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# The New Precarization of Work: a Conceptual Map

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## Abstract

The new precarization of work, flexible precarization, presents changes and significant new elements within the context of precarious work. As a historical manifestation, it has gradually been included within structural-economic and institutional-political reforms. This paper aims to propose a conceptual map of the new precarization of work. The conceptual map is a critical tool for developing a scientific investigation and links concepts, context, and theoretical influences to promote the advancement of research in the field of the object studied. Three dimensions embodied the proposed map: the context, synthesized in the rise of neoliberalism, in the hegemony of the financial sector, in productive restructuring, and in economic globalization; flexible practices, in the condition of manifestations and causalities of the social arrangements, exposed in terms of the naturalization of unemployment, economic fatalism, the emptying of the State, the sanctity of contracts, deregulation, work intensification, the capture of *savoir faire*, decentralization and deterritorialization of productive units, technocratic manipulations, the weakening of the unions, part-time or temporary work, outsourcing, and despecialization; and the categories, relational expressions identified as flexible capitalism, flexible business, flexibility (flexible regulation), social precarization, and the movement from formal to real subsumption. Providing a synthesized image that seeks to critically apprehend the concreteness of the real, the map can be used as a script for new research and to contribute to critiques in the field of organizational studies.

**Keywords:** work precarization; flexible precarization; conceptual map; neoliberalism; flexible capitalism.

## Introduction

The structural-economic and institutional-political innovations and reforms carried out in the 1970s and 1980s directly impacted the world of work, resulting in new forms of precarization of working conditions and of the worker's life. According to Antunes (2018), after the long period of growth of the capitalist economy between the end of the war and 1970s, there began a phase of crisis of the accumulation pattern based on the Taylorism/Fordism binomial, whose deep determination lies in the structure of the system of capital.

It was in that phase, due to the obstacles imposed on the capitalist accumulation process, that a set of practices linking new and old forms of exploiting the workforce redesigned the international division of labor (Antunes, 2018). Consequently, the so-called Toyotism – a form of productive arrangement based on the flexibility of processes – achieved ideological and structuring power over the productive restructuring complex of capital. This fact made flexibility a universal objective category in the wave of economic globalization<sup>1</sup> and financialization (Alves, 2000; Antunes, 2009a, 2018).

Despite these changes having been operated within the relations and organization of production/labor, the process of restructuring the productive arrangements was embedded in a context of deeper transformations that involved the entire societal arrangement. That context is linked to the response of capital in the face of the crises of the Fordist accumulation regime – based on the expansion of productive forces in core capitalist countries after the Second World War – and of the State of Social Wellbeing. That created a profound change in the patterns of competition and reordering of productive forces and of national States. That change involved the use of new technologies and new ways of organizing and controlling labor (Harvey, 1992, 2014; Hobsbawm, 2015).

In light of that context, the regulation of work came to be transferred from the social arena to the private one, resulting in an increase in worker informality, in social inequality, and in the destruction of social safety nets for workers. Flexibility was embedded in that scenario, characterized as enabling reduced employment and an increase in the mobility of personnel by overcoming situations of institutional controls. Its main linkage modalities are temporary work, part-time work, outsourcing, and the temporarily suspension of contracts, resulting in a general context of work precarization (D'Arísbo, Boff, Oltramani, & Salvagni, 2018; Faria & Kremer, 2004).

Precarious work is not a new reality, but rather the result of a socio-structural condition that turns the workforce into merchandise. Therefore, precarious work is intrinsic to the subsumption of labor to capital, while precarization is a process of the class struggle and of the correlation of forces between capital and labor, located in a particular historical dimension (F. Martins & Lima, 2016; Pereira, Tassigny, & Bizarria, 2017).

Although work precarization is not a new phenomenon, there is, however, a new precarization process. That new precarization is linked to the alterations caused by the neoliberal paradigm, which undermined the foundations of the State of Social Wellbeing through the emptying

of the State and the flexibilization of the labor market, among other policies (Antunes, 2018; Mészáros, 2007; Pochmann, 2009; Quinlan, 2012). That new precarization process involves flexibility as a core component (Antunes, 2009a, 2009b, 2018; Harvey, 1992, 2014; Mészáros, 2007).

According to Antunes (2018), the current global economy is under the command and hegemony of financial capital, which demands the increasing flexibilization of work contracts. That makes outsourcing the core management modality of corporate strategies, hiding the real labor relations in flexible contract relationships, for a specific period, between companies. According to Pereira et al. (2017), the neoliberal program imposes a deregulatory State policy in a global environment and is characterized by the outsourcing of work contracts, new technologies, and subcontracting.

According to Standing (2014), the current precarized working class is the first, within modern capitalism, in which the general rule is that the worker has a higher level of training than required by the work they perform. Villen (2017), in turn, shows that currently professions considered as “privileged” or “shielded,” that is, functions that demand extensive training, also suffer from the precarization process. Similarly, Mészáros (2005) shows that there is a structural crisis of the capitalist system – whose genesis dates back to the end of the 1960s and start of the 1970s – inaugurating a period in which not only workers without training, but also a large number of highly qualified workers, cannot find work. For that, according to the author, even decades later, the apologists for the system do not offer solutions, but only empty discourses and repeated promises.

There is a strong relationship between precariousness – insecure and irregular jobs that include questions linked to hours worked or the income received by the workers, casual work, short-term or temporary contracts, self-employed workers, subcontracted workers, immigrants<sup>2</sup>, clandestine workers, distance workers, or domestic workers – and the condition of class (Estanque, 2014; Quinlan, 2012). Therefore, when we talk about work precarization, we should make it clear that the precarization is, obviously, directly linked to the working class (Estanque, 2014).

Along these lines, it is important to highlight that the entire precarization process, regardless of how excluding it can be, should be understood based on the dialectic logic of exclusion/inclusion, since it composes the totality of the capitalist society, therefore being a functional part of its organic system. Thus, despite the reasonably recent historical localization of the work precarization process linked to the neoliberal hegemony and to the new practices derived from the transformations in productive relationships, the **new** work precarization is, as Alves (2000) highlights, the result of a structural socio-historical and long-lasting process of capitalist accumulation in which the globalization of capital has sought to accelerate the general law of accumulation, weakening the world of work and the class perspective.

Considering the changes occurring in the world of work and the new precarization process derived from the alterations in the productive arrangements, this article aims to propose a conceptual map of the new work precarization. The conceptual map is a critical tool for developing a scientific investigation that is warranted for a future construction of a conceptual framework of the work precarization process embedded in the discussions of the field of organizational studies. The conceptual framework is a system of concepts, affirmations, expectations, beliefs, and theories that give support and information for research, and it should not only originate from a literature

review. As a critical tool, it should highlight the ontological and epistemological positioning of the research.

As a visual device, a conceptual map can present the elements of the theory and the development of the phenomenon that is being studied. The objective of the elaboration of a conceptual map is to condense the concepts, context, and theoretical influences of the topic studied to advance the research. In this sense, this object is not an end in itself, but rather an attempt to highlight connections presented in the research (Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

After this introduction, this paper engages in a discussion with respect to the new work precarization, seeking to situate it historically, emphasizing its unique characteristics. Next, it elaborates a theoretical presentation of the conceptual map, highlighting its importance for advancing the research, the moment at which the conceptual map of the new work precarization is included, the discussions, and the concluding remarks.

## **The “new” precarization of work or “flexible” precarization**

The essence of the capitalist system – despite it having undergone significant transformations in its historical development – lies in the appropriation of labor by capital, independently of which forms appear to have the capital-labor relationship (Druck, 2011).

According to Antunes (2018), precarization is a process resulting from the class struggle and capacity for resistance of the working class, and it can be both increased and reduced through struggles against the regime of labor exploitation. In turn, Faria and Kremer (2004) argue that “work precarization is understood as the process that involves the degradation of work and employment conditions” (p. 10). For Franco, Druck, and Seligmann-Silva (2010), work precarization is a set of “domination processes that mix insecurity, uncertainty, subjection, competition, and the proliferation of mistrust and of individualism, besides the hijacking of time and of subjectivity (p. 31).

Work precarization is not a new phenomenon – the consequence of alterations in the labor market in recent decades – but rather it has been a generalized characteristic of the labor markets since the first Industrial Revolution. That is, it is a structural part of the capital/labor relationship, which had only a brief space of protection in the roughly 30-year period after the Second World War in countries with an advanced economy, coinciding with the State of Social Wellbeing<sup>3</sup>.

Precariousness is, therefore, the result of a socio-structural condition that turns the workforce into merchandise. It is inherent to the mode of capitalist production and the result of the subsumption of labor to capital. In turn, precarization is a process of the class struggle and of the correlation of forces between capital and labor, located in a particular historical dimension (F. Martins & Lima, 2016; Mészáros, 2007; Pereira et al., 2017; Quinlan, 2012).

According to A. Silva and Freitas (2016), the new precarization is associated with the productive restructuring that began in the 1970s, enabled by the technological evolution. For Antunes (2018), that movement led to us entering into a new era of work precarization, a structural precarization created by neoliberalism, which seeks to annihilate social rights. It warrants mentioning, however, as Druck (2011) argues, that work precarization is a phenomenon that is at the same time old and new, different and equal – which does not allow for airy conclusions about

some type of rupture – based on a clear process of social metamorphosis in which there is, currently, hegemony of the financial sector that encompasses all fields of social life, thus providing content to a new mode of work given by the insecurity, fragmentation, and destitution of the social content of labor.

According to Mészáros (2007), the new work precarization is given by deregulation and by flexibility, in which the latter is a myth that develops autonomy in relation to people and determines the subjects' behavior. Antunes (2018) reinforces that “flexibilization is expressed in the drastic reduction of the boundaries between work activity and the space of private life, in the disassembling of labor legislation, in the different forms of hiring the workforce, and in its denied expression, structural unemployment” (p. 41). In turn, Stiglitz (2012) considers flexibility to be a euphemism for precarious work. In addition, Antunes (2009a, 2018), Alves (2000), and Harvey (1992, 2014) consider the flexibility category to be a founder and structurer of the new forms of precarization in the world of work. In light of that, the reason Mészáros (2007) calls this process “flexible precarization” becomes evident.

Indeed, Antunes (2009a) and Faria and Kremer (2004) argue that the precarious work – unstable, informal, outsourced, subcontracted – that was previously associated with the jobs carried out at the margins of the social fabric and that occur through the degradation of the work and employment conditions of the formal worker, has become the dominant relationship of the other workers embedded in the various productive chains. According to Antunes and Alves (2004), among the precarized workers, deprived of rights and stability, alienation/estrangement takes on a more intensified and brutalized form, based on the loss of the humanity dimension, given by separation from the unit that is found in working society.

Thus, Pereira et al. (2017) assert that we live in the era of precarization, marked by the profound exploitation of the worker, in which there is a search to break the centrality of labor, causing the fraying of social bonds. For Wolff (2014), the current public policies of the national States are instrumentalized so that the working class sustains the capitalist accumulation at a global level, reiterating the work precarization process. In turn, Druck (2016) states that the new work precarization is a strategy of capital to dominate the working class.

Moreover, Mészáros (2007) states that by maintaining its inexorable drive for self-expansion, capital creates a system of dynamic and destructive socioenvironmental control, under the guise of globalization, which cruelly eliminates most of the humanity from the work process. The same author, in another paper, warns us of the attempt of a discourse that seeks to call unemployment “structural,” meaning it is not a “problem,” but something “inevitable” – the same fatality warned by Bourdieu (1998) — a “universal consequence of the benefit of technological advancement” (Mészáros, 2005, p. 33). Consequently, as it is **natural**, this destructive and unsustainable structure does not enable the establishment of a viable alternative for another reproductive social order. Thus, the discourse of the voices in the service of capital seeks to naturalize the existing reproductive structure with the argument that this is managed by **neutral** technical/economic devices supporting the flexible forms (Mészáros, 2005).

Therefore, in sum, we can affirm that, although precarization is linked to the structural crisis of capital accumulation – a perennially decreasing movement of its reproduction rates – there is a

new precarization process underway, which is the result of the new arrangement of the capitalist accumulation regime and of the emptying of the national States.

In light of the above, the following question arises: what is **new** in the flexible work precarization? What elements, categories, context, and social practices give it form so as to allow a condensed visualization of an image/framework, thus providing a general representation of the topic that can contribute to understanding the structure of its underlying relationships?

Below, we list its main characteristics.

1. A recent historical milestone:

The period that covers the end of the Second World War up to the 1970s was marked by Keynesian policies – State participation in the economy, full employment policies, and social and economic growth policies, among others, primarily in the core capitalist countries – nationally or internationally coordinated. The crisis of the 1970s – the combination of rising unemployment and spiraling inflation, derived from the capitalist accumulation crisis that affected the entire world – emptied those policies and national States lost the protagonism that had characterized them in the State/society/market relationship. The model was undermined by economic globalization, which placed all, except the USA, under the domination of the **global market**. In that period there was major support for ultraliberal trends, culminating in the Nobel Prize for Friedrich Hayek in 1974 and Milton Friedman in 1976. The milestone in the path of the transformation of ultraliberal thinking into political and economic doctrine was recorded in 1978 and 1980, with the revolutionary rupture point in the social and economic history of the world, led by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher (Harvey, 2014; Hobsbawm, 2015).

Stiglitz (2012) argues that the argument that the end of the Soviet Union<sup>4</sup> marked the triumph of the market economy is incorrect. Even developed economy countries rejected the doctrine of self-regulated markets, that is, the free-market ideology of Reagan/Thatcher, and they used **neo-democratic** or **neo-labor** policies. According to the author, the most convincing interpretation is that the industrialized countries were not able to impose free-market policies on the poor countries during the Cold War, as they ran the risk, if those policies excessively undermined the developing countries, of them being courted by the other bloc. With the fall of the Berlin wall, the alternative for poor countries also fell, making it possible for rich countries to impose those risky doctrines with impunity.

In addition, for Harvey (2014), the building of consent – or of a common meaning in the Gramscian sense – on the acceptance of neoliberal values broadly resided, in many cases, in the use of military force, in the case of Chile, or financial force, such as the IMF operations in countries such as the Philippines and Mozambique. Also according to Harvey (2014), empty rhetorical devices were also invoked that hid political strategies, for example the use of the word **freedom**, which has the strength to justify any act. In other cases cultural and traditional values were used, such as the belief in God or the position of women in society, as well as fears: of communists, of foreigners, of immigrants, or of any person identified as **the other**.

According to Harvey (2014), “in so far as it values market exchange as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action, and substituting all previously held beliefs, neoliberalism emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace” (p. 13). Based on that idea, a series of chaotic backward and forward neoliberalization<sup>6,7</sup> experiments were

conducted in the capitalist world, which only in the 1990s found convergence with the emergence of a new related orthodox known as the **Washington Consensus**.

According to Stiglitz (2012), the Washington Consensus emphasizes that State interventions are a source of problem, and the solution is the total liberalization of the economy. However, Stiglitz (2012), anchored in Polanyi (2012), states that a totally self-regulated market is a myth: this is merely a doctrine defended by believers in the market, using an ideology that distorts the nature of social transformations. Along the same lines, Bourdieu (1997) highlights that the members of the Chicago School, primarily Milton Friedman, pulled out all the stops to rehabilitate the market so that it played the role of a **clever myth**, identifying it with freedom and making it appear that economic freedom was a condition of political freedom.

Thus, neoliberalism sustains that social wellbeing is achieved when the reach and frequency of transactions are maximized, seeking to fit all human actions into the market domain. As Stiglitz (2012) indicated well, the Washington Consensus defends the **sanctity of contracts** against all and any insolvency; however, it unscrupulously profanes something more sacred, the **social contract**. As an example, the author shows that the social experiment conducted in Russia, in the opening up of the markets, brought disastrous results. Not only did the promised bonanza not occur, but the economy shrunk to almost half and the proportion of poor people increased from 2% to 50%. What the opening up did was create a new cast of oligarchs.

According to Stiglitz (2012), the rapid transformation imposed on society destroyed old mechanisms without new ones being designed. Something similar occurred in the liberalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is something that the defenders of the Washington Consensus, a modern version of the liberal orthodox, forgot or pretended to forget. In the same sense, Pochmann (2009) reinforces that the lessons were unlearned by the formulators of public policies when considering the market as something that floats above society, a maximum doctrine of the neoliberal discourse.

For Antunes (2009a), the agenda of the neoliberal project contemplates the deregulation of labor relations and the broad flexibilization of the labor market, resulting in the weakening and loss of workers' social rights. For A. Silva and Freitas (2016), there was a reduction in regular employment in favor of flexible employment (part-time, temporary, or subcontracted), across the whole world. However, in underdeveloped countries, these changes were more violent, as those countries have less social protection. In this sense, Pochmann (2009) shows evidence of the connection between the growth of poverty and the precarious work and social inequality derived from the neoliberal answer that reduced the State of Social Wellbeing.

Mészáros (2005) argues that current capitalism is characterized by a period of structural crisis, and not merely a cyclical one as in previous phases, which has more profound implications for our era and for the future. Indeed, neoliberalism is the constitutive political component of the logic of the new precarization of labor relationship. It is imposed as a policy of the State that emerges with global capitalism (Pereira et al., 2017).

The neoliberal program is characterized by the intensification of global economic integration, outsourcing of part of the population, new work technologies, and subcontracting to reduce worker's pay (F. Martins & Lima, 2016). For Wolf (2014) and F. Martins and Lima (2016), the neoliberal policies carried out from the 1990s onward changed the paradigm of labor relations, the

result of the intense mobility of big capital, using the workforce of peripheral, cheaper, and more docile countries to increase profit levels.

Castel (1995), the new dynamics of capitalism as a core element of work precarization, or the end of the **wage-earning society**, is a process that creates social vulnerability and modifies labor relations. Along the same lines, Druck (2011) argues that the pattern is no longer a society in full employment, not even in countries with advanced capitalism with a strong State presence, but rather a society with a predominantly precarized relationship of labor and of the employed. In turn, Mészáros (2005) argues that, even in richer countries, capital has systematically removed the various concessions of the past through the governing order with the help of implacable and openly anti-labor legislation. Therefore, the current stage of capitalism, besides not guaranteeing the State of Social Wellbeing for less developed countries, is fraying the social fabric on a global scale.

In the Fordist period, there were labor and social advances that imposed certain limits on capital and it is that terrain that the neoliberal project seeks to recover for the great bourgeoisie. The weakening of States is an economic and political project of restructuring of capitalist accumulation that seeks to empty the electoral threat of the left, as it removes from capital the onus about **social questions**, transferring them to the third sector, the only remaining space of hegemonic direction of civil society (Druck, 2011; Montaña, 2003).

The content of that weakening can be better visualized in the text of Williamson(1993), a member of the Washington Institute for International Economics and one of the participants in the Consensus. According to the author, the aforementioned weakening is caused by factors such as: fiscal discipline; trade liberalization with an emphasis on eliminating import restrictions; opening up to direct foreign investment; the privatization of state companies; deregulation; and the security of ownership rights.

For Druck (2011), the neoliberal project has overstepped all barriers and impregnated all areas of social life. Harvey (2014) highlights that the neoliberalization process has involved much **creative destruction** in all spheres of society, from the old institutional structures to the divisions of labor, of the promotion of social wellbeing, of reproductive activities, of forms of bonds with the land, of thinking, of habits of the heart, and of human subjectivity.

The emptying of the State, that is, its failure in the social protection of its people, together with the deregulation of the markets form a conductor wire that is inseparable, and it articulates a new work precarization process that materializes in a wide variety of forms (unemployment, deregulation, flexibilization, sickness, wage losses, weakening of the unions, etc.)

We thus understand neoliberalism as the rationality/institution that corresponds to the capital accumulation process within so-called flexible capitalism, which invades all spaces of social life, being constituted of a set of theories, from various areas, that sometimes legitimize the precarious relationship of politics with regards to economics, and sometimes prescribe models – theoretical and/or political – of adjustment to the needs of capital accumulation. In sum, it promotes political-ideological dissemination, on one hand, and structural-economic dissemination, on the other.

## 2. The productive restructuring:



A key category for understanding the current form of precarization of labor relations, the neoliberal program of the relations of production, derived from the exhaustion of the Fordist accumulation pattern, prescribed the search for increased productivity, workforce substitution through the application of fixed capital, and the search for a cheap and docile workforce in underdeveloped countries, as well as new consumer markets (Wolff, 2014). In the wake of the weakening of the Fordist line, the flexible accumulation regime entered stage, which from the 1990s onward has acquired a political arm and began a ferocious attack on the working class through the loosening and deregulation of the legal conditions that governed the employment contract (Alves, 2011; Colombi, 2016).

Unlike the old Fordist accumulation regime – in which both products and support services were executed within the same factory – the subsequent development model is despotically based on high turnover rates, low wages, and intensification of the pace of work. Flexible firms are characterized by few hierarchical positions and generalized outsourcing<sup>8</sup>.

The neoliberal productive restructuring has created forms of extracting relative and absolute added-value, creating processes for reducing labor costs promoted through the use of measures – emptying of the State, deregulation – that establish flexible contracts, significantly inflating informality, unemployment, and dishonest subcontracting and outsourcing processes. Thus, there has emerged the new era of flexibilization belonging to the Toyotized phase, with its traits of continuity and discontinuity in relation to the Taylorist-Fordist form (Alves, 2000; Antunes, 2018; A. Silva & Freitas, 2016; Colombi, 2016; Pochmann, 2009; Quinlan, 2012; Standing, 2014; Wolff, 2014). According to Harvey (1992), “flexible accumulation is marked by a direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism. It rests on flexibility with respect to labor processes, labor markets, products, and patterns of consumption” (p. 140). With respect to this, Antunes (2018) states that the thesis of flexible accumulation developed by Harvey is a form of capitalism itself that maintains three essential characteristics of that mode of production: (a) it is focused on growth; (b) that growth is based on the exploitation of living labor; and (c) it has an intrinsic technological and particular dynamic.

For Druck (2011), flexible accumulation is the greatest mark of contemporary capitalism. It is the **new spirit of capitalism** that incites the global hegemony of financial capital. According to Faria and Kremer (2004), flexible accumulation – which substitutes the hegemony of more than half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of Fordism, in decline since the 1970s – gives rise to a new technical base with the advent of microelectronics and the new arrangements for managing labor, promoting profound changes in the factory space and creating a “new societal arrangement that seeks to overcome, in the legal/political sphere, the rigidity of the Fordist commitment” (Faria & Kremer, 2004, p. 2).

Faria and Meneghetti (2007) teach us that the locus in which the processes of direct or indirect domination of workers occur are organizations. In this space, the subject becomes an instrument of capital very often without realizing it. In this sense, Bourdieu (1998) calls an organization embedded within the field of productive restructuring a flexible company. This is an organization that “exploits, somewhat deliberately, a situation of insecurity that it contributes to reinforcing” (p. 74), including practices such as deterritorialization and decentralization of the company, previously linked to one space or nation State and now part of a process **in a network** spread over many distant places.

With respect to the new management practices, Alves (2000) and Antunes (2018) argue that Toyotism surpasses Fordism in a way; it is dialectic, in the sense that it **surpasses conserving** some predominant aspects of the management of capitalist production. So, it belongs to the same logic of the rationalization of work adopted by the Fordism/Taylorism binomial. However, Toyotism manages to also capture – a full capture in development – and control the subjective element of capitalist production, creating a new real subsumption of labor to capital, expressed in a formal-intellectual and spiritual subordination of labor to capital.

Thus, also according to Alves (2000) and Antunes (2018), Toyotism shows discontinuity, a rupture with its predecessor. While Fordism used the separation, repetition, procedure, and specialization of the worker, in Toyotism despecialization, non-separation, polyvalence, and shared and flexible time occur, as well as the plurifunctionality of men and machines.

According to Druck (2011), “force and consent are the resources that capital uses to enable” (p. 43) its continuous level of accumulation. That “force primarily materializes in the imposition of precarious working and employment conditions in the face of the permanent threat of structural unemployment created by capitalism” (p. 43). After all, “having any job is better than not having one” (Druck, 2011, p. 43). Through the reserve industrial army, capital can create deep competition and division between workers, guaranteeing the subordination and submission of labor to capital, as a form of worker survival.

This leads, according to Bourdieu (1998) and Druck (2011), to the establishment of a political regime, through the active or passive complicity of political agents. That regime establishes an economic dogma built on the pretense of inflexible and inviolable natural laws, aiming to produce a consensus so that workers perceive and understand the transformations in the world of world as unavoidable.

It is of fundamental importance for understanding the ontological meaning of the involvement of labor under capitalist production, according to Antunes and Alves (2004), to understand the concept of subsumption and its breakdown into real and formal. It is based on technocratic manipulations, indicated by Bourdieu (1998), that Toyotism will operate the transformation of the formal subsumption of the working class into real subsumption. According to Antunes and Alves (2004), in Fordism the subsumption of worker subjectivity to the logic of capital was merely formal, reduced to the productive processes – to the **physical machinery aspects** – an **inconclusive rationality** in which the psychological variables of the worker’s behavior were not totally incorporated into the capitalist rationality.

Based on the intra-factory production process “a form of control is installed that covers the worker’s entire psyche,” absorbing the “active participation of their intelligence, fantasy, and work initiative” (Antunes & Alves, 2004, p. 346). The worker is therefore embedded in an engaged way in productive processes, and their subjectively is captured entirely, meaning that, in Toyotism, that capture reaches the full stage of development: “a real and not only formal development” (Antunes & Alves, 2004, p. 346), whose content, however, is dialectic, and not merely passive, a condition that needs to be continuously affirmed.

For Bourdieu (1998), the participative management techniques result in rational submission – beyond any attributions of the workers in their work posts – in a high degree of involvement of the worker and they weaken or eliminate the collective solidarities or references. These

technocratic manipulations, with the unique purpose of obtaining submission and obedience, are the object of permanent attention – with massive investment in time, research, and work – to continuously create forms of management and command techniques that incessantly feed the “belief in the hierarchy of academically guaranteed competences that forms the basis for the order and discipline in the private company and also, increasingly, in the public function” (pp. 84-85).

Capital has sought, throughout the history of capitalism, to establish different patterns of accumulation in response to the limits and resistance that workers place on that limitation. The capitalism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is different from the one in place in the previous century and flexible accumulation is the most characteristic trait of that new pattern. At the center of flexible accumulation is work precarization as a domination strategy that seeks to break down the barriers imposed by the Fordist mode and by the regulations of the State of Social Wellbeing. For that, it is necessary to forcibly impose new working conditions, primarily in peripheral countries (Druck, 2011).

For Standing (2014), this is the first time, in historical terms, that the State has systematically removed rights from its citizens, transforming countries in rent-seeking economies and promoting policies that sustain this form of accumulation in favor of an ingurgitated plutocracy. Consequently, the author argues that workers should fight for a new system of distribution and advance in the right to have rights.

The advent of neoliberalism engendered transformations that generated a new international division of labor, leading us into a new era, marked by the ferocity with which global capital requires the dismantling of structures of social legislation for protecting labor and destroys the social rights that were arduously conquered (Antunes, 2018).

Within this context, the effects of the changes in labor relations have resulted in the deterioration of the set of social relations, institutionalizing social precarization through the generalization of flexible forms and the dismantling of social safety nets, imposing on the collectivity a state of normalization of the **regulation of deregulation** – regulation via the market – in various fields of social life.

### 3. The institutionalization of social precarization:

We previously mentioned that in the flexible accumulation regime there is structural unemployment and precarious working conditions that result in an adverse reality for the working class (Antunes & Alves, 2004). The effect of these conditions can be felt in the entire set of social relations. Equally, A. Martins and Honório (2014) stress that the bourgeoisie order of capital continues to divide people, and the new forms of organization have increased precarization and exploitation, making insecurity a constant presence throughout the entire world of work.

There is currently a hegemony of the financial logic that reaches all “areas of social life, giving new content to the modes of work and of life, sustained in volatility, in ephemerality, and in limitless disposability” (Antunes, 2018, p. 153). Thus, “the growing process of individualization of work and the rupture of the fabric of solidarity previously present between workers” have as a consequence the breaking of the “capacity for putting into action collective protective strategies among workers who find themselves at the base of the increase in the psychic sickness processes and of its more emphatic expression, workplace suicide” (Antunes, 2018, p. 142).

Bourdieu (1998) argues that there is a situation of permanent insecurity, generalized and without precedents, which inscribes precariousness in a new-type mode of domination, obliging workers to accept exploitation by means of a rational management of insecurity. This management establishes “above all through the orchestrated manipulation of the space of production” (p. 75) the competition between workers. This results in the breaking of their mechanisms of resistance, dressing the form of management of the domination “in apparently natural mechanisms, which are in themselves their own justification” (p. 75).

The new precarization given by the flexible accumulation regime has made insecurity, fragmentation, and instability its hegemonic and core content (F. Martins & Lima, 2016). The flexible forms increase the workers’ burden, reducing their quality of life. Intensification is a process that results in a greater expenditure of the worker’s capacities with the aim of raising the results of capital. This is the fruit of a strategy of capital as a response to the workers’ struggle for regulation of the time of work (Alves, 2011; A. Silva & Freitas, 2016; Colombi, 2016; F. Martins & Lima, 2016).

According to Druck (2011), an institutionalization of flexibility and of work precarization is occurring, in a process that is economically, socially, and politically installed, whose core aspect, which explains the capitalist structure today, is the unlimited degree of mercantilization of work and of life. Standing (2014) argues that the great new transformation of capital intends to make instability a habit of the world of work, unlike the previous desire of capital for the nucleus of the proletariat to be used to a stable life **belonging** to a particular corporate structure.

However, Colombi (2016) highlights that the ephemerality, uncertainty, or instability of the world of work is common to any historical context – it is the normality within the capitalist system – as it is necessary for there to be a superfluous population so that the working class is exploited. Thus, there is a strong correlation between a **superfluous population** and flexible contracts/outsourced workers.

In this sense, according to Faria and Kremer (2004), under the flexible accumulation regime employment relationships have been weakened by a dual movement: (a) first, with the emergence of new modalities of working relationships with reduced workers’ rights – such as part-time and temporary work – and the fraying of the traditional relationships derived from the intensification of work and workforce turnover, underpinned by articulations in the political and legal spheres; (b) and later by the expansion of informal work, in which the excess workforce is located. Thus, there is a contingent of workers always available for hire as outsourced personnel, outside the space of the core companies, with tenuous employment relationships in a context of general deterioration of the quality of job posts, raising the risk of accidents and occupational illness.

Indeed, the flexibility of capital and globalization of the markets bolstered by a lack or insufficiency of protections, regulations, and guarantees of people’s socioeconomic rights have contributed to the phenomenon of work precarization, including in advanced economies. These movements have caused insecurity and instability at a macro level in the world of work due to: the lack of sound full employment policies; the insecurity related to the weakness of unions – for example, the inexistence in many countries of the right to strike; the insecurity caused by the absence of protection against accidents at work or illness; and the insufficient protection against unhealthy workplace conditions (Braga, 2014; Valenzuela, 2015).

In addition, companies that hire outsourced businesses remain in a comfortable position and do not assume their responsibilities, since these fall on the outsourced companies. Pereira et al. (2017) indicate that there is a relationship between outsourcing and moral harassment: because of their vulnerability, outsourced workers are more subject to discomfort due to their weak bond with the job.

Despite the defense of many who see in the technological transformation a path to a healthier, more harmonious and prosperous world, what is happening, according to Antunes and Alves (2004), is a historical process of erosion of the social terrain and a deepening of the contradictions of capital.

In this sense, despite the fragmentation and heterogeneity of the working class of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Antunes (2018) and Antunes and Alves (2004) argue that nothing allows for arguing for the defended thesis of the end of work, that is, the idea of the loss of the centrality of the work category as an element that structures society. On the contrary – in spite of the recognition that this is a complex and heterogeneous process that, in fact, results in a working class that is not identical to that of the previous century – the crises that the world has experienced show that work is the main element that sustains the social base, therefore it has not ontologically lost its structuring sense (Antunes & Alves, 2004; Antunes, 2018).

In sum, we understand that the institutionalization of social precarization materializes: in the institutional-legal field, through the deregulation and emptying of the political field in favor of the economic one, or emptying of general laws in favor of private agreements/contracts; in the organizational field, through new routines and flexible – insecure – forms of work; and, finally, in the subjective field, through the real subsumption and hijacking of subjectivity, establishing a new form of being extremely individualist (of the entrepreneur) or, in summary, a new widely disseminated and accepted habit of thinking that is leading to the collapse of the foundations of the social edifice, weakening the solidary relations of the community. Social precarization is, therefore, the consequence of the neoliberal paradigm.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed with great cruelty the panorama of social precarization that a good portion of the world is experiencing – including the so-called rich countries – in a setting in which US power scarcely hid acts of piracy and the **confiscation** of equipment for protection against the spread of the virus (Coronavirus: USA..., 2020). In Brazil, a powerful discourse was heard – accompanied by acts of sabotage of the fight against the pandemic by Jair Bolsonaro's government, as the report of legal rulings in the country in response to COVID-19 indicates (Cepedisa, 2021) – of the supposed separation between economics and society, the heart of the neoliberal paradigm, leaving without protection the great mass of the population, primarily the most insecure: self-employed workers, service providers, and app delivery drivers.

## Conceptual map of the new work precarization

A conceptual map is a research tool that seeks to demonstrate through a visual framework the set of concepts that sustain an object of study and its explicit and underlying relationships. Eppler (2006) defines the map as a type of top-down diagram that shows the relationship between concepts, their connections, and manifestations, differentiating it from other tools such as mental maps, conceptual diagrams, and visual metaphors.

The final objective of the elaboration of a conceptual map is to advance in the building of a conceptual framework. For Tamene (2016), the conceptual framework indicates the assumptions that conceptually underpin a particular topic. According to Maxwell (2013), it is a conception or model of what there is or what is occurring in the field one wishes to study, a strategy for theorizing a phenomenon under investigation, that is, a basis for understanding patterns of interconnection between events, ideas, concepts, knowledge, observations, interpretations, and other components of experience.



**Figure 1.** Schematic representation of the conceptual framework

Source: Adapted from Tamene (2016, p. 52).

As observed from Figure 1, we can affirm that the conceptual framework is the condensation of disperse analytical elements, which can include the research problem, the method, and basic questions, objectifying an understanding of the phenomenon in a broad and holistic way, a **totality**, thus enabling us to theorize about a phenomenon under scrutiny. According to Jabareen (2009), the building of a framework, instead of delivering the description of concrete elements, offers the possibility to interpret them given the information collected in the empirical field and in the theoretical field. It therefore involves a consolidated version of the understanding of a phenomenon, containing clear ontological, epistemological, and methodological positions, covering the context and founding questions of the object studied.

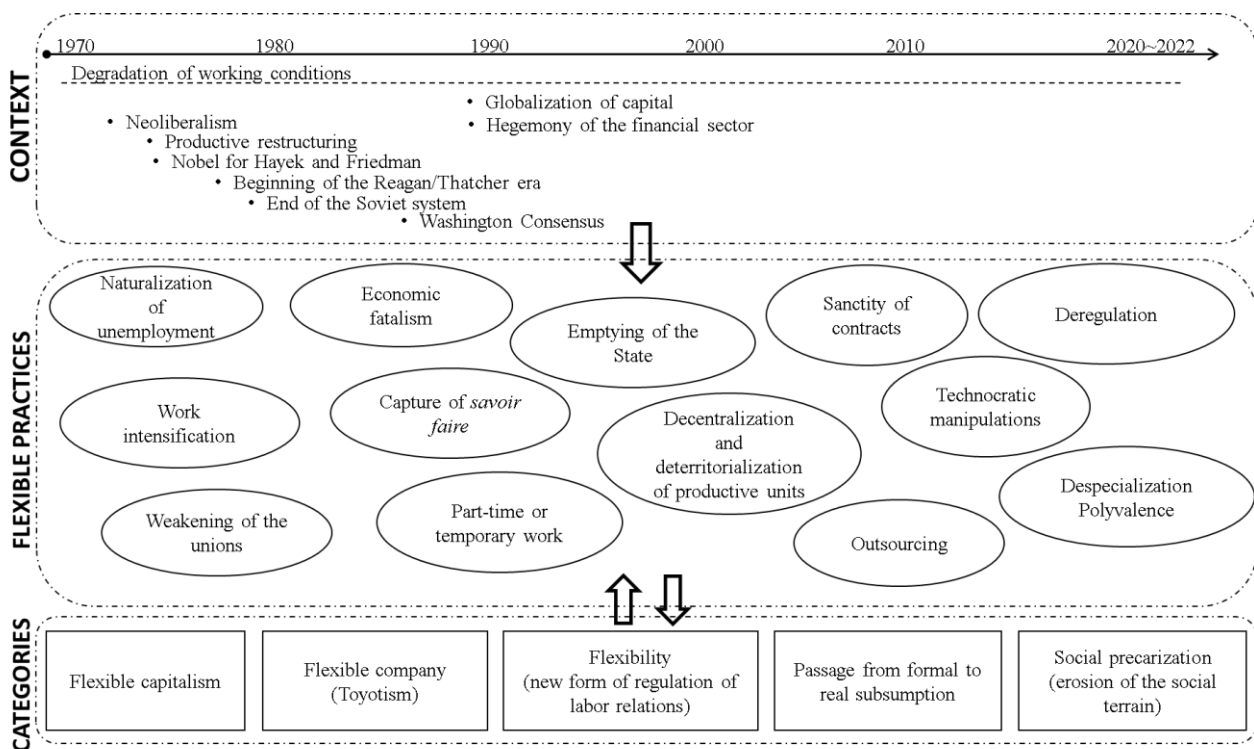
Indeed, the architecture of a framework is a robust process of theoretical-analytical condensation, which based on ordered elements can offer answers to more complex questions, such as: in what way does the passage occur from formal to real subsumption? How is the intellectual-affective arrangement of the working class incorporated into the **rules of the game**? In what way is the capture of the worker's know-how affected? How is unemployment naturalized? Considering flexibility as a founding factor of flexible precarization, are there scientific theories, in the field of administration and/or economics, which legitimize flexible relations, that is, which have the sanctity of the contract as their *raison d'être*? Or put in another way: is it possible to demonstrate that there is an **elective affinity** between the neoliberal paradigm – in the

normative/institutional dimension – and some school of thought – in the organizational field – that has at its heart the management of outsourced contracts?

Faced with the complexity of the warping of this web of relationships, it is highly useful to elaborate a conceptual map as a means for building the framework, given that this cannot exclusively originate from the literature review and depends on the debate, on the interlocution with peers, and on the advancement of the research through some means, in this case the conceptual map, to add all the necessary elements to be consolidated as a framework (Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The visual expression of the elements discussed in this paper in a conceptual map can help in the development of a framework, so as to identify unexpected connections, gaps, or contradictions that guide the continuity of the research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

The conceptual map is like a visual device regarding what is being studied (Maxwell, 2013). For Ravitch and Riggan (2017), the object of the conceptual map is to be a useful means for advancing the research, with them warning that it should always be considered as a tool for critiquing the real and that no graphical representation is capable of expressing the complexity of the reality.

In light of the above and considering that the research problem is to highlight what the constitutive elements of work precarization are in the context of the neoliberal turn, a conceptual map was built based on the theoretical framework used, to guide the research, as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Conceptual map of the new work precarization

Source. Elaborated by the authors based on the theoretical framework.

Figure 2 is not capable, in itself, of revealing the complexity of the linkages of the topic at hand. Nor is that its objective. According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant (2001), the symbol is something that goes beyond the meaning and that depends on a certain predisposition in the search for its interpretation. In turn, according to Langley (1999), visual representations have the attraction of enabling simultaneous images of various dimensions, being highly useful for showing precedence, parallel processes, and the passage of time.

The choice of the rectangular mode, like a blueprint – outlined or designed in a horizontal projection – to represent the totality of the map occurred in an intuitive way and attempted to present a synthesis of a **cartographic** model, that is, a flat representation of an area, indicating not only origins and directions, but also means of displacement. It therefore seeks to show the parts as an integrated whole, indicating its locations.

In the upper quadrant of Figure 2, the various historical events linked to the new work precarization are related. The dotted line indicates that the degradation of working conditions is a continuous process underway. Directly below, in the middle quadrant, represented by circles, are the social practices. These, according to Fairclough (2000, 2003), are possible syntheses of social relations, activities, instruments, subjects, objects, forms of conscience, values, and time-space, among others. They are organized in a network and are relationships of power and conflict, thus being dynamic. Finally, the lower quadrant of the map shows the categories represented by rectangles.

Figure 2 presents a chronology of the events in different codifications. There is an arrow that goes from the quadrant of the context in the direction of the quadrants of the social practices, indicating that these practices have a historical dimension, thus not constituting timeless relationships. This set of social practices, of the concreteness of human relations, given their strength at the contemporary historical moment, feed the institutionalization – in the Veblenian sense, indicating a certain crystallization/habituatio – of a structure of relationships/representations, which here we call categories.

At the same time that these categories are the result of social practices, they also work in the opposite direction, as reinforcers of the practices – therefore being of a structural and structuring nature. The two-way arrows indicate that two-directional movement.

According to Creswell (2007), in qualitative studies orientated toward theory, primarily studies with emancipatory purposes, the literature can be used inductively to build their results (themes or categories). Also according to Creswell (2007), the researcher should build schematic categories to extract meanings from the text. This construction can be carried out by grouping topics that have similar meanings – even if implicitly.

In turn, Faria (2017) adds that the schematic ordering of an analysis should be carried out by means of filtering through the critical mediation of thought. Faria (2017) continues by arguing that the categories have “the purpose of explaining a particular structure of relationships and representations” (p. 12). This involves a reading of the concrete in which “this detains the primacy, but does not determine the meaning that should be attributed by the scientific investigation” (p. 12). To create them, the researcher can “either resort to those already available in the literature (and that correspond to the investigated reality), or create new and specific categories” (p. 12),



moreover, “the Categories of Analysis can also be preceded by the definition of Thematic Categories, which serve to organize the theoretical approaches to the themes addressed in the study” (p. 12).

Thus, the general thematic categories of the conceptual map were organized, divided into: context, social practices, and, finally, the analytical categories (structure of relationships). Thus, in summary, the conceptual map provides schematized elements, which were organized by means of similarity of meanings extracted from the texts consulted, mediated by the authors’ critical reflection effort. The map therefore culminates in the representation of causality relationships and interconnection between the elements that compose the architecture of the new work precarization, being constituted as a fundamental intermediate step for the future exercise of theorization about that phenomenon.

Below, we discuss the elements that constitute the map, indicating their main points of origin.

### *Context*

Since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it has been possible to note a context of degradation of working conditions. Changes in social relations, formally institutionalized in alterations of regulations and laws, have established a new accumulation regime based on the globalization of capital and technological advancements that have caused profound alterations in labor relations, resulting from a political will disguised as fatalism.

Among the important events of this historical localization are: the advent of neoliberalism, observed, among others, based on the works of Antunes (2018), Harvey (2014), Druck (2016), and Pereira et al. (2017); the productive restructuring of capital (Alves, 2000; Antunes, 2009a, 2018; A. Silva & Freitas, 2016; Harvey, 2014; Pochmann, 2009); the Nobel Prize for economics for the ultraliberals Hayek and Friedman, as well as the beginning of the Reagan/Thatcher era (Harvey, 2014; Hobsbawm, 2015); the collapse of the Soviet system (Hobsbawm, 2015; Mészáros, 2005); and the globalization of capital and the hegemony of the financial system (Alves, 2000; Antunes, 2009a, 2018; Bourdieu, 1998; Druck, 2011, 2016; Mészáros, 2007).

The historical localization of the new work precarization lies in the productive restructuring started in the 1970s, in the rise of neoliberalism, in economic globalization, in the hegemony of the financial sector, and in the consolidation of the dominance of the neoliberal discourse, with the fall of the Soviet Bloc. The neoliberal discourse was institutionalized, years later, by means of the Washington Consensus, which provided a prescription that became the new articulated political/economic orthodoxy (Bourdieu, 1997; Harvey, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012). Besides the aforementioned events, it is possible to observe in the upper part of the map some of the main events that contextualize the new work precarization, including the beginning of the Reagan/Thatcher era.

### *Flexible practices*

The middle part of the map shows the social practices that engender the new work precarization, which we call **flexible practices**. E. Silva and Gonçalves (2017) understand social practice as something actively produced by the people that understand it based on a shared

common meaning. For Fairclough (2008), social practice has various orientations: economic, political, cultural, and ideological. In turn, Fairclough and Melo (2012) explain that social practices are an interconnection between economic, political, and cultural elements, among others, of social life, which reproduce the structures, but can also transform them.

Flexible practices emerged with the changes initiated in the form of production which, in turn, gave rise to new social arrangements, demanding profound changes in the form of organization of labor and of social life. These practices seek to adapt the worker to a new labor regime at the same time as seeking to disguise or legitimize practices that are predatory in relation to social life.

These practices are the manifestation of the materialization of the structuring discourse. Among them we can mention: the weakening of the unions (Braga, 2014; Harvey, 2014; Mészáros, 2005); the decentralization and/or deterritorialization of productive units (Bourdieu, 1998; Faria & Meneguetti, 2007); part-time and/or temporary work (A. Silva & Freitas, 2016; Faria & Kremer, 2004); the despecialization and/or polyvalence of the worker (Alves, 2000; Antunes, 2018); the naturalization of unemployment – structuring discourse or denied expression (Antunes, 2018; Mészáros, 2005); economic fatalism (Bourdieu, 1998; Druck, 2011); the sanctity of contracts (Harvey, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012); work intensification (Alves, 2011; F. Martins & Lima, 2016; Faria & Kremer, 2004); widespread and unrestricted outsourcing (Antunes, 2018; Druck, 2011, 2016; Faria & Kremer, 2004); technocratic manipulations – managerialist ideology for persuasion (Antunes & Alves, 2004; Antunes, 2018; Bourdieu, 1998; Faria & Meneghetti, 2007); the capture of *savoir faire* (Alves 2000; Antunes & Alves, 2004; Antunes, 2018; Bourdieu, 1998); and, primarily, the deregulation of labor relations and the emptying of the national States (Antunes, 2009a, 2018; Harvey, 2014; Mészáros, 2007; Pochmann, 2009; Quinlan, 2012).

As can be visualized in the map, the social practices cover the economic, political, cultural, and discursive/ideological dimensions of social relations, and they are produced in the institutional and organizational spaces. Flexible practices have the purpose of adapting to the production of the new accumulation regime and obtaining obedience from the working class, and, due to the latter motive, they are the object of constant attention and investment with the aim of creating forms of management that feed the belief in the hierarchy. They are a way of manipulating spaces of coexistence to create competition between workers and try to eliminate their mechanisms of resistance, naturalizing the exploitation relationships. Consequently, in relation to the flexible practices that intensify the structural situation of precariousness, it is necessary to compare practices not only of resistance, but, above all, emancipatory ones.

### Categories

Located in the upper part of the map, the categories represent structural relationships. Derived from the capital accumulation crisis of Fordism, the flexible capitalism category is based on the flexibility of work processes and is itself a form of capitalism – having a particular relational/structural dynamic – that established a new global hegemony with the advent of new technologies and new management arrangements that sought to overcome the restrictions of the political and legal institutions of the Fordist pact. The elaboration of these categories was primarily

carried out based on the works of Alves (2011), Antunes (2018), Druck (2011, 2016), Faria and Kremer (2004), and Harvey (1992).

The flexible company, a company that administers contracts, is the consequence of Toyotism. It is the locus of the new form of production arrangement and controls of the productive processes, which deliberately promotes the situation of insecurity that it creates and reinforces, implementing practices such as transfers of plants to countries with fewer social protections, the dispersion of the organization into network processes, and the widespread outsourcing of the productive processes controlled via contracts and regulation of ownership rights, among other practices. More regarding this category can be observed in the writings of Alves (2000), Antunes (2018), and Bourdieu (1998).

Flexibility is a central category of the new work precarization. It involves a need of capital to impose a new form of regulation of labor relations in which there is a transfer of regulation from the social sphere to the private sphere. Thus, **flexible regulation**, or regulation via the market, is established, promoting conditions to guarantee economic rights for the hegemonic class, or **ownership rights**, through the emptying of social rights, via the weakening of the institutions of social protection and of the legal/political protection of labor. The schematization of this category was primarily elaborated based on the works of Alves (2000), Antunes(2009a, 2018), Druck (2011, 2016), Harvey (1992), Mészáros (2007), and Stiglitz (2012).

Flexibilization, a fetish expression that seeks to euphemize precarization, materializes by means of the movement/flexibilization of the contingent of workers, of temporary work, of part-time work, of temporary contract suspension, of outsourcing, of the lack of a right to strike, of unemployment etc.

A founding element of any precarization process, the structural precariousness of work, based on the social division of labor and on the alienation of the worker from decision-making processes, is expressed in the subsumption of labor to capital and is inherent to the capitalist system in any one of its phases. However, this subsumption undergoes a qualitative leap with Toyotism, which operates a movement from the formal subsumption of labor to a real subsumption, in the form of intellectual and spiritual subordination. This movement occurs by means of physical and symbolic violence, including unemployment and the persecution of social movements, among others. The movement from real to formal subsumption is, therefore, one of the structuring elements of the new work precarization. The ordering of this category occurs based on the works of Alves (2011), Antunes and Alves (2004), and Antunes (2018).

Derived from these core elements of neoliberalism, social precarization is the result of flexible practices. It has as a central element the generalization of the flexible forms for all areas of social life and it is established by means of changes in the legal and organizational spheres, besides the constitution of a new subjectivity. With the dismantling of social protections, the social terrain has suffered from an erosion that weakens human relations and empties the bonds of solidarity, imposing the regulation of life via the market and establishing a new mode of being based on external individualism. We identified this category based on the works of Antunes (2018), Bourdieu (1998), Braga (2014), and Druck (2011).

## Constitutive elements of flexible work precarization

Work precarization is an element that is inseparable from the capitalist mode of production. It is the result of a structural social condition that turns the workforce into merchandise. It involves a phenomenon that dates back to the Industrial Revolution and is a generalized characteristic of the capital/labor relationship. In that sense, it is important to distinguish precariousness, structural relationship, precarization, the process of struggle, and the correlation of forces between classes in a particular historical dimension.

During a certain period, between the Second World War and the beginning of the 1970s, there was a hiatus of legislation protecting labor, particularly in rich/industrialized countries, which culminated in a certain stability of the world of work. That stability is the result of working class struggles, but also of the relative accommodation of the classes while the arrangement of the so-called State of Social Wellbeing enabled the expansion of capital. When a deep crisis of capital accumulation took root, the crisis of the 1970s, a productive reorganization was needed that triggered a new process of work precarization: **flexible precarization**.

The content of that new work precarization can be better visualized in the figure of a conceptual map. This is a visual device that presents elements of the theory, as well as the path of the phenomenon that is the object of study. The map seeks to highlight contexts, concepts, and theoretical points of the theme addressed. It is possible to visualize in the conceptual map the elements of the new work precarization, which can contribute to a general holistic understanding of the phenomenon addressed.

For Faria (2017), the grouping of positions – filtered into constitutive elements, in an organized and categorized form – is a qualitative leap that is the researcher's responsibility. The author highlights that although it is an abstraction activity, the constitutive elements should be defined based on a critical reflection, appropriated by thinking as an organized reality. Thus, this grouping enables a representation of the real and of its appropriation of the thought real; not only a reflection of the object, but an analytical presentation (theoretical-conceptual) of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

Thus, the constitutive elements of the flexible work precarization are organized in the map: the historical facts in a timeline; the social practices used to exploit the working class; and the categories that show structures of relationships. Therefore, the map provides a visual architecture that helps clarify the series of events and their respective socio-historical contexts, contributing to an understanding of the emergence of the new work precarization. Thus, it offers us a general representation of the phenomenon, constituting a tool that graphically expresses a certain glimpse of the intricate web of relationships of the object addressed. The connections between the elements are also noted, which leaves no margin for the possibility of interpretation of separation of the structures of the relationships between the world of work and the socio-historical and political relationships.

With respect to the relatively recent phenomenon of precarization, Colombi (2016) warns that discussions about this topic cannot be restricted to the formalist aspect – in the question of the right to have employment – but they should contemplate the recognition that there was never contractual stability of work for the working class within the capitalist regime.

However, precarization as a process cannot be denied. In this sense, we share the understanding of Antunes and Alves (2004) and Antunes (2018): the denial of precarious work is a trend, more discursive than practical, of a return to the policies of the Fordist era. This involves an idealist attitude, as it does not reflect the fragmentation of the working class, with consequences that cut across the objective reality and the new subjectivities underlying that process.

Thus, the discussion about the inclusion of the worker in the **labor market** and/or the achievement of rights leaves out the core element: the question of work itself. In light of that, each and every precarization process occurs because that is the basic contradiction of capitalism: the exploitation of labor by capital.

Finally, it warrants highlighting, as Antunes and Alves (2004) argue, that the new productive arrangement of the flexible forms has an **Achilles heel**, as it is limited to its political perspective, primarily if compared to the Fordist arrangement. Thus, in the flexible arrangement, the contradiction between societal irrationality and intra-company irrationality becomes much more acute. Labor is a living element – although subsumed to capital – that is in permanent conflict and calibration of forces in the capitalist relationship. The worker experiences in daily life the field of dispute between the alienation of labor and its disalienation.

## Concluding remarks

The aim of this paper was to propose a conceptual map of the new work precarization. Flexible work precarization is historically localized in the context of the rise of neoliberalism, of the hegemony of the financial sector, of productive restructuring, and of economic globalization. It is linked to the social practices derived from those processes: the flexible practices.

Engendered in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, flexible practices burst through the walls of the factory to spread throughout the social fabric. They can be visualized in various manifestations, synthesized in the deregulation of labor relations and in the emptying of the national States, thus promoting the **regulation of deregulation** – regulation via the market – in all the dimensions of social life. Flexible practices aim to obtain the submission of workers, creating competition, feeding beliefs in forms of hierarchized management, and seeking to destroy the mechanisms of resistance of the working class. To oppose the flexible practices that intensify precariousness, workers must organize emancipatory and resistance practices.

The categories identified were flexible capitalism, the flexible company, flexibility or flexible regulation, the movement from formal subsumption to real subsumption, and social precarization, the maximum expression of neoliberalism, which promotes the destruction of the bases of solidarity of the community. Categories and practices are inseparable elements of its historicity and, therefore, a reading cannot be allowed that promotes a separation of the relationships between the world of work and social, historical, and political relations.

It warrants highlighting that the map is not an end in itself and cannot alone express the complexity of the reality, but rather it should be understood as a tool, a means of apprehending and critiquing the real-concrete. By means of a visual representation of the causality relationships of the constitutive elements of the new work precarization, the conceptual map contributes to a comprehensive apprehension of the phenomenon at hand, explaining connections, historical facts,

and the main social practices of the neoliberal paradigm. It provides an image-synthesis that can be used as a script for new research and contribute to a critique within the field of organizational studies.

An important caveat needs to be highlighted with respect to the phenomenon of work precarization: the exceptionality of the thesis of the erosion of the State of Social Wellbeing, indicating a limitation of that experience to rich countries. This form of broad social protection was never a reality in poor countries. However, despite the non-particularity of this thesis for Latin America or other **peripheral** countries, there are key elements that contribute to understanding the precarization process that is deepening even more in such countries; since, although there are contextual and historical differences, there are general elements – such as globalization, flexibilization, and deregulation, among others – that cut across the whole world of work and form a common process.

The idea of regulation via the market misconfigures human relations and weakens the subjectivity of the beings that compose the intricate and delicate social bond. Work is central in the configuration of the being, and, therefore, the subject cannot be alienated or sidelined from decision-making processes, under the risk of a deep violation of the individual. Consequently, we argue that the explanation, by any means – including the conceptual map – of the relationships of exploitation of labor constitutes a contributory element to the emancipatory struggles.

By means of the map presented, it was possible to conclude that the new work precarization, flexible precarization, is structural and structuring. In this sense, we share with Mészáros (2005) the understanding that there is a chronic unemployment and brutal precariousness that cannot be transcended, as they are an absolute limit of the system of capital in all its variables. Therefore, only the establishment of a different social order – a totally cooperative alternative, in a non-hierarchical form of decision making on the reproductive, cultural, and political plain, comprehensively coordinated without disaggregation of irreconcilable antagonisms – can overcome the globalized unemployment that results in deep dishumanity. Consequently, we live in a historical moment in which there is the need to urgently establish an alternative to the established social order that necessarily enacts alterations in the organization of work as a form of eradicating the terrible inequalities that befall us.

There is in the capitalist mode of production the need for a logic of fragmentation of humanity to maintain production relations, a fundamental contradiction that is manifested by means of the alienation maintaining the hegemony of power. It is only by means of the recovery for itself of the activity, of the cooperation of the class that lives from work, and of the resumption of awareness of itself, of thinking, and of action, that substantive changes can be operated, thus eradicating exploitation and, consequently, the precarization/precariousness of work.

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## Notes

1. In this paper, the expression globalization refers at the same time to: the ideological disguise – **justifying myth** (Bourdieu, 1998) or **fairy tale** (Mészáros, 2005) — legitimizing the process of precarization of work and of social relations; and to the concrete phenomenon linked to the dissemination of financial markets by means of the reduction of legal controls and the enhancement of technological means.
2. According to Villen (2017), the migratory movements reveal on a global scale tendencies for the weakening of the entire world of work, which has resulted in the fraying of social relations and contributed to the phenomenon of discrimination, particularly racism. This migratory movement is of a structural and systemic nature internationally linked in the **globalized** capitalist system. In turn, Antunes (2018) argues that the explosion of immigrant workers is the tip of the iceberg of the work precarization process imposed by neoliberalism. These workers always receive the worse wages, the most uncomfortable schedules, and are subject to all sorts of discrimination. Paradoxically, according to the author, such workers are the ones that have most factors of societal transformations as they are collective holders of a need for social emancipation.
3. That period, marked by the pact between the State and unions of businesses and of workers, as well as by the combination of Fordism with Keynesianism, became known, according to Hobsbawm's (2015) analysis, as the golden years of capitalism. Distinguished by high rates of economic growth, social policies, and full employment, the so-called State of Social Wellbeing was a short moment in the history of capitalism, limited to a reduced number of developed countries. For that reason, it is necessary to consider that there are particularities in the work precarization process, both in the countries that achieved relative levels of security and in the countries in which the precariousness of labor relations is not a recent phenomenon, but a structural characteristic linked to unequal development. However, despite the historical and contextual differences of each country, it is possible to visualize a set of elements related to the work precarization process that cuts across and penetrates the different particularities, therefore signaling the more general and universal aspects of the process.
4. With regard to this, Mészáros (2005) ponders that: “the implosion of the Soviet system can only be intelligible as an integral part of that systematic crisis. Indeed, the attempted Soviet solution emerged as a form of overcoming in its own setting a major capitalist crisis, establishing a post-capitalist mode of production and exchange by means of the abolition of private ownership of the means of production. However, the Soviet solution could not eradicate the capital from the post-capitalist system of social metabolic reproduction. Thus, it could only remain operational until the need to go beyond the system of capital as such – and not simply deny a specific, somewhat retrograde form of capitalism – emerged as a fundamental challenge in the global order of the time” (p. xviii).

5. For Harvey (2014), “neoliberalism is firstly a theory of political-economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can be much better promoted by releasing individual entrepreneurial freedoms and capacities within the arena of an institutional structure characterized by solid rights to private property, free markets, and free trade. The role of the State is to create and preserve an appropriate institutional structure for these practices... state interventions should remain at a minimal level” (p. xviii).
6. According to Harvey (2014), the first experience of neoliberalization occurred after the coup of the dictator Augusto Pinochet in Chile in 1973. The coup enjoyed the support of US corporations and the CIA, repressing social movements, dismantling forms of popular organization, and **freeing** the labor market from institutional or regulatory restrictions, such as union power. A group of economists, trained at the University of Chicago and adept in the doctrines of Milton Friedman, who became known as the Chicago Boys, was called upon to conduct various denationalization and deregulation experiments.
7. Mészáros (2005) offers us examples with regard to this: “the role of the British government in the miners’ strike [of 1984] provides a very clear example of how the state can intervene on behalf of capital. Unlike the elementary rules of good business practices praised by the ex-boss of General Motors, the capitalist state in Great Britain was able to plan its anti-labor action in the form of a ‘carefully controlled and coordinated accumulation of excessive stocks,’ with the almost hidden purpose of provoking the miners to strike, which – given the total resources of the state – they could not win. In addition to that, the state authorities, with full cooperation from the judiciary, intervened ‘in the dispute in all ways possible, depriving the strikers of their legitimate claims and the National Miners’ Union of all its funds. Moreover, great sums were spent by the state during the year-long dispute – estimated at around five to six billion pounds sterling [twenty years ago] to defeat the strike” (p. liv).
8. Outsourcing is, paradoxically, an old and new phenomenon – old, as this form of organization of labor has its roots in the Industrial Revolution and dates back to the beginnings of capitalism; and new, because its recent historical milestone is underpinned and inspired by the productive restructuring process of the Japanese company Toyota – as it is merely a new form of the content of market fetishization, in which the fetishization of flexibilization also comes to occur, inverting the relationship between subject and object, and determining the behavior of workers as an external and naturalized force, seeking to prevent the subjects from being capable of reaction and control of the processes of the community (Druck, 2011; Pereira et al., 2017).

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The authors state that there are no conflicts of interest.

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