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### "Biographic Processes of Precariatized Minds in Contact Centers"

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### Abstracts

At the end of the 20th century, communication society brought new challenges, not only for post-modernity but, mainly, to academic qualified workers. The deterioration of work conditions, structural unemployment and the increasing of precarization of job offers in the labor market, contrast with the growing need of qualification for the acquisition of employability. New forms of labor intensification, the inexistence of expectations and the recognition and/or devaluation of qualifications have perverse impacts on the worker's psychic and mental structure.

The need for survival forces workers to emigrate or accept low-skilled jobs with tenuous links. The 19th century factories were transformed into computerised and lyophilized work centres. In the current precarious society, call and contact centres embody in the best way precarious work, subcontracting the "de-employed". The reality of these workers consists, above all, in an alienation translator of an extreme impotence, as well as a high degree of physical and spiritual dehumanization.

O presente estudo consiste numa análise longitudinal de biografias precárias do trabalho informatizado, enfatizando o caso dos atuais e ex-trabalhadores/as de *call* e *contact centres* portugueses. As entrevistas biográficas, realizadas ao longo de cinco anos, analisaram o percurso destes/as trabalhadores/as. Na maioria dos casos, observou-se a construção de uma mente precarizada, subordinada a lógicas de medo e resignação. Este processo manifesta-se no sofrimento mental e psíquico do indivíduo, sobretudo na construção de uma identidade ocupacional e emancipação.

The present study consists in a longitudinal analysis of socioprofessional biographies, mainly, precarious ones from computerised work, emphasizing the case of actual and ex-workers of call and contact centres in Portugal. Biographical interviews, conducted over five years, analyzed the worker's trajectory. In most cases, it was noticeable the construction of a precariatized mind, subject to logics of fear and resignation. This process manifests itself in the mental and psychological suffering of the individual, especially in the construction of an occupational identity and emancipation.

**Keywords:** Precarity; Mind; Call and Contact Centres; Suffering; Work

### Introduction

At the end of the 20th century, communication society brought new challenges, not only for post-modernity but, mainly, to academic qualified workers. The deterioration of work conditions, structural unemployment and the increasing of precarization of job offers in the labor market, contrast with the growing need of qualification for the acquisition of employability. New forms of labor intensification, the inexistence of expectations and the recognition and/or devaluation of qualifications have perverse impacts on the worker's psychic and mental structure. Having in mind the strong changes verified in consumer and informational societies, Giddens refers to the consequences instilled on the individual (self), where the "I" and "society" find themselves deeply intertwined in a global context. It's a permanent revision of biographic narratives in a context of multiple choices filtered by abstract systems, questionings on personal identity, where

reflexivity mechanisms are used to reconstruct it (Giddens, 1992). 21<sup>st</sup> century factories were transformed into lyophilized computerised work centres. In a precarious society, contact centres personify, in the best way, precarious work, subcontracting the “unemployable”. The reality of these workers consists, mainly, in an alienation revealing an extreme impotence, as well as a high degree of physical and spiritual dehumanization. The present study consists in a longitudinal analysis of socioprofessional biographies, mainly, precarious ones from computerised work, emphasizing the case of actual and ex-workers of contact centres in Portugal. According to Bertaux (2010), the construction of professional identity emerges from the fusion of several identities and stages of a worker’s life. To the present article, there will be analyzed only three interviews, from a range of 20 biographic interviews, made between 2010 and 2014 in Lisbon, Oporto and Coimbra. The contact established with the interviewees is due to the fact that the author has worked in several contact centres in Lisbon and Coimbra, establishing professional relations with these customer relationship assistants.

### **Austerity Society**

In 2008, after the bankruptcy of the banking group Lehman Brothers, the collapse of world financial system began and a crisis increased the economic and social crisis that has been manifesting since 1990. Having in mind that the only viable alternative by the government would be the application of strong austerity measures, the signing of Troika’s Memorandum in Portugal, in May 2011, brought a process of expenses retaining by the state, privatization of the public sector, raising of taxes, wage reduction and liberalization of labor law. In this way, an austerity state was created, transferring costs to society, increasing the process of dismantling of the social state through the individualization of social risks and commodification of social life (Ferreira, 2011). Portuguese society has become precarious, uncertain, fleeting, fluid and mobile (Castel, 2000; Paugam, 2000; Bauman, 2001; Standing, 2011), increasing the asymmetries and deepening social inequalities (Ferreira, 2011). According to the study made by the European Commission, between 2009 and 2001, from the countries that were in crisis (Greece, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom, Ireland and Estonia), Portugal highlighted itself as the only one in which austerity measures were applied in a more regressive way, reaching, mostly, the poorest in their allowances and pensions (European Commission, 2011: 16-18). In this way, in 2011,

around 20% of the poorest have lost between 4, 5% and 6% of their income (*Ibid.*, 2011: 21-22). Reforms guided by austerity have adopted Reagan and Thatcher's neoliberal agenda of the eighties, with labor law attachment, the implementation of negative flexibility and the disqualification of unions (Ferreira, 2011:132). The lack of liberty has been verified in all areas of each individual's life, mainly, in the labor area, where the right of exception presents itself in a paradigmatic breakage with the assumptions of labor law. It eliminated workers protection as a freedom condition, facilitating the firing process and minimizing the process of collective negotiation.

### **Labor Subjectivity**

On the second half of the 20th Century, though remaining an essential economic category, through the fordist regulation model, work has become a synonym for employment (Castel, 1995; Grozelier, 1998). Labor activity allows individuals to share the feeling of integrity in society, in a scenario where wages and material security were considered as a central instrument for social wellbeing. With the dismantling of the Social State and the flexibilization of labor relations, this scenario brought employment precarity, labor market segregation, low and irregular income, unqualified occupations, nonexistent or low training opportunities, conflicts with the family life and the deepening of gender and social inequalities (Falcão Casaca, 2005; Kovács, I., org., et al., 2005). In this way, we verify a regression with the loss of worker's labor rights and labor dignity. A context of several contractual forms, mainly considered as precarious or undervalued, implied transformations at socioprofessional labor profiles, trajectories, careers and life projects (Marques, 2009). Nevertheless, labor is connected to the subjective dimension of the human being, having a major role in the construction of self and social identities, possible of containing resistances and conflicts, depending on affectivity and emotions, containing different forms of power, domination and being susceptible of generating cohesion and emancipation, decompensations and unease (Areosa, 2013:30). It fills a space, having a purpose and a belonging function (Dejours, 1998). In several cases, it lacks meaning due to the fact that the worker doesn't recognize him/herself in the activities he/she undertakes. In situations of dissatisfaction, it might bring professional and psychosocial risks, because it leads to the fulfilling of essential needs of the human being (physiological needs, stability, personal

fulfillment, self-esteem), causing suffering that implies effort, tension, pain, distress and forced labor. A study carried out by Gallup (2011)<sup>1</sup> analyzed the psychological impact on economic Portuguese workers problems, revealing that resignation is the dominant feeling and hope is scarce (Ferreira, 2011:133). The exponential growth on long-term unemployment, as well employment insecurity, lead to a new typology of poverty not only material but human.

### **Suffering at Work**

According to Mendes and Cruz (2004), work occupies a central space in people's lives because it is a constituent element of the worker's identity, assuring his/her mental health that might be endangered of getting sick in precarious work contexts and strict opportunities for professional development. Dejours (1998), sustains that work might cause suffering and reduce the needed subjectivity for human production, creating pleasure or suffering. The concept of work is polysemic and multifaceted, having a major role in the individual's construction and social identities, being able of containing resistances and conflicts, depending on affectivities and emotions, being filled of different forms of power and domination and also susceptible of generating cohesion and emancipation, decompensations and uneasiness. In the 1970's, Piotrkowsky (1978) carried out a study where he verified that some workers were exhausted due to psychological tiredness or because they possessed boring employments, creating the same feelings of apathy for familiar life and other activities. Over the years, work has become more demanding from the mental point of view than the physical one (Zijlstra *et al.*, 1996). There was an increasing on the number of workers exposed to pressure, situations of fatigue, burnout, stress, alienation, being observed an emptiness feeling towards the meaning of work, disqualification and degradation of work conditions. Individuals possess a lower degree of autonomy and labor decision power, which leads them to work, in many cases, at a ridiculous pace, absent from controlling their working time and not being able to control the pace of their tasks (Jackson, Wall, Martin, & Davids, 1993), nor the level of the investment's effort (Zijlstra, 1993; Zijlstra, *et al.* 1999).

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<sup>1</sup> Available on: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/149261/Worries-Job-Cutbacks-Return-Record-Highs.aspx>

## Contact Centres

According to the Portuguese Society of Contact Centres<sup>2</sup>, Portugal is on the radar and agenda of international decision makers in attracting foreign investments for the installation of contact centres. Portugal is strategically positioned on the intercontinental routes that present its best technological infrastructures. Portuguese companies export contact centre technologies, with specific knowledge in terms of professional management, with human resources easily adapted to this activity, with language skills, key element to the settling for international contact centres. Since the end of the 1990s, it has been one of the leading services companies expanding in Portugal and one of the best places to apply the Lean Production model to the telecommunications sector (Burgess; Connell, 2006), meaning the tailoring of intellectual work and services field work. The scenarios of technological innovation are personified through a timed rationalization of work (Castells, 1996) and the employment of salaried precariats (Paugam, 2000). According to Braga, there is an imprisonment of spiritual work force and its practical knowledge in a production routine marked by work interaction of labor with information technologies (Braga, 2006:15). Even though workers might have knowledge of their precarious working conditions offered by temporary-work agencies, which connect workers to contact centres, they prefer to submit themselves to manipulation and exploitation as a means of an easier integration in the labor market (Roque, 2010). Fixed-term contracts offer an uncertain stay at the company through successive labor renewals, at the end of which the worker is discarded. Those who remain are in an eternal dialectic process of monthly or weekly renewal so that they won't be part of the company's staff. In this way, the temporary gives place to a permanent or intermittent precarity (*Ibid.*). To address the lack of means of production, temporary-work agencies perpetuate massive seasonal hiring, allowing the simplification of bureaucratic recruitment procedures, saving business expenses.

## Psychosocial Risks at Contact Centres

The first studies made on psychosocial risks field took place in the 16th century. They were carried out by Paracelsus, a pioneer doctor of labor medicine that emerged as a precursor for

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.apcontactcenters.org/>

health science and safety at work. He sought to systematize the occupational diseases, in particular, the nature and the degree of relationship with work and protective measures, contributing greatly to the adoption of laws on protection of labor and worker's compensation (Neto, 2013: 10). In the 17th century, the Parliament of the United Kingdom created the poor Law, which sought to answer whether employment conditions, whether life conditions, establishing a relationship between disease and poverty due to the new challenges and problems posed to safety and health of workers (*Ibid.*). In the 18th century, there was a transition from manufacture to machinofacture through the advent of Industrial Revolution, in an exacerbated human factor subservience to the capital factor, creating human and sanitary precarious conditions (Correia *apud* Neto, 2013: 10). However, Robert Owen (1771-1858) was one of the first employers to concern about the working conditions of workers, considering them as "vital machines", stating that they only could lead to an increase in production if they possessed good working and existential conditions (Cornish & Clark (1989) *apud* Neto, 2013:11). At a labor level, one of the highlights of the 20th century was the creation of ILO, in 1919, and the School of Human Relations that stands out by the Hawthorne Studies, conducted by Elton Mayo and Harvard University, between 1924 and 1932 at Western Electric Company. These experiments focused on labor and its consequences, regarding repetitive and monotonous tasks in the industrial sector. They concluded that work is a typically group activity in which the worker reacts as a member of a group and not as an isolated individual, and that the efficient organization is unable to elevate productivity if the psychological needs are not discovered, located and fulfilled. In the late 1950's, with the new technologies of information, communication and knowledge (Kumar, 1997) and service provision (Bell, 1973; Naisbit, 1996; De Masi, 2000; Neto, 2013), there was a profound transition from an industrial society to a network society (Castells, 2002).

### **Vulnerability**

Since the end of the 1990's, through the advent of globalization and the consequent social precarity, there has been a growing degradation of opportunities on the labor market (Barbier, 2002). In the 21st century, structural unemployment and the increasing of precariousness on job offers, which contrast with the growing need for qualification for the acquisition of

employability. New forms of labor intensification have perverse impacts in the psychic and mental structure of workers, creating a new psychopathology through the increase of psychosomatic illnesses or "diseases of the soul", a subjectivity aimed by the capital (Alves, 2011). Contact centre assembly lines instill certain disturbances, expressed in psychosocial individual manifestations, identified by the constant fear of an eminent dismissal, giving an instrumental character to the relationships between the individual and the organization (Seligmann-Silva, 1994). Lean production, characteristic of atypical employment situations, lead to an individualized, specialized, segmented, hard, repetitive and monotonous work, culminating in several behavioral, emotional, psychological, physiological and psychosomatic disorders. Therefore, workers of contact centres are subject to an objective precariousness manifested in little or nil qualified workstations, with poor content tasks, undervalued in the business/organizational context. It may include painful working conditions that endanger physical and psychological health of workers, weaken or eliminate qualifying opportunities, progressions and professional development, create low levels of remuneration, inadequacy of the function exercised in relation to the obtained qualifications (situations of over-qualification) (Falcão Casaca, 2005: 16). Paugam (2003) designates this situation as a social disqualification, resulting from a progressive erosion of educational and economic skills, social exclusion, a process of weakening of social and relational ties, social isolation, discouragement, the condition of non citizenship that the precariat and the unemployed are subject to (Kovács, 1994; 2002; Castel, 1995; Paugam, 2000; Gallie e Paugam, 2002; Barbier, 2002; Falcão Casaca, 2005).

### **Poverty of the Self**

Since the beginning of 2008 crisis that 82% of Portuguese workers registered more diseases related to stress, 32% loses sleep nights concerned with their jobs, 61% presents absenteeism, 41% claims that stress affects personal relationships with colleagues (Regus Inquiry, 2013)<sup>3</sup>. We are witnessing the creation of a new condition of poverty among young adults who prefer a bad job than not having a job at all (Ferreira, 2012). It is a question of survival absent from emancipation, of structural violence, being removed to individuals their natural and human rights

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.rcmpharma.com/actualidade/saude/10-12-13/82-dos-trabalhadores-portugueses-tem-mais-doencas-relacionadas-com-o-stre>

such as health, welfare and work. Graduates and qualified, represent a new type of "graduated poverty", constituting in a typology of the "new poor" who detain an academic degree which is not recognized by the labor market or the companies, leading to a situation of economic and psychological frustration. According to Kosugi, they are affected by a situation of status discord, that is, they are unable to apply their knowledge, mainly the academic one, in their daily work, creating a spiritual poverty or "poverty of Self", that is, disqualification (Kosugi, 2008). Contact centres are on the basis of what Braga and Antunes (Antunes; Braga, 2009) established as infoproletariat or Huws conceived as cibertariat (Huws, 2003). This is a new generation of workers who operate with new information and communication technologies. It is a non-industrial services proletariat, even if the employee does not have consciousness of this proletariat condition, being inserted into a working toyotist model, generator of new feelings of alienation and/or frustration, resulting in a corrosion of character (Sennett, 2001). The identity of the customer relationship assistant is deconstructed by the lack of expectations, the non identification with the role of customer service, being unable of building a professional career, i.e. absent of an occupational identity, a sense of belonging to the company for which he/she works, a belonging to the community, a sense of ethics, standards of behavior, reciprocity and brotherhood, culminating in frustration (Huws, 2003). In this way, we are witnessing a process of subjetification of the Self, being created a "computerized Self". The Self or "itself", is the center the whole personality, representing the achievement, the recognition and integration of the individual's whole and individuality (Jung, 2009).

### **The Precarious Mind**

According to Antunes (2013), the new work morphology comprises not only the working class, heir of the taylorist and Fordist era, but also the world's precariatized proletarians. These are a growing part of the class-who-lives-of-work, temporary ones who expand themselves, according to the logic of "flexible" company, in particular, in the services area, information and communication technologies. Telemarketing and call centre workers, banks, supermarkets, employees of fast food, among others, are examples of this kind of workers. According to Standing, these overqualified workers comprise the precariat, a symbol of globalization, electronic life and alienated work. They are subject to high levels of wage flexibility, labor

flexibility and flexibility of qualifications, with easy adaptation to any task (Standing, 2011). However, these workers may have a precariatized mind, an apparent state of "mental insanity", manifested by four symptoms, the 4 A's according to Standing, that comprise: Anxiety, Anomie and Alienation. Anger results from the frustration of a life filled with precarious jobs; anxiety results from chronic labor insecurity, overwork or lack of it; anomie results from the absence of a professional career and/or occupational identity; alienation comes from mental separation from work carried out for others and not for his/her own satisfaction. In this way, a crisis of identity and membership is created. Automation of work in call centres becomes virtual, having as a consequence the illegibility of its own activity in which work becomes degrading and social ties with work are disrupted, being created a loss of social identity where workers are multipurpose and adaptable to constant change (Sennett, 2001).

### **Biographic Processes of Precariatized Minds**

Biography 1 - Precarity I<sup>4</sup> is a young woman of thirty-two years of age living in Coimbra, since birth, with her father. At a young age she suffered from her mother's death. Her oldest brother immigrated to Mexico where he works as an engineer and started a family. Her maternal grandparents were farmers, while her paternal grandfather worked in the construction business and her grandmother was a domestic worker. Her father, now retired, was a merchant and, according to Precarity I, belongs to the lower middle class. She has a boyfriend whom she met at the call centre where she works. Her friendships, excepting a few childhood friends, belong to her call centre working world. Precarity I studied and graduated in Coimbra, in the area of Sociology and obtained a postgraduate degree in human resources. The only work experience she has had, since 2006, was in the call centre as a customer relationship assistant. The insertion was made with the recommendation of a friend who was already working in a call centre. Initially, she began with a part-time of four hours so that she would be able to attend classes simultaneously. However, taking into account that the fatigue and wear are quite notorious in a routinized and timed work, she didn't finished her masters course, only keeping the post-graduation, and decided to change her work regime to a full time schedule. This worker receives a minimum wage for eight hours work week and has an uncertain term contract with the

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<sup>4</sup> I decided to name the interviewees with a false name so that their privacy would be respected

temporary-work agency. However, it does not prevent her from being transferred to any other service or being fired. After eight years of working at a call centre, she reveals a high degree of fear of losing her job. Like most colleagues, she is not affiliated, nor believes in the role of trade unions, living encapsulated in a lethargy that prevents her from risking new job opportunities, leaving parents' home and raise a family. From the interview taken, the most relevant were the following:

*"Sometimes I said in jest that since I joined a call centre that I am in a process of stupidification. For me, precariousness is my reality".*

*"There are customer relationship assistants who enjoy what they do, I don't like what I do, I need to work. The only good thing is that the wage is there at the end of each month and that's an advantage."*

*"Getting married and having children, no. Being independent, yes. Leaving home is impossible, with the minimum wage living alone in a house, paying the rent, water, electricity, I would starve. "*

*"I have a brother who is emigrant and he's tired of telling me to go, but I hate to get out of my comfort zone and that depends on my psychological shape because Coimbra is my comfort zone. I'm very afraid of risking it. Uncertainty makes me very confused. "*

Biography II - Precarity II is a young woman of 39 years old who lives in Coimbra since birth. She lives alone with her parents in Coimbra, having a sister who immigrated to England. According to her, grandparents were farmers and belong in poor class. Her parents are in the lower middle class and comparing the class evolution she only considers that there are greater opportunities for qualification but not in terms of jobs. She has been working since she was 17 years, on a part-time regime on the weekends for financial reasons. She worked at stationery stores, clothing stores, household articles stores in malls, supermarkets and hypermarkets, without a working contract. At the end of the 1990's, with 18 years of age, she started a law degree, however, unfinished. As tuition costs have increased her lifestyle became unsustainable, being forced to work. So, she entered the information customer service of a call centre in

Coimbra, where she has been working for 15 years. Despite the antiquity, she doesn't belong to the firm's managerial staff. She has had short-term contracts with several temporary-work agencies which bond her to the call centre. Since December 2013, the call centre company changed its temporary-work agency, giving her an uncertain term contract. This situation doesn't give her any safety, because she can be fired at any moment or being allocated to another company. She has an eight hours a day contract, earning the minimum wage. She has no car, isn't married and doesn't intend to marry or to have children, especially, due to the precarious situation in which she lives, remaining in a situation of extreme fear of losing what she has, even if it's little or nothing. From the interview taken, the most relevant were the following:

*"Rather than be living at my parents, I could have an independent life, being at my house. I don't have a license, I don't have a car, but I could have another kind of life, in fact, but I don't.. Five years from now I see myself in the same place. If I had good financial conditions I would have kids, because I'm afraid of not being able to give them what they would need".*

*"Professional achievement in a call centre, no. This is not what I envisioned for my life".*

*"I'm not happy at all with the work that I do. With the passing of the years we get conformed or even try to think, with a good mood on, that the day will go on faster, but a professional level this isn't a stimulating work. The main feeling is that we are cannon fodder. We're just a mere number inside the call centre. There are no names, just statistics inside the company. If he/she doesn't work another one will come along".*

*"There is absolutely no communication, and only to give a practical example, I think that there is no one else that knows better the customers than us call centre assistants. In many situations, they want to impose procedures that we know from the outset that will not please the customer. And it is regrettable that after a while, even two or three years, the company realizes that, in fact, we were right and that that procedure wasn't correct".*

*"Psychological support we don't have at all. More often we see customer relationship assistants taking a sick leave for exhaustion and psychological fatigue reasons. More and more they demand from us. What they pay doesn't correspond to what they require. "*

Biography III - Precarity III is a young man of 35 years old who lives in Coimbra, having been born in France but came to Portugal with three years of age. At 18 years old she moved to Coimbra to attend an academic course in law. Her maternal grandparents lived in conditions of extreme poverty with nine children, being farmers; her maternal grandmother was a household cleaning maid and her maternal grandfather a civil constructor. Her parents were Portuguese migrants, self-employed traders, belonging to the middle class, well stabilized. According to her, over the years there was social mobility in her family, having stagnated until her generation. Her academic career followed a completely different course from her professional career. At eighteen years of age, she got into law school in Coimbra, being, simultaneously involved in associative movements and, therefore, completing the course in six years. After that, she decided to attend master's course in law, moving to Viana do Castelo, where she made an internship. In 2005, attending the second year of the course, she returned to Coimbra and needed a job to support herself. So got into a contact centre, working six hours a day. So, since then she has been working for nine years in the same inbound service, referring that her call centre changed several times of temporary-work agency. Precarity III, receives the same wage she received nine years ago, working now eight hours day, with a fixed-term contract, monthly renewable, receiving a compensation at the end of each year of work by the expiry of the same. In 2013, she enrolled again in a master's degree in social intervention. Therefore, she never exercised a profession in her training area, stating that she accumulates courses. She prefers keeping her survival, working at contact centres, than risking her life firing herself and waiting for months for an eventual internship, without access to employment benefit. Precarity III is not affiliated in unions because she is a customer relationship assistant and it's just a temporary thing. There is no love for the profession because it is not a profession, it's not a career. She considers herself as precarious, because she receives a low wage for the tasks she carries out. One month after the completion of this interview, she was invited to be carried over to another service with another schedule, i.e. the informational service, working only eight hours at the customer relationship service. As such, she quit and immigrated to France with her longtime boyfriend that supported this change. From the interview taken, the most relevant were the following:

*"At this point, I don't consider myself as a precarious worker. I am precarious only in the sense that I have not been using the qualifications or the skills I've acquired, and precarious at*

*the wage that I get at the end of the month. But at a level of employment stability I cannot consider it as precarious because I work there for nine years. "*

*"People who work there are at a point of saturation and reveal quite explosive reactions. If we hear our colleagues, sometimes, I think they are bipolar because they can be very happy as very depressed, mistreating the clients, treating them like as if it was their grandmother, consequent of a terrible fatigue and imbalance. Everything which comprises pills and anxiolytics becomes fundamental".*

*"I'm in a generation in which people managed to have a profession or call centre assistants don't have a perspective of employment, job or career. If anyone asks what you'll be doing when you're 50 or 60 years old? Nobody knows. I don't know any call center assistant who has 60 years of age. There are no older people working at call centres and I don't know what will these people do? "*

*"There is a culture of accommodation; I see other situations where there is a complete shutdown of what you do. People go there, it's just signing in for the work presence.. You go there, there is no love for the profession because it is not a profession, it's not a career, it's not ... it's the place where you will work. You don't create any link with the job, although it's completely absorbing. It's impossible to have coffee with folks whom you work, they just talk about work ".*

*"I use to say that the street sweeper and the cleaning lady have a profession, they are workers from somewhere and dedicate themselves to cleaning. A call centre assistant doesn't have a profession, a career, only works at a call centre. I think nobody there feels that he/she has a profession. What is it? I work in a call centre, I am nothing, there's no identity. Career, I don't think they even think about it. There is no notion of what a professional career is".*

## **Conclusion**

Through the analysis of the following professional trajectories, we verify the deconstruction of occupational identity of each one of the customer relationship assistants, by the lack of

expectations, by not identifying with the professional role and the tasks they do, creating new feelings of alienation. The despotic power, sometimes inhuman, exercised in the figure of the call centre, leads to the development of an uncertain identity or pathology of the assistant who finds her/himself forced to live within a framework of constant readaptation (Roque, 2010). Hence, in this case, workers remain, for the most part, imprisoned in uncertainty, that over the years, with the precarious and uncertain economic and social situation that Portugal crosses, prefer to remain in a situation of alienation, fear, exempt of occupational identity, finding themselves in a professional position not included in the national classification of occupations. The lack of hygiene and safety at work, the disregard for the human condition and the worker's labor, lead to psychic and physiological diseases. Hence, this type of work is recognized as precarious, in addition to the weak or null level of personal achievement, especially by the non-recognition of the academic skills.

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