

Comment on the papers by Carles Muntaner and Graça Druck
 Comentário sobre os artigos de Carles Muntaner e Graça Druck
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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/0102-311XCO050516>

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In search of conceptual precision in the phenomenon of work precarization

The articles in this section address a common theme – precarization of work both around the world and specifically in Brazil – but they have different objects and objectives, with diverse contents. Carles Muntaner's article clearly aims to analyze a concept or category to define “precarious employment”, while my article deals with outsourcing in Brazil and its impacts on working and health conditions for workers, claiming the inseparability between outsourcing and precarization. I do not intend to present a conceptual discussion of precarization or precariousness, which I have discussed elsewhere ¹.

Stimulated by Muntaner's article, I wish to offer some brief remarks concerning the theoretical debate on precarization or precariousness, which I have taken as a reference in my empirical studies.

First, it is necessary to establish a conceptual difference between precariousness and precarization, not common in studies on the issue, which generally confuse the two. I contend that precariousness has been inherent to capitalism since its early days, as part of the capital-labor relationship with workers' exploitation and subordination. Yet precariousness is also historical, undergoing metamorphosis as the result of clashes between social classes, reshaping itself across time and space. Meanwhile, precarization should be understood as a process, as a movement, taking different shapes, the central idea of which is social regression, which affects the working class as whole, although unequally. Without a doubt there is a hierarchy to precarization, as shown by the case of outsourced workers, whose condition is more precarious than that of other workers.

Second, examining the transformations in work in recent decades, as mentioned by Muntaner, it is possible to identify a process of precarization of work that is global, although differing in its national configurations. In my opinion, one can hardly claim that what is precarious

in France may not be precarious in Brazil. What one can say is that precarization differs in degree according to each country's historical processes. I would add that it differs more on the basis of countries' past history than on their present circumstances. This, because the current transformations in capitalism, through the hegemonic globalization induced by financial capital, by the predominance of neoliberal and industrial restructuring, assume a global character, in which the central dynamic of flexible accumulation or flexible capitalism is the precarization of work.

Third, I contend that the current precarization of work is social and not “individual or psychological”. I have used the term “social precarization of work”, drawing on French authors such as Robert Castel ¹, Annie Thebaud-Mony, and Beatrice Appay ². I explain its social character based on the following: (a) precarization is a strategy for capital's domination at a specific historical moment, combining the crisis of Fordism and the crisis of social welfare states, financialization of the economy, neoliberal policies, and productive restructuring, forming a new regime of flexible accumulation; (b) it is ubiquitous, breaking with certain dualities like excluded/included, employed/unemployed, formal/informal, that is, there is a process of precarization that spreads to all regions and to all different segments of workers, although hierarchically; (c) these transformations have an impact on all other dimensions of social life: family, school, leisure, curtailing access to public goods, especially health and education; (d) precarization is expressed not only in the sphere of the work market (contracts, job positions, wage levels), but in all fields, e.g., work organization and management policies, working and health conditions, forms of resistance, and the state's role ³.

Finally, I agree with Muntaner that one cannot choose one or another indicator to define “precarious employment”. In addition, I contend that precarization, as a multifaceted social process, cannot be equated with precarious employment, if the latter is defined on the basis of the contractual format. The latter is only one form of precarization, along with management patterns and organization of work – which have led to extremely precarious conditions through the intensification of work (imposition of unreachable targets, increasing the workday, multitasking, etc.) – backed by management through fear, abuse of power through moral harassment, and the discrimination created by outsourcing; unsafe and unhealthy workplace conditions – the result of management standards that disregard essential

training, information on risks, collective preventive measures, etc., in pursuit of higher productivity at any cost, including loss of life, leading to high work-related accident rates and illness; unemployment and the constant threat of loss of jobs, leading to isolation, loss of rootedness, ties, belonging, and a collective identity, negatively affecting class solidarity, undermined by brutal competition among workers themselves;

weakening trade union organization and workers' struggles and representation, resulting from their heterogeneity and division, with trade union fragmentation created mainly by outsourcing; and trampling labor rights through labor legislation reforms that question state regulation in the defense of neoliberal principles and flexibilization as an inexorable process of modernity in the age of globalization³.

1. Castel R. *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale. Une chronique du salariat*. Paris: Fayard; 1995.
2. Appay B, Thébaud-Mony A. *Précarisation sociale, travail et santé*. Paris: IRESCO; 1997.

3. Druck G. *Precarização social do trabalho*. In: Ivo A, coordenadora. *Dicionário temático desenvolvimento e questão social*. São Paulo: Annablume; 2013.