and 2011, with eight young people, selected among the ten already monitored in 2004 and 2007 during the development of the first stage. The following strategies were used: exploratory and biographical interviews, and field registers with ethnographic observations, prepared with the aim of recording what was not said and what was not recorded during the interviews.

The exploratory interview carried out in 2009 enabled the discourse elaboration, understood as an expression of a historical moment, through which meanings and contradictions are produced, and versions of reality are constructed. For that, exploratory meetings were used to define the themes and re-elaborate the study path, as other research techniques and instruments were thought of *a priori*, but meeting with the young people showed that we were facing a particularly delicate ground. In order for the young people investigated to be able to narrate their work paths, the research instruments initially considered had to be replaced by in-depth (biographical) interviews - not about their entire lives, but some of their paths, especially those of work.

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<sup>7</sup> The choice for the city of Salvador and its Metropolitan Region was due to the availability of some data already collected from the Youth Social Consortia, found during the research developed in the Master’s of Education and Contemporaneity, concluded in 2007. Throughout this research, a database that enabled the monitoring of young people assisted in 2004 and 2005, and, more precisely, those who participated in the Social Consortium for Youth in Salvador and the Metropolitan Region in 2006 was created.

In this sense, Segnini<sup>8</sup> (2009) shows that in-depth interviews, in their different forms – biographies, life stories, social paths –, express scientific legitimacy in the understanding of society, and enable the apprehension of issues foreseen by the researcher as a result of accumulated knowledge about an object, and, above all, “inform unexpected aspects, constituting social kaleidoscopes that inform dimensions of the Brazilian social reality” (p. 10). The interviews were carried out throughout 2010.

The ethnographic observations carried out throughout the course of the research constituted material of fundamental importance to understand the configurations present in the lives of the young people in the research. They guided the construction of analyses of the young people’s work paths in a game of constant surveillance by external information, captured and recorded, and allowed the recording of issues that emerged as the work progressed.<sup>9</sup>

The paths analyzed belong to a group of poor young people who maintain and/or contribute to family expenses, aged between 23 and 26 years old, who either have concluded High School or not, living in the so-called peripheral neighborhoods in the city of Salvador (BA), almost all single and residents of a family configuration, with parents (male and female), siblings and/or grandparents. In the set of analyzed paths, seven young people declared themselves to be black, and only one declared to be multiracial. In the analyzed universe, the female sex predominates (five women). The predominance of women in the contingent occurred because they were those who were predisposed to narrate their life paths, education and, especially, work from the first moment of the research.

In order to establish a dialogue between the paths and more general statistical data from Brazil and Salvador, statistical surveys of employment and youth unemployment were added to this analysis, obtained through secondary data and made available by the following organizations: State Data Analysis System (Seade)/Interunion Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies (Dieese), Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)/National Household Sample Survey (PNAD), Annual List of Social Information (Rais/MTE), and General Registry of Employed and Unemployed People (Caged) of the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MTE)/Ministry of Economy. Information from 2000 to

<sup>8</sup> For more details, see Segnini (2009).

<sup>9</sup> For a better understanding of what the field diary is, read *Guia para pesquisa de campo: produzir e analisar dados etnográficos* (Beaud & Weber, 2007).

2018 was used, contemplating data from before, during and after the research to support notes of existing correlations and trends.

Therefore, it was possible to construct and analyze singular paths from the triangulation of the different sources, in a sequence of facts, almost always non-linear, developing a narrative logic that sought to give meaning to what was told. Each path analyzed was considered a singularity, a life occurrence, so that the goal was not to represent Brazil with this set of work paths, but a society in which many similar cases end up being reflected.

The theoretical categories constructed are present throughout the work, sometimes in dialogue with the quantitative data or the narratives of the work paths. For this reason, the path of the exhibition that follows is organized in two sections and final considerations – presented from a constructed logic that best guided the construction of this article.

## **The paths of young apprentices: steps and mismatches**

This research had eight young people monitored, and six of them had their first job as a young apprentice. In 2006, when I started monitoring these work paths, Ana Paula, Leidze, Iranildes Paula, Luciana, Alisson and Naiara organized the universe of 660,689 young Brazilian people inserted in the labor market through apprenticeship contracts, as seen in the data presented in the General Registry of Employed and Unemployed People (Caged) of the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MTE).

The law by which young people had their first job opportunity, the National Apprenticeship Law, was created during the presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 2000, modified<sup>10</sup> in 2005 and 2008, with Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as president, and, more recently, in 2018, in the Bolsonaro government. The aforementioned law guarantees the hiring of young people, aged between 14 and 24 years old, as apprentices, forcing large companies to hire 5 to 15% of their workforce from young people included in this modality. As stated in the decree (2018), an apprentice is an adolescent or young person between 14 and 24 years old who is

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<sup>10</sup> Until Decree No. 5,598, 2005.

enrolled and attending school, if not yet concluded, and enrolled in an apprenticeship program<sup>11</sup>, carried out by institutions in accordance with the legislation in force.

Although the law is relatively new, it is not possible to say that the learning issue is a new discussion in Brazil, nor is it a result of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since the “Estado Novo” movement, the learning issue has gained centrality, especially with the 1937 Constitution, which marks the distinction between intellectual work for the dominant classes, and manual work, emphasizing professional education for the most disadvantaged classes, according to studies by Romanelli (1983). As a consequence of this context, the National Service for Industrial Learning (Senai) was created in 1942 – by means of Decree No. 4048 of January 22<sup>nd</sup>. In the same year, another decree, Decree No. 4,984 of November 21<sup>st</sup>, required companies with more than 100 employees to maintain an apprenticeship school on their own for the professional training of their apprentices. At that time, there was no specific age group for categorizing “apprentices”, that is, they were all workers. Thus, the current law (Law n° 10,097, 2000)<sup>12</sup> on Apprenticeship becomes unique in the focus of its public served: young people.

However, the creation of the current Apprenticeship Law was born out of an unfavorable situation, especially for the youth segment. On the contrary, it appears within a growing trend of unemployment, elimination of jobs, and the precariousness of laws and working conditions, mainly affecting the most vulnerable segments historically: the working youth. Consequently, it was imperative to adapt the large number of unemployed people to the new dynamics of the labor market, strongly marked by its own logic that excludes capital and, above all, in the belief in qualification/training as the antidote to unemployment, especially youth unemployment.

Along with Ana Paula and her five colleagues, other 76 young people were placed as apprentices in the job market, also from the Social Consortium of Youth in Salvador and the RMS in 2006, making up no less than 22% of the youth contingent employed via the

<sup>11</sup> “Enrollment in apprenticeship programs must observe the legal priority assigned to the National Learning Services and, alternatively, to Technical Schools of Education and to Non-Profit Entities (ESFL) whose objective is to assist adolescents and professional education, registered in the Municipal Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (CMDCA) in the case of apprentices aged between 14 and 18 years old” (Brasil, 2010, p. 11).

<sup>12</sup> Expanded by Decree No. 9,579, 2018.

Consortium, behind only of alternative income-generating forms – i.e., associativism and cooperativism –, with more than 50% of the young people included.

For this percentage of 22% of young people, the *Learning Manual* of the Ministry of Labor and Employment (2010) reiterates that technical-professional training should consist of theoretical and practical activities, organized into tasks of progressive complexity, in a program related to the activities developed in the contracting companies, providing the apprentice with basic professional training. However, according to young people's reports, the discourse of work as an educational principle, present in the speech of the employer or those who had the status of employee, often did not materialize in practice. Naiara's work path as an apprentice is quite enlightening.

In 2006, undecided on whether to take the entrance exam for Electronics or Journalism courses, Naiara enrolled in the Administrative Practices course, offered by the Social Consortium of Youth in Salvador, at one of the participating NGOs located in Mata Escura, the neighborhood where she lived. Six months later, she had her first professional experience, as a young apprentice, in the administrative sector of a company in the Petrochemical Complex in Salvador, but she did not stay until the end of her contract. The experience of working as a young apprentice is defined by Naiara as “very difficult”. She explains that she felt very discriminated against, as many people had no patience with her. “They saw the young apprentices as poor, as poor things” (Naiara, 2011). However, what disappointed her the most in her work was performing routine activities that added little to her education.

*They always asked us to do small things, the ones that no one else wants to do, like photocopying, faxing... Those things, you know? We could have been doing anything, but they were always yelling, “Photocopy it for me.” We always did it, because we were there, we had to serve them, even if it wasn't our job, even if it had nothing to do with my work or with everything I learned in the Consortium. Everybody wanted the contract to be renewed at the end of the first year, including me. (Naiara, 2011)*

Young Alisson lived a similar path, with his first job at the Salvador Transport Companies Union (SETPS), also as an apprentice. As such, he was an administrative assistant and received a monthly salary of R\$ 175.00. His duties at the company's service stations were to provide information to students and organize queues.

*I would stand for four hours. It was super exhausting... I didn't like to stand, but I ended up choosing to organize the queues as I always dealt with people... The minor apprentice may choose... Let's put it this way, in the worst possible place, we just stall. We are the jack of all trades, doing everything for everybody. I was always handing out kilomeric passwords and doing all that and more. The sun was very hot when distributing the passwords and sometimes I had a lot of headaches. (Alisson, 2010)*

The young man's report sheds light on a present contradiction between what the Apprenticeship Law prescribes and the apprentices' concrete work situation. As the legal document highlights:

*In this contract, the employer undertakes to guarantee to the adolescent/young person aged between 14 and 24 years old (the limit of 24 years of age for young people with disabilities is not applied) enrolled in an apprenticeship program a methodical technical-professional training, compatible with their physical, moral and psychological development. In turn, the apprentice undertakes to carry out the tasks necessary for this training (article 428 of the Consolidated Labor Laws) with zeal and diligence. The apprenticeship program will be developed by a qualified entity for this purpose [our emphasis]. (MTE, 2010, p. 13)*

In its following pages, the same document that provides for the physical, moral and psychological development of young people also points out that the insertion process always seeks to guarantee “a formation that can, in fact, contribute to their integral development and in line with the established contents in the course in which he was enrolled, according to the learning program” (Decree No. 5,598, 2005, art. 23, § 1).

As we have shown before, the most contradictory part is that the theoretical training had already been carried out previously via the Consortium and, even more, little or almost no relationship existed between the training obtained and the occupational spaces in which young people were inserted via the Apprenticeship Law. On the one hand, if the documentary analysis allows us to conclude that there is an omission at this point, at least in its prescriptive nature of penalties, the documents are emphatic in demanding compliance with the number of apprentice quotas in each company on the other hand – “it is up to the Regional Labor and Employment Superintendencies, through inspection, to inspect compliance with the quotas of apprentices to which each company is obliged” (MTE, 2010, p. 17).

Another interesting aspect to be observed from Alisson's speech is the employer's concern to comply with what governs the contract regarding the apprentice's workload in the company, not the labor nature of the job itself, "I worked four hours, but there were days when

the queue was so long that I would stay past my time. Once, my supervisor was upset because I stayed up to six hours. Her biggest fear was being fined by inspection” (Alisson, 2010). The concern of the young man's supervisor regarding the fulfillment of his workday was perhaps motivated by the imputation to the employer, when hiring apprentices, that “compensation and extension of the workday are prohibited” (Decree-law n° 5.452, 1943, art. 432, *caput*). However, at no time does the Apprenticeship Law or the MTE *Apprenticeship Manual* refer to employer penalties when the work performed by the young apprentice is not related to their professional training, nor if they are exposed to precarious working conditions.

Luciana's work path illuminates another important aspect of the materiality of the Apprenticeship Law within the work relations, not presented in the ministerial documents: the instability in legality as a condition of the apprentice.

Luciana completed her professional qualification in sales and customer service, focusing on the organization of cooperatives. After concluding the course, she was soon placed in one of the existing cooperatives in the NGO that offered her the training. However, her biggest dream was paid employment, so she applied for a Young Apprentice at the Salvador Card company as soon as the first formal employment opportunity arose. At this company, her main function was to organize queues of people who would buy tickets to be used in the city's transportation, which Luciana found exhausting, as she highlighted, “The routine was tiring and there were times when I did not want to continue, but I needed to, so I had to be strong” (Luciana, 2010). Nevertheless, even though she was, in her words, “a role model of an employee”, her apprentice contract was suspended, and she spent a week with the uncertainty of (un)employment, “I would stick to the phone waiting for a call from the company. Thank God they called me back.”

After being rehired once again as an apprentice, her work path is marked by temporary placements in various positions/functions and, especially, in the different headquarters of the company spread throughout Salvador. “I have done everything and been to several places. In the end, I live in anguish and great instability” (Luciana, 2010). In light of Castel's (1998) analysis, made on the intermittent situation of French young people, we can say that Luciana, like the other young people surveyed, is part of a category that the author calls “permanent interim”, that is, she lives a modality made up of alternations of activity and inactivity, of provisional variations marked by an uncertain tomorrow, or, as Pais (2005) rightly defined when analyzing

unemployment in the Portuguese context, it composes the universe of young people who “twirl through a multiplicity of jobs, interspersing provisional insertions in the work universe with periodic withdrawals” (p. 17).

The instability path in Luciana’s legality signals a trend in the work relations of many other apprentices – young people who, although being enrolled in the work universe supported by the Apprenticeship Law, experience a work transit in their daily lives, marked by the uncertainty of (un)employment, and, therefore, their work paths are guided by the instability of the employee condition in a context of recurrent contractual precariousness. The fear of unemployment is a structuring element of these paths.

In one of the first interviews with young Leidze, she immediately told us that “things never came for free in her life” (Leidze, 2010). During the period in which she had already concluded High School and was studying to take the entrance exam, Leidze was looking for a job, but was not successful because she had no previous experience. For six months, she took a Cultural Production course at an NGO from the Social Consortium for Youth in Salvador. Her first job was as a young apprentice in the administrative area of the Human Resources sector of a bus company in Salvador. Leidze says that she worked hard and had many responsibilities equal to or greater than those of the other company’s employees, but she was not recognized for being an apprentice:

*It is a very big responsibility, right? They did not see us as young apprentices. This was a mere register to justify that the company did not want to hire employees at the moment, but the functions were the same, the responsibilities were the same, or rather, even a little bigger, because we have to show them that we are ready for anything that happens. (Leidze, 2010)*

The young woman’s report draws attention to the fact that her hiring as an apprentice is characterized by an employer’s strategy, which can be guided in the perspective of reducing the company’s costs; in compliance with the law that obliges companies to hire 5 to 15% of their apprentices; and/or even to make working relationships and conditions precarious, using one of the historically most vulnerable segments: youth. In this case, faced with the desire to be hired and the real need for value received for their working hours, young apprentices who subject themselves to any and all types of work in order to keep their jobs and, in the future, be able to move from apprenticeship to employee status.

Leidze's conclusions partially corroborate the findings of the research by Bastos (2011). For the researcher, there are indications that the National Apprenticeship Law can be an instrument of precariousness in the insertion of workers in the labor market, as apprentices are often hired to serve as cheaper labor, ending up in positions and functions that should be occupied by properly remunerated professionals, and prepared for such.

If the narratives presented so far, both of the paths of the young people surveyed and the conclusions of Bastos' (2011) research, tend to direct our gaze to a movement that has consisted of hiring young people as apprentices to assume certain roles and positions instead of hiring qualified employees, the paths of all young apprentices monitored throughout the research also reiterate that the jobs occupied by them did not demand any mental or technical capacity of high complexity beyond their capabilities, such as providing information about a product and/or organizing a queue. The idea that the apprentice assumes "the place" of a qualified professional needs to be better problematized, since the central issue is not the replacement of one worker by another (the apprentice), but how the capitalist mode of production is particularly organized in the imposition of precarious working conditions in the face of the permanent threat of structural unemployment, created by itself. After all, as Iranildes Paula explained: "having an apprentice job is better than having none". What Marx and Engels elaborated more than a century ago on the main political function of the "industrial reserve army", reiterated by sociologist Druck (2011), generally applies here to:

... create deep competition and division among the workers themselves and, therefore, guarantee an almost absolute submission and subordination of work to capital as the only way of survival for workers. Consensus is produced from the moment workers themselves, influenced by their political and union leaders, come to believe that changes in work are inexorable and, as such, justified as the result of a new era or a "new capitalism spirit". (p. 43)

## **Telemarketing work paths**

In its multiple configurations, Telemarketing work has progressively been characterized as a predominantly concentrated locus of the youth workforce in the formal market, especially those from urban areas who have concluded High School, at least. They are young people who,

for the most part, have their first professional work experience in call centers, as Selma Venco already demonstrated in the late 1990s, with her pioneering research on the subject.

The unique work paths presented in this work can contribute to the analysis of many other work paths of workers enrolled in the telemarketing sector<sup>13</sup>. In fifteen years, between 2003 and 2018 in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador alone, they grew from 1,795 jobs in 2003 to 22,690 in 2018, that is, no less than 1,179%, according to data from Rais (2003-2018).

Data from the Annual Social Information Report (Rais) for the RMS regarding the evolution of the employees participation as telemarketing operators between 2003 and 2018 reveal the greater participation of young employees in the sector, especially between 18 and 24 years old, and 25 and 29 years old. As a result, there is a lower participation of older age groups. The data presented in Table 1 indicate that there would be a constant insertion of younger workers in telemarketing activities, reflecting the permanent turnover of young people in the sector.

**Table 1. Evolution of the participation of employees as telemarketers, according to age group. RMS, 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2018**

Year	Total	10 to 14	15 to 17	18 to 24	25 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 64	65 and older
2003	1,795	–	–	70	518	399	94	14	–
2008	13,203	–	4	6,500	3,722	2,253	616	108	–
2013	16,939	–	7	6,410	4,707	4,342	1,156	312	5
2018	22,960	–	1	9,513	5,208	5,968	1,696	564	10

Source: MTE (2010)

In the study carried out on workers in the telemarketing sector, prepared by Corrochano and Nascimento (2007), it was found that a first explanation for the large presence of young people in the sector resides in the low requirement of formal qualification, that is: complete High School education and basic computer knowledge. However, the analysis revealed that the high hiring of young people is also related to social factors, such as: easier adaptation of younger workers to the specific conditions of the sector, greater capacity to assimilate the necessary basic

<sup>13</sup> In this work, the following groups of occupation were considered as the telemarketing sectors according to CBO (2002): 4223-05 – active telemarketer; 4223-10 – active and receptive telemarketer; 4223-15 – receptive telemarketer; 4223-20 – technical telemarketer.

training, and to withstand the demands for compliance with service goals, especially in the case of young people from low-income families.

Such explanations had already been evidenced in Selma Venco's doctoral research in 2006. Thus, for the author, one of the explanations given for the large presence of young people in the sector, especially adopted by the business discourse, is that young people have an easier time to deal with the frequent changes in the operational and technological base, mainly those related to information technology and the Internet, in addition to being more flexible to changes. Nevertheless, these explanations given by entrepreneurs – inscribed in the discourse of “skills” and “employability” – obscure the reality that the most historically unemployed age group is subjected to: young people. “In the absence of a job, anything was valid, even telemarketing”. This was Ana Paula's first justification for joining and staying in one of the main call center companies, based in Salvador.

Young Ana Paula reports that she spent days without sleep waiting for a call from the psychologist at the company where she had previously worked as an apprentice, calling her back to work. When informed that her contract would not be renewed for another year, she was instructed by the Human Resources (HR) department to stay at home waiting for a call from the company. For her, “these were agonizing days, without eating and sleeping properly. I would rush if I heard the phone ring, but they did not call me back” (Ana Paula, 2010). Realizing that they would no longer call and that, once again, the condition of “permanent interim” was part of her journey, she went out every day distributing resumés and filling out virtual job selection forms. After a lot of “walking around”<sup>14</sup>, she was called for an interview at Contax<sup>15</sup>. “I did a month's training, and I am still there today. I am a Marketing agent... I joined in 2008 and had a basic promotion in December. They signed my contract, but what I earn doesn't reach the minimum wage, working from Monday to Saturday” (Ana Paula, 2010).

Leidze's journey was not much different. When joining as a young apprentice in the HR sector of a public bus transport company in the city, the young woman's intention was to study Psychology and, in parallel with the course, remain as an apprentice, then as an intern and,

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<sup>14</sup> Expression used by the young woman herself.

<sup>15</sup> In the ranking of the largest companies in the telemarketing industry in Brazil with the largest number of employees (2005-2010), it occupies the second position, only behind Atento, according to the Brazilian Association of Teleservices (ABT).

afterwards, earn a Psychologist position in the company's Recruitment and Selection sector. Although she received numerous accolades from her superiors, her contract was also not renewed for another year. The condition of being unemployed was desperate, especially since what she earned was directed towards helping with household expenses, in addition to defraying the demands of her distance higher education course, which was not in Psychology as she had wished, but in Languages with an emphasis on English. "In the beginning, it was very difficult to be unemployed. I was so desperate... How was I going to keep myself until I had another job? I spent six months leaving at six in the morning and returning at five in the afternoon, handing in my resumé every day" (Leidze, 2010). After all her journey looking for a job, she became a telemarketer at Atento Brasil. Despite having a formal contract, she does not earn a fixed salary: her remuneration varies according to the number of hours worked and the goals achieved. At the end of the month, Leidze's salary varies between R\$ 400.00 and R\$ 500.00, working from seven in the morning to two in the afternoon.

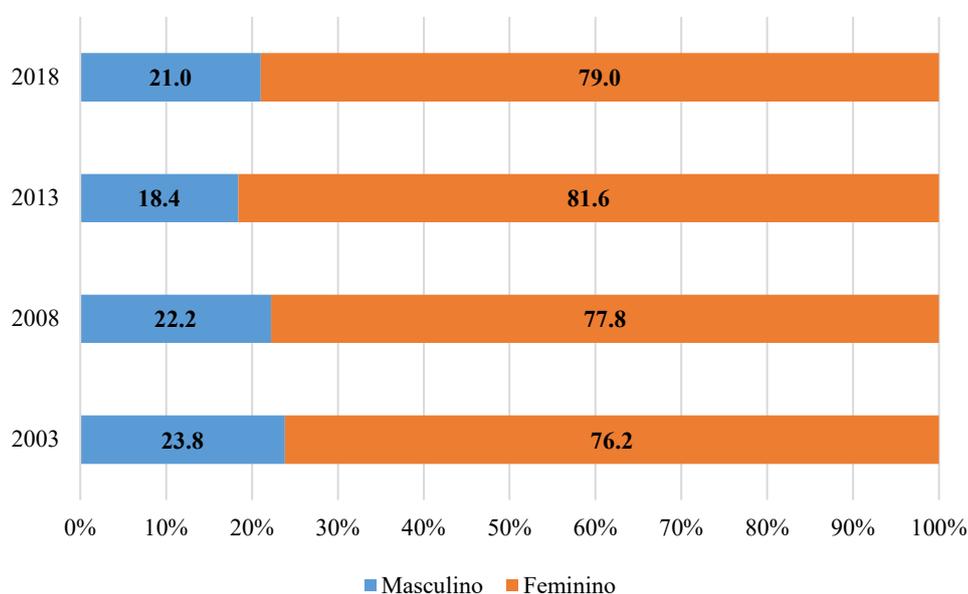
In 2009, a year after the termination of her apprenticeship contract, Naiara managed to enter the job market again, this time in a call center. In the year she was unemployed, she tried to make ends meet with what little savings she had made while still working. The financial conditions of her electrician father, "although not the best", allowed her to continue her studies and hand in her resumé, even though she was unemployed. However, the financial dependence added to the unemployed status created a very embarrassing situation for her. "It was a challenge for me... I tried to find an internship right in my field. After many attempts, I managed to find a job at the call center... There, I worked like crazy, from Monday to Monday, with one day-off in the month, but here is the catch: I earned less than R\$ 250.00" (Leidze, 2010).

What do these three work paths tell us? These are young people who re-entered the job market after their first work experiences as apprentices, full of dreams, disappointments and instability. Now, they are workers registered by the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), but with low wages and extreme work routines. However, it is characterized as a formal job, as it guarantees the minimum of rights to workers, especially female workers, since the universe is predominantly female.

## Telemarketing and gender relations

Regarding the participation of employees as telemarketers according to gender in the RMS, it is possible to observe that Ana Paula, Naiara and Leidze constitute a dominant percentage of the workforce in call centers. As shown in Graph 1, more than 70% of employees in this activity are female, a trend that did not change in the analyzed period.

**Graph 1. Evolution of the participation of the formal employment of telemarketers by gender. RMS, 2003, 2008, 2013 e 2018.**



Source: MTE, 2010  
Key: Male – Female

Research by Segnini (2001) on gender relations and the rationalization of work in remote care services helps to understand how social sex relations are configured in predominantly female work niches. For the author, “feminization in the related work is one of the expressions of its rationalization, in the sense that it increases its efficiency and reduces costs” (Segnini, 2001, p. 181).

Like Segnini, Danièle Kergoat (2001) also highlights that social sex relations establish links with social relations as both are permeated by contradictions and challenges. In this sense, it establishes segregations and valuations that end up determining a value for male work that is

different from that of women, not only in terms of remuneration, but also of social recognition of the task and profession.

However, why does the telemarketing occupation privilege the massive hiring of females? The answers found by Venco (2006) for this question were often related to the woman's qualities as they are socially constructed, such as patience, the ability to listen, finesse in dealing with clients, and, finally, the conclusion that everybody, men and women, prefer to talk on the phone with a woman. In other words, they all attribute the professional qualification of women to tacit attributes, which configures a clear form of devaluation of the work carried out.

Why not men? Analyses carried out within the scope of social sex relations, such as those of Danièle Kergoat, Helena Hirata and Liliana Segnini, among others, trace a common aspect when inquiring about the behavioral differences between women and men reflected in production relations: they are not educated in the family and in society to submit or to obey, and these aspects do not meet the principles of a Taylorist work organization for the service sector, as analyzed by Hirata (2002):

...rationalization is contradictory to the very essence of the work demanded, for which there is no one best way... and neither Taylorist techniques nor automation, as attempts to control all the parameters that intervene in production and in the process of work may succeed in this case. Although the Taylorist organization is an obstacle to automation, these posts refractory to Taylorism can also be an obstacle to automation.  
(p. 31)

Thus, in the light of this conception, the telemarketing work points out that it is essential to incorporate women, especially young people, in order to achieve higher levels of productivity, with a view to mobilizing their "tacit skills", as evidenced earlier, without which the simple standardization and control of behaviors are not enough to achieve the new regime of accumulation: "flexible accumulation" (Harvey, 1992).

On the one hand, if we can say that call centers predominantly incorporate the workforce of young women, research by Venco (2006) points out that other segments are added to the sector on the other hand. This is the case of men and women who do not meet the aesthetic ideals prevailing in consumer society, such as homosexuals and transsexuals, blacks,

obese and disabled people - segments of the population that commonly suffer discrimination in other sectors of the economy, especially in the direct provision of services to customers.

However, this phenomenon that occurs in call centers, apparently inclusive, can mean, still according to the author, “the emergence of a segment of the labor market that brings the possibility of inclusion, via formal employment, but whose activity is carried out at a distance and, therefore, reiterates the barriers based on racial, aesthetic or sexual prejudice created in civilization” (Venco, 2006, p. 74).

In addition to these specificities presented here regarding the telemarketing sector, another point revealed through the three work paths analyzed were the working conditions and pressures in which Ana Paula, Leidze and Naiara are inscribed because, despite the efforts to maintain the jobs and reach the goals, they constantly returned to the pressures for production, continually repeating their supervisors’ speech: “I need to reach the goal this month”.

## **The intensification of telemarketing work**

Ana Paula reports that her salary “was very good” when she joined the company, earning a monthly commission of R\$ 800.00. However, this amount was never reached again, with the amount of R\$ 190.00 being the most common, since the goals to be achieved are “absurd” and “the pressure is overwhelming”, as the young frowning woman revealed. In these cases, adopted by supervisors, disciplining power is used within work relationships at all times. They are yelled at with the purpose of “motivating” them to work. For the young woman, they are configured as “constraints”. In addition to the psychological pressure reported by Ana Paula, other mechanisms of control and penalties are adopted, which make it difficult for her to “hit the goals”, in her opinion.

*For example, there is also the delay issue. If you are late, you lose “RV”; if you show a sick leave, you lose “RV”; if you receive a quality score of zero on a call, which is monitored... For any failure, you lose the commission, so there are many things that make you lose it, and not earn. I receive a salary, but I have to reach the goals. If I don't hit the monthly sale goals for them, you don't earn. Let's put it this way: the goal is 130 sales, but you sold 129, so it's no use. You won't earn any money, and if you have a sick leave, your commission is deducted. I have already lost money at the company because I was sick and had to stay at home for five days. I showed the sick leave and reached the goal, but I still lost sixty percent in the RV<sup>16</sup>. (Ana Paula, 2009)*

In a study carried out by Pena, Cardim and Araújo (2011), aiming to understand the illness process caused by Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI), and its relationship with the management strategies associated with new technologies, the authors emphasize that the ten companies studied in the capital of Bahia perform direct managerial monitoring, analogous to the “panoptic”, described by Foucault as a mechanism of surveillance and disciplinary control. In the work environments analyzed by the researchers, there was an architectural structure that allowed direct surveillance of each work area by the team supervisor, as well as by the manager, who had an overview of the entire working room. In addition to these control strategies, other indirect acts were perceived, such as digital recording of dialogues, and obstacles to the formation of friend groups among operators, both inside and outside the company. For example, avoiding joint parties to make it difficult to form bonds of solidarity between the operators themselves. “Times are strictly controlled, using the technical apparatus itself as a means to obtain the values necessary to control the established criteria” (Pena, Cardim & Araújo, 2011, p. 138).

The lack of the right to being sick, presented by Ana Paula, explains the anguish of all the young women surveyed, since it has a close relationship with how much they will earn at the end of each month. “It is like walking in the dark,” said Ana Paula. “Let’s say you ended up working all month to reach your goal. Suddenly, you get sick on the twenty-ninth day of the month and have to go to the emergency department of any public hospital. Then, you lose a

<sup>16</sup> The “RV” expressed by the young woman is a variable that increases the telemarketers’ salary.

portion of what you had sold”. What can be seen is a set of control mechanisms so that workers are always at their posts working to generate capital at any price.

In this process of controlling time and the production process, technology is an essential ally. The supervisor’s computerized system indicates the situation of each team member, informing about the time the workers arrived at the company, their breaks and calls in progress, how many calls they made a day, and, therefore, what their daily production was. This monitoring is facilitated by the individual introjection of control, resulting from the various forms of control practiced: the permanent issuance of productivity reports, goals as salary or career promotion determinants, and, above all, the fear of losing formal employment, often exploited by supervision, given the high unemployment rates, particularly among young people, the predominant age group in the sector, as highlighted by Venco (2006).

The constant ability to “know how to work under pressure”, typical of Ana Paula, Naiara and Leidze, reiterates the very description of occupation in the Brazilian Classification of Occupation (CBO) made by the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MTE, 2002), which demarcates visible traits of the work severity experienced by call center workers. According to the MTE (2002), in its CBO, the function of telemarketers is to establish contacts, exclusively via telephone, with users and customers, aiming at making sales, solving problems, providing technical support, carrying out real-time surveys or registration. In carrying out these activities, they must always follow “planned and controlled scripts to capture, retain or recover customers” (MTE, 2002, Telemarketers and the like).

As personal skills, the CBO (MTE, 2002) highlights: vocal quality, clarity of diction, oral expression ability, oral comprehension (knowing how to listen), ability to understand and write, record information accurately, patience, self-control, power of persuasion, empathy, agility in service and in typing. In addition, it is necessary to be able to manage conflicts and be objective when making decisions, since, in many cases, *work is under pressure*.

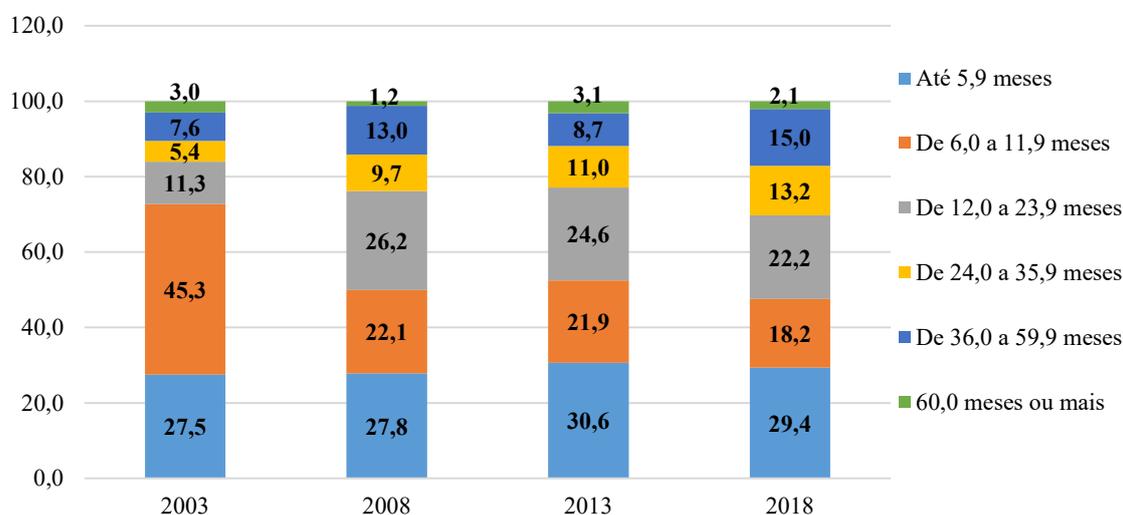
However, although the ability to manage conflicts is described in the CBO (MTE, 2002) as one of the competences necessary for the telemarketing operator, the pressure to achieve

goals and the direct performance of supervision in production control are negative elements in the field that drive the young people surveyed daily to wanting another job. Not just any job, but a “better job”, as Leidze highlighted when expressing their interest in another professional activity.

## Work paths and their transitory nature

Observing the data from Rais in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador, in Graph 2, it can be seen that the predominance of the worker's permanence in telemarketing is approximately six months for the age group between 18 and 29 years old. This result corroborates the hypothesis that there is no professionalization process in the job.

**Graph 2. Evolution of the share of formal employment of telemarketers by length of employment (in months). RMS, 2003, 2008, 2013 e 2018**



Source: MTE, 2010

Key: Until 5.9 months – From 6 to 11.9 months  
From 12 to 23.9 months – From 24 to 35.9 months  
From 36 to 59.9 months – 60 months or more

When crossing the turnover data presented in the graph with the type of employment relationship present in the work relationships at call centers, it is possible to observe the

transitory nature not resulting from the predominance of fixed-term contracts, at least not in the RMS, since contracts prevail workers for an indefinite period, reaching 14,431 in 2018, that is, 98% of the total number of established employment relationships. Thus, it is notorious that the character of temporary employment assumed for the telemarketer job does not come from the contractual condition, but from the high rate of dismissal on the initiative of employees or layoffs.

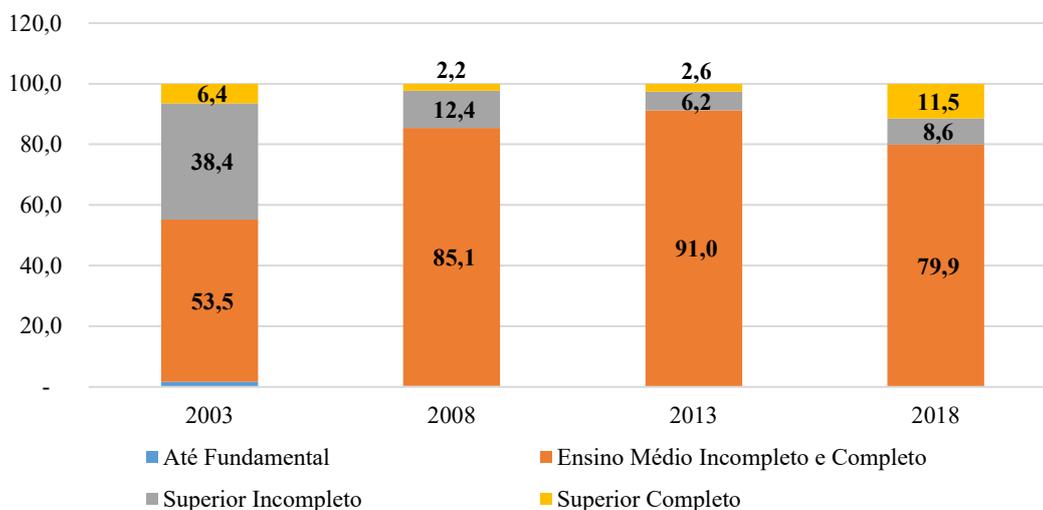
For the young women interviewed, being a telemarketer is a circumstance, not a career option. They see it as the transitory, the interim, as it constitutes one of the few viable possibilities for the continuity and/or resumption of studies to then work in another area, preferably related to academic training, as Leidze reiterates, “Sincerely and honestly, I am in the telemarketing field, despite everything, because there is no other way. I have not found anything better. I have to finish my college course, and this is it...” (Leidze, 2010).

The young woman’s narrative informs that “even in the face of everything” and “the psychological pressures” experienced within work relationships, she continues to work at the call center because she needs to survive. Therefore, work assumes a uniquely instrumental meaning: a means of survival and continuity of studies. For Naiara, in addition to being the only way to guarantee the continuity of her studies, it is also a means of investing in her future professional project, “Actually, I want to do an internship in my field. I know that paid internship is complicated, so, even though I earn less than R\$ 300, I am saving a bit every month, because when something comes up in my field, and it is not paid, I can assume it and survive during that time” (Naiara, 2011).

Naiara’s and Leidze’s testimonies also direct the analysis to the contingent of young people working at call centers who have concluded High School and are attending university. Analyzing the data on the percentage of employees as telemarketers according to the educational level in the RMS, presented in Graph 3, the growth in the participation of employees with complete and incomplete secondary education and the significant reduction of employees with incomplete higher education stands out. These values also reiterate the national trend in the

occupation of telemarketing: an increase in the participation of employees with secondary education and a decrease in the participation of workers with complete and incomplete higher education<sup>17</sup>.

**Graph 3. Evolution of the share of formal employment of telemarketers aged between 18 and 29 by schooling years. RMS, 2003, 2008, 2013 e 2018**



Source: MTE, 2010

Key: Only Elementary School – Complete and Incomplete High School Education  
Incomplete Higher Education – Complete Higher Education

Although it is not possible to cross the data of telemarketing employees with incomplete higher education with their respective courses and higher education modalities, it is possible to infer that these workers, predominantly young and female, are mostly paying for their higher education courses at private institutions, in modalities of lesser social value, such as teacher-training courses<sup>18</sup>, and with a strong possibility of being at a distance in the current conjuncture, as is the case of Leidze. This situation can generate two distinct and simultaneous movements: on the one hand, if they submit to psychological pressures and the intense pace of work because they need employment to guarantee survival conditions and pay for higher education expenses,

<sup>17</sup> In 2003, 69.9% of Brazilian telemarketers had complete and/or incomplete High School education, and in 2018, 79%. With higher education completed, there was a percentage of 18.4% in 2003, reducing to 8.6% in 2018.

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that the institution that carries out the degree is also a credential of social value.

leaving this job, whether during or after concluding their higher education, does not represent a guarantee of better employment on the other hand.

## Final considerations

Whether in the light of the expanded statistical data analyzed or through the singular trajectories researched, the paths analyzed indicate that the entry of young people into the labor market occurs through provisional insertions in a precarious and difficult way. In other words, by work itineraries marked by long working hours and low wages. The condition of “permanent interim” (Castel, 1998) is predominantly experienced along these paths. Young people who go from job to job in the hope of stability and better working conditions. In addition to constituting the most disadvantaged age group by restrictive employment conditions, they also reproduce in themselves the inequalities of gender and race/color present within the Brazilian working youth itself.

Among the various forms for these young people to enter the labor market, two were strongly present in the set of paths analyzed, reflecting the similarities, singularities and contradictions of this path. Thus, for the analysis of this work, two forms of labor insertion that constitute the work paths of the youth group studied were privileged: the first job through the Apprenticeship Law and the telemarketing job.

For some young people surveyed, the apprenticeship meant the possible way of accessing their first job. For most, it was more than a possibility of having a job: it meant the prospect of building a career path in the company they worked at. However, the apprentices’ paths were notably marked by the underutilization of the youth workforce, the devaluation of their productive capacities, and the race/ethnicity and gender prejudice within labor relations.

At the end of 2000, Rais had a contingent of 7,423 apprentices. In the last month of 2018, they represented 431,806 active learning contracts. Thus, although the numbers indicate a progressive growth in the number of young people as apprentices in Brazil, the singular paths analyzed inform trends in this type of insertion, with fear constituting a structuring element. Daily, young people live a work traffic marked by the uncertainty of employment and, therefore, their paths are guided by an uncertain tomorrow. Not only were young people unable to

establish a professional career within the company at which they were placed, but also did not remain in the apprenticeship for two years, as required by law.

When we analyze telemarketing work paths, the quantitative data presented here indicate that the sector has been characterized as a gateway for an important portion of young Brazilian workers. It is a predominantly female occupation, with complete/incomplete High School education and a high turnover.

The work paths of the young people enrolled in telemarketing, in addition to reiterating what Rais data elucidate, also inform that the central issue is not to find the best possible employment, but rather finding a job, whatever it may be, given the scarcity of employment and the barriers historically imposed on young people in accessing the desired job. Consequently, it is assumed that telemarketing work has an instrumental character for the young people surveyed, one that enables material conditions for survival, whether for themselves or their family group.

For telemarketers, work at the call center is configured as a possible locus of occupation, being protected and registered in the portfolio, even if it is marked by high levels of psychological pressure and intense work rhythm. However, in this particular case, it does not mean necessarily better working conditions and wages.

The most contradictory aspect of these two insertion processes is that the young people in this research believe in changing their social position through work and, above all, constantly (re)affirm the centrality of work in their lives even in the face of increasing difficulties in finding a job, of temporary insertions, precarious jobs, low wages and the intensification of work taken to the extreme.

Finally, the analyzed paths, either from training or work, inform how much they are interdependent, particularly dealing with low-income young people. In 2005, Emir Sader provoked the analysis of this relationship in the preface to the work of Isteván Mészáros, *Educação para além do capital*, asking:

Tell me where work is in a kind of society and I will tell you where education is. In a capital society, education and work are subordinated to this dynamic, just as in a society in which work is universalized: a society in which everyone becomes a worker. Only then will education be universalized. (Sader, 2005, p. 17)

Therefore, the training paths constructed by the young people surveyed, almost concomitantly with their work paths, contributed to the fact that flexible forms of employment constitute a gateway to the exercise of a paid activity for a growing number of young people. However, the great transformation that has occurred in recent years lies in the fact that both precarious jobs and new forms of underemployment, such as apprentices and telemarketers, are less and less a bridge that leads to job stability. For many young people, they ceased to be a punctual biographical event and became a way of life.

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