

Precarious work and platformization: trade in the lower circuit of economy

Trabalho precariado e plataformização: comércio no circuito inferior da economia

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Abstract

The context of capitalist restructuring, deindustrialization, reprimarization of the export agenda, and rentism also includes platform economy, uberization, and the growing precarization of the world of work. Maracanaú, in the Metropolitan Region of Fortaleza, is not immune to the transformations that have been occurring in the national scenario. This article aims to analyze the dynamics of the lower circuit of urban economy in territories of popular clothing trade in the Municipality of Maracanaú. We conclude that this trade goes beyond the metropolitan territory and reinvents itself amid the clash with the government and with private interests. However, the right to work in the context of urban reform is a challenge in view of the army of excluded workers, and the right to the city that has become a commodity – the business city – has been denied.

Keywords: business; precarization; urban economy; territory.

Resumo

No contexto de reestruturação capitalista, desindustrialização, reprimarização da pauta exportadora, rentismo, somam-se a economia da plataforma, a uberização e a crescente precarização do mundo do trabalho. Maracanaú, pertencente à Região Metropolitana de Fortaleza, não passa incólume pelas transformações ocorridas no cenário nacional. O objetivo deste artigo é analisar a dinâmica do circuito inferior da economia urbana nos territórios de comércio de confecção popular do município de Maracanaú. Conclui-se que esse comércio extrapola o território metropolitano e se reinventa em meio ao embate com o poder público e os interesses privados. Contudo, o direito ao trabalho na reforma urbana é um desafio diante do exército de excluídos, sendo negado o direito à cidade que se transformou em mercadoria, cidade do negócio.

Palavras-chave: comércio; precarização; economia urbana; território.



Introduction

While until the 1970s, Brazil's economic structure was characterized as urban and industrial, it is well known that, along with the urban and service economy, we are facing the larger context of capitalist restructuring, the advance of deindustrialization, the reprimarization of exports, rentierism and, recently, the platform economy and "uberization" (Antunes, 2019; Slee, 2017), as part of the growing precariation (Standing, 2014) of the world of work.

Economic crises have a direct impact on the labor market, with a drop in investment and an increase in the number of unemployed people. The one that occurred in 2011 is emblematic of this, which led to a reduction in the pace of national economic growth, confirming what Ribeiro, L. C. Q. (2020) said about the rupture of the "developmentalist experiment", since the economic crisis intensified at the end of 2014, becoming irreversible in 2016, unfolding in a movement of "ultraliberal inflection".

Capitalism has always faced crises, although the most recent ones have had quite striking territorial consequences. According to Pochmann (2017), the inflection in the trajectory of formalization of occupations and unemployment directly reflects the recessionary situation that dominates the Brazilian economy.

The renewal of the conditions that allow for new cycles of capitalist accumulation has historically occurred through spatial adjustments. Thus, there is an intrinsic relationship between the accumulation process and spatial adjustments as a way of overcoming

the crises resulting from the devaluation of capital. According to Harvey (2005), the recent crises faced by capitalism have led to sectors of production being transplanted to countries that offer the necessary advantages for a new moment of accumulation.

Companies that continually modernize their machinery and, among their new organizational forms, increasingly employ outsourcing lay off employees, and increase forms of automation. The tendency of the labor market to reduce the number of workers and employ a workforce that is easily dismissed was already pointed out, among other authors, by Harvey (1993).

Productive and territorial restructuring boosts flexibilization and outsourcing, which in turn intensify the precariation of employment relations with a loss of rights as informal employment overtakes formal employment relations. Outsourcing is one of the spheres of flexible accumulation based on "the flexibility of work processes, labor markets, products, and consumption patterns [...]" (ibid., p. 140).

We are witnessing a continuous process of "flexibilization" in labor legislation. As an example, we can mention the Labor Reform, with rules aimed at making the labor market more flexible (law n. 13.467/2017), and the Social Security Reform, which changed rules for granting retirement and social benefits (PEC 6/2019).

With the COVID-19 pandemic, this context has worsened, leading to more layoffs. During the period of social isolation, there was a disruption, harming formal and informal workers and, notably, small and micro-enterprises. The definition of what was an essential activity during the lockdown period revealed socioeconomic inequality and, in

particular, the deepening of capitalism in its most perverse version, as Silva and Muniz (2020) pointed out.

Growing unemployment, informality, and "precarisation" (Standing, 2014) prompt investigation of relevant issues and their impact on the territory. Thus, this exploratory, qualitative, and quantitative study involved bibliographical research, as well as statistical and field research, with records and observations in the field diary, in addition to the application of 64 questionnaires, from September to November 2022, with traders in their different spaces of reproduction linked to the popular clothing trade, in the lower circuit of the urban economy of Maracanaú, a municipality in the Metropolitan Region of Fortaleza (Ceará).

With this in mind, the objective is to analyze the dynamics of the lower circuit of the urban economy in the territories of popular clothing trade in the Municipality of Maracanaú. To this end, it is structured as follows, in addition to this introduction: Unemployment, informality, and precarious work; Maracanaú's urban economy (RMF-Ceará); Maracanaú's popular clothing trade; Platform economy and uberization in the popular clothing trade in Maracanaú's lower economic circuit, followed by the Final considerations.

Unemployment, informality, and precarious work

We are witnessing a growing process of technological innovation in the production processes of different economic sectors. "At the same time as an intense and widespread

process of technological innovation, many workers are being pushed out of the production process [...]" (Ianni, 1997, p. 13). "Technological change then becomes an endogenous source of unemployment" (Offe, 1989, p. 82).

Large-scale unemployment, also known as technological or structural, has thus been occurring, generally motivated by the replacement of labor by mechanization, automation, and computerization of the production process with the expansion of the technical-scientific-informational environment (Santos, 1994), which underpins the process of productive restructuring. Tunes (2020, p. 224) states that "associated with the growth in employment of the skilled workforce is, contradictorily, the increase in structural unemployment, which has a more intense impact on the less skilled workforce".

We recognize that the terms of this debate are wide-ranging and complex, and we cannot pretend to summarize this theoretical challenge. However, it is crucial that we try to retrieve the key elements of this debate that have divided the literature into two currents, namely: those who affirm, based on Marx's social theory, the centrality of work; and those who affirm the non-centrality of work precisely because of microelectronic-based automation with the accentuated technical progress in the production process, generating structural unemployment and leading to the trivialization of the need for workers in the production process, since they now occupy a secondary role in the process of capitalist accumulation.

Ricardo Antunes goes against the position of authors who announce the crisis of the labor society or the end of work (Gorz, Offe, Habermas, Kurtz), striving to demonstrate

that work still represents the central category in the structuring of contemporary societies, and workers remain the main protagonists of social transformations. Even considering the spread and deepening of technical and scientific advances, as well as how work has diversified, there is still validity to the Marxian thesis of work as a generator of value. Thus, in capitalist society, science is added to the apparatus of capital in order to extract surplus labor (Antunes, 1997).

Antunes (*ibid.*, p. 54) points out that there is no "generalizing and unison trend" towards the elimination of workers and their social weight, stressing the incorporation of women's work, the extensive wage employment in the middle sectors as a result of the expansion of services, and the multiplication of forms of partial, temporary and precarious work. It would be more appropriate, he argues, to speak of a "process of greater heterogenization, fragmentation, and complexification of the working class".

In view of this, we cannot neglect that companies that

innovate and differentiate products generate more jobs, of higher quality, better paid, and with more job stability. This, in a way, contradicts the traditional view that innovative and technology-intensive companies are labor-saving and are not great employers. (Tunes, 2020, p. 224)

There is a duality in the labor market, with a small "top" layer (skilled workers with higher levels of education) and a large "bottom" layer (unskilled workers with lower

levels of education) growing at both ends of the occupational structure. Added to this is the huge number of unemployed and the informal labor market, accompanied by the evolution of precarious labor relations in almost every country in the world, analyzed by Standing (2014).

With an unemployed population of 8.6 million, the unemployment rate in Brazil fell to 8% in the first quarter (April to June) of 2023, according to data from the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (Pnad Contínua), calculated by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the lowest rate since 2014, and a drop of 1.3 percentage points compared to the same period in 2022. In turn, the employed population (98.9 million) grew by 1.1% (1.1 million more people) compared to the previous quarter and increased by 0.7% (641,000 more) compared to the same quarter in 2022. The country recorded an informality rate of 38.9% in the labor market in the quarter to April 2023. There were 38.089 million informal workers in the period. In one quarter, 365,000 people stopped working as informal workers. Job losses in the labor market as a whole in the period totaled 605,000, which is more a seasonal issue than a structural one.

Informality driven by labor flexibilization, with "free contracting between capital and labor, was presented as a 'solution' by neoliberal ideologues to eliminate unemployment" (Muniz et al., 2022). Furthermore, as pay in certain segments of the economy is increasingly based on productivity, it is difficult for workers to keep their jobs and maintain a stable income. App-based service

providers are an example of this context that puts into practice so-called flexible working relationships, in which there are excessive working hours and low incomes. Another example is the many cases of precarious work in textile and clothing production.

[...] in almost every region of Brazil - whether in those where the proportion of informal workers is still high, or even in the most developed centers, such as São Paulo - we see situations of serious precarization, such as those that characterize the working conditions of Bolivian families who in growing numbers have signed contracts with textile companies that pay them per production, in regimes that far exceed the legal working day, and with derisory remuneration. (Standing, 2014, p. 284)

Standing (ibid.) conceptualizes the precariat:

The precariat is made up of people who lack guarantees related to work, such as guarantees of the labor market, employment, job security, reproduction of skills, income security, and representation.

On the scale of the intra-urban metropolitan area, it is also possible to identify precarious work (ibid.). So, in the next few topics, we'll address questions about the popular clothing trade in Maracanaú related to the lower economic circuit.

Maracanaú's urban economy (RMF-Ceará)

the municipality of Maracanaú, located in the Metropolitan Region of Fortaleza (RMF),¹ emancipated itself from Maranguape in 1983, becoming an integral part of the RMF established by federal complementary law no. 14, of June 8, 1973, and currently made up of nineteen municipalities.

According to the IBGE census (2022), Maracanaú is about 23.2 km from Fortaleza, with 234,392 inhabitants, making it the third largest population in the RMF, behind Fortaleza, with 2,703,391 inhabitants, and Caucaia, with 368,918 inhabitants. Maracanaú's population growth (1960-2021) points to the 1980s as a milestone, resulting from the establishment of housing estates and new industrial plants in the industrial district.

Since the end of the 1960s, Maracanaú has been part of the context of regional development projects organized by the Northeast Economic Development Agency (Sudene), with the establishment of the industrial district. In the 1980s, the municipality entered the logic of flexible production and consumption, through the productive restructuring promoted by the "Government of Change" in Ceará, which reproduced the neoliberal agenda and stimulated the entry of private enterprises through the policy of

tax incentives and the fiscal war provided by the administrative autonomy approved by the Federal Constitution of 1988 (CF88), with new geographies of city governance, in which the state, as well as being a structurer, is also an entrepreneur of space and not just what Harvey (2005, p. 166) calls "entrepreneurship in urban governance".

Thus, in addition to the policies carried out during the developmentalist experiment in Ceará, the state government acted through different strategies to advance the restructuring of capital, notably in the sectors of industry, tourism, services, and export agribusiness based on irrigated agriculture (fruit-growing, horticulture, and floriculture) and the agro-industry associated with it.

Although investments are heavily concentrated in the RMF, as shown by a recent study by the Observatório das Metrôpoles regarding the metropolitan economy and regional development (Muniz et al., 2020), there is also an effort by politicians to decentralize the capital and spread productive investments to the rest of Ceará.

According to Muniz (2015), industrial activity is important in the process of metropolization that has taken place in the RMF, with the presence of large establishments. This process corroborates the intensification of commuting between the municipalities of the RMF, especially on the Maracanaú-Pacatuba (CE-060), Horizonte-Pacajus (BR-116) and Caucaia-São Gonçalo do Amarante (BR-222) highways, where major industrial companies are active.

At the same time as maintaining its share of the industrial total, the metropolis of Ceará is following the global trend and standing out as a tertiary metropolis, reinforcing the strength of

this sector in the economy of the RMF, due to the growth of commerce and services (Muniz et al., 2020).

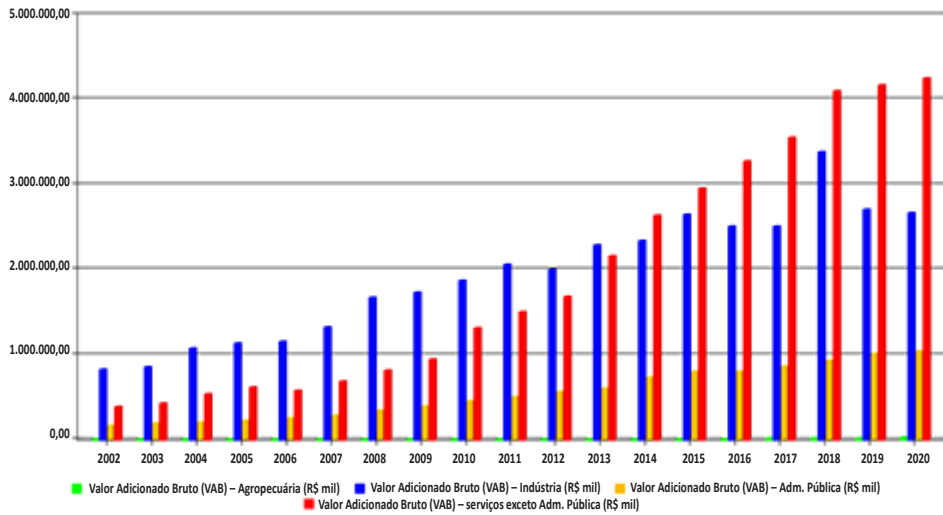
Consequently, since the 2000s, the city of Maracanaú has been transformed and its tertiary sector has grown, thus forming a new centrality in the metropolitan area, not just related to industrial production, but with the implantation of fixed structures linked to commerce and services that drive intense flows in the territory.

In 2003, the year North Shopping Maracanaú was founded, the service sector grew (from 379,706.00 to 422,858.00), but it was in 2014 that the service sector stood out (2,629,989.52) in relation to the other economic sectors in the municipality, as can be seen in Graphic 1.

Although the metropolis of Fortaleza still exerts a great centripetal force, economic activities, leisure and housing go beyond its limits, spreading to municipalities in the RMF. Maracanaú, home to the industrial district and numerous housing estates, with high population growth rates, attracts commercial and service activities, becoming an important centrality in the RMF.

Among the municipalities with "very high" and "high" integration with the RMF are Caucaia, Maracanaú, Horizonte, Eusébio, Pacajus; and with "medium" integration are Aquiraz, Pacatuba, and São Gonçalo do Amarante; while the majority are poorly integrated (Costa and Amora, 2015). According to the Regic studies (IBGE, 2020, p. 12), which proposed the designation of Population Arrangements to the grouping of two or more municipalities with a strong connection due to movement for work or study, Maracanaú is part of the Fortaleza grouping formed by: Aquiraz, Caucaia, Eusébio, Itaitinga, Maracanaú, Maranguape and Pacatuba.

Graphic 1 – Maracanaú's GDP



Source: Ipece (2022).

Modern tertiary equipment has been installed (shopping centers, supermarket chains, private colleges, and training and educational institutes), without preventing the expansion of traditional street vending, present in different parts of the city, territories of survival and consumption for lower-income inhabitants. This traditional trade encompasses different structures, workers from the capital and from municipalities in the RMF, and its area of influence ranges from local to global (Bezerra da Silva, 2013; Santos, 2014; Queiroz and Muniz, 2020; Muniz et al., 2022), linking the "upper and lower circuits of the urban economy" (Santos, 1979). However, the reproduction of this type of trade in the lower circuit is widespread in medium-sized municipalities in the state and in the RMF, with an impact on the territorial configuration of Maracanaú.

The popular clothing trade in Maracanaú

Trade linked to textile and clothing production has a strong presence in the city of Fortaleza and, consequently, in Ceará, extending to regional, national, and international scales. The textile and clothing cluster in Ceará is the seventh largest in the country, behind São Paulo, Santa Catarina, Minas Gerais, Paraná, Rio de Janeiro and Goiás, according to data on establishments – RAIS (2019).

The consolidation of the modern textile and clothing hub in the RMF has the presence of local capital that has close ties to the pre-existing industrial base (Silva and Muniz, 2022). Maracanaú's representativeness in the clothing trade is a reflection of the significant weight of textile and clothing production in

the state, as Muniz (2014) has already pointed out. Muniz (2022b), based on data from Rais (2019), states that, as with the textile industry, clothing production in the state stands out in the metropolitan area, with Maracanaú (81 establishments) standing out after the capital (1,641 establishments).

According to Bezerra da Silva (2013), the clothing sector attracts a large contingent of buyers, mainly *sacoleiras* (itinerant vendors) and tourists from other states and countries such as Cape Verde, French Guiana, and Suriname.

The expansion of the lower circuit, through the clothing trade in the RMF, is very representative in Fortaleza, such as the popular clothing trade in the city center, with the Municipal Small Business Center, also called Novo Beco da Poeira, Esqueleto da Moda, the José Avelino street market, the marketers around the Igreja da Sé and at Praça José de Alencar; these are examples of spaces used by those who depend on this sector of the economy, according to Dantas (2012), Bezerra da Silva (2013), Santos (2014), Queiroz and Muniz (2020).

The geography of commerce encompasses the interrelations between the upper and lower circuits of the urban economy. As in other Brazilian urban realities, the popular clothing trade in Maracanaú, practiced by the lower circuit of the economy, has its activity limited, "regulated" through the action of the public authorities, by serving private interests, as well as by regulating the use and occupation of urban land, leading to the consequent fragmentation of its practice in the city.

It is worth noting that "the second half of the 20th century was marked by accelerated urbanization in dependent economy countries, and their cities manifested all kinds of problems related to the population growth they are experiencing" (Sposito, 2020, p. 70). Thus, among the problems caused is the informality present in the lower circuit of the urban economy, which we can define as "a non-modern circuit, comprising small manufacturing production, often artisanal, small trade and a multiplicity of services of all kinds" (Santos, 1979, p. 155).

It is well known that, in the capitalist economy, not everyone has a formal job, a reality that is exacerbated by the flexibilization of labor relations, leaving the population that lives as street vendors. Roughly speaking, this type of trade refers to people who engage in street vending, with no fixed location in the city, occupying territories that guarantee their survival. These "pieces" of the city, i.e. the territories of street vending, make it possible not to "segregate" consumption for low-income inhabitants, since the lower circuit configures a social relationship through the practice of "business", for those who seek it out, regardless of their social status.

However, it is important to point out that, despite the origin and greater dependence of the lower circuit on the upper one, both are connected like "communicating vessels", since, as both are a result of modernization, they currently find the conditions for their reproduction" (Silveira, 2004, p. 66).

In this way, the interrelationship between the two circuits can be seen today, especially in the context of the "practicality and

speed" provided by digital platforms, given the advance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) that marks the expansion of Industry 4.0.

[...] the expansion of the so-called Industry 4.0. This proposed industry was born in Germany in 2011, designed to generate a new and profound technological leap in the productive world (in the broad sense), structured on the basis of new information and communication technologies (ICT), which are developing rapidly. Its expansion will mean even more automated and robotized production processes throughout the value chain so that business logistics will be controlled entirely digitally. (Antunes, 2020, pp. 13-14)

According to Antunes (*ibid.*, p. 13): "Information and communication technologies are thus configured as a central element among the distinct accumulation mechanisms created by the financial capitalism of our time."

Therefore, the use of digital platforms to publicize and communicate popular clothing products in Maracanaú, together with payment mechanisms such as credit card machines and instant payment platforms like PIX, are elements of the upper circuit that adapt to the commerce provided by the lower circuit, given that capitalism is an unequal system that easily adapts to different realities (Queiroz and Muniz, 2020).

The urban space is occupied by different social actors, based on various interests and manifestations; therefore, labor activities promote the use and occupation of land for commerce in the two circuits of the urban economy. The lower circuit of the urban economy is evidenced in different areas of

the municipality of Maracanaú, such as the Entrepreneur Center, the Carlos Jereissati Market, the Feira do Caranguejo (Crab Fair), and the Industrial Fair.

The Iguatemi Favela Fair and the Calçadão Fair were relocated by Maracanaú City Hall (PMM), and some of the former market-goers from the Iguatemi Favela moved to the Carlos Jereissati Market, founded in 1993.

The old Iguatemi Favela Fair (FFI), in Maracanaú, was the first place where the lower economic circuit was reproduced; a space that was modified and fragmented through the actions of former mayor Júlio Cesar, who removed the former market traders from the site and moved some of them to the Carlos Jereissati Market, according to Gomes (2015).

The second, more recent space linked to the lower circuit of the economy, designed for the predominant operation of the popular clothing trade, the Entrepreneur Center (CEM), founded in 2022, is located at Praça Francisco Mário Ferreira, after the street vendors were removed from the Calçadão Fair; some of them were given a stall in this new location, which operates from Monday to Saturday, morning and afternoon, and on Sundays in the morning.

Thus, the territories investigated in the fieldwork related to the lower circuit of the urban economy in Maracanaú's popular clothing trade are the Carlos Jereissati Market, the Crab Fair, the Maracanaú Metropolitan Popular Fair, also known as the Industrial Fair, and the Entrepreneur Center.

In all these spaces, the popular clothing trade predominates, but there are also sales of electronics, vegetables, meals, offal, tools, beauty products, cosmetics, haberdashery, and barbershops.

In Maracanaú's clothing trade, the main target consumer is women, aged between 30 and 40. With regard to the sale of products related to this commercial segment, on a descending scale, from the largest to the smallest, according to an analysis of the questionnaires answered, among the products with the largest number of sales, fashion stands out, followed by underwear, children's clothing, and, finally, beachwear; we would point out that there are also hammocks for resting, bed, table and bath.

Unlike the other spaces where the popular clothing trade takes place, in spaces designed with a box-shaped allocation structure, through the ordering of the use and occupation of urban space, the Crab Fair refers to the traditional issue of the occupation of public roads by street traders from the lower circuit of the urban economy. Its operation reproduces street trading and the practice of a free market.

The Crab Fair, located on the 4 de Julho ring road, next to the Maracanaú branch of the National Institute of Social Security (INSS) in the city center, is always open on Sundays from 6am to 12pm. This is where you'll find a wide range of clothing: beachwear, clothing, beds, tables and baths, and hammocks for resting; there are also sales of food, footwear, fruit, vegetables, grains, offal, electronics, pets, animal feed, bicycle, motorcycle and car parts, tools, household appliances, toys, cosmetics, hats and personal hygiene products.

The Metropolitan Popular Fair of Maracanaú, also known as the Industrial Fair, is a different territory from those mentioned above because, although it has street vendors from the municipality of Maracanaú, its origins go back to the problem of the use and occupation of urban land by the popular clothing trade in Fortaleza, at the José Avelino Fair and the Sé Fair, which was relocated to Maracanaú in 2010, according to agreements between Fortaleza City Hall and Maracanaú, which transferred part of the market vendors to this municipality.

The Industrial Fair is open from Wednesday to Sunday, and its operation has a particularity in relation to the other sites, which is the strategic locational issue, as it is close to the neighborhoods bordering Fortaleza and the 4th ring road; therefore part of its consumers are itinerant truck drivers from other states in Brazil, who transport cargo by modal, including São Paulo, Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul. According to the local vendors, the "word-of-mouth" advertising by employees of the industries located in the Conjunto Industrial neighborhood of Maracanaú facilitates consumption by truck drivers.

Regarding the existence of fairs in the city's urban space, Gonçalves (2019, p. 33) teaches that: "[...] fairs and markets can be understood as manifestations of a periodic trade that preceded those of a permanent trade profile in the urban space with the establishment of stores, such as boutiques and stores".

Figure 1 shows the former Calçadão Fair, on Avenida Carlos Jereissati, which, after the closure of the Iguatemi Favela Fair, was the second busiest commercial space in Maracanaú's lower circuit. Therefore, this figure will depict two moments: in the horizontal position, in the letter A, recorded in June 2021, when it was operating in the commercial corridor; in the horizontal position, in the letter B, it is possible to observe the removal of the street vendors, under the management of Mayor Roberto Pessoa, through the requalification work of the

road, thus occurring, in the same way as the Iguatemi Favela Fair, the action of the city hall, in the removal of the street vendors and the consequent fragmentation of their activities in the territory.

Gonçalves (2019) shows that there is often a conflicting relationship between the fair and the urban space, and the public authorities try to bring it within the norms in order to reduce clashes with fixed traders or the misuse of public areas since the configuration of this type of trade promotes a large flow in central areas.

Figure 1 – Calçadão Fair and the redevelopment of Avenida Carlos Jereissati



Source: Queiroz, 2023.

In this way, they are areas left over from the selectivity of spaces by other agents based on segregation and which are often imposed on the population not included in formal jobs. They end up occupying the public space, forming territories. State action can be motivated by territorial planning issues, but also to serve the interests of certain social groups with great economic power. Serpa (2021, p. 176) points out that:

[...] the processes of appropriation of public space in the contemporary city are conditioned by segregationist representations, which mediate processes of territorialization of social groups (classes and fractions of classes), based on a dialectic between cultural capital and economic capital.

It's important to note that the Crab Fair is the only one to occupy the municipality's public space in an unplanned territory, with "street" trade taking place; however, it is limited by the government to Sundays and cannot operate on other days of the week. It also has no support from the city's Department of Labor, Employment and Entrepreneurship (Setee).

In the fairs, precarious work is emblematic. In order to solve the problems faced by the precarization of the population, Standing (2014) considers it essential, firstly, to ensure the right to a voice for all people, especially those who are so far from having the right to citizenship. This is done through means that can improve the forms of participation in the decisions of all communities and countries, effectively advancing the process of democratization. Secondly, among the economic and social proposals, as one of the

most important scholars on the subject, he suggests the institution of the Unconditional and Universal Basic Income.

In a recent study by the Observatório das Metrôpoles on urban reform and the right to the city, Muniz (2022a) portrays the challenges of the right to work in the face of transformations in the urban economy and labor market of Fortaleza, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, complementing the work developed on the impacts of covid-19 on the metropolitan labor market of Fortaleza in the context of neoliberal inflection (Muniz et al., 2020).

In this context, what we are observing is the metropolitan expansion and diffusion of territories of the popular clothing trade in the lower circuit, such as what is happening in Maracanaú, as part of the extension of this process that has already been consolidated in the metropolis of Fortaleza. For Haesbaert and Limonad (2007, p. 26), "[...] territory is always, and concomitantly, appropriation (in a more symbolic sense) and domination (in a more concrete, political-economic approach) of a socially shared space that is not simply constructed [...]"

Thus, the territorial constructions of the clothing trade in Maracanaú are, in a way, present in the logic of reproduction of this part of society. On the reproduction of territories formed by the lower circuit of the economy, Bezerra da Silva (2013, p. 96) teaches us that:

A multiplicity of social actors (street vendors, peddlers, and itinerant vendors) linked to this activity, in order to guarantee their process of reproduction, appropriate the space, build territories through social relations carried out over time, attributing use and symbolic value to a certain area.

In this sense, studies on the territories of the clothing trade, whether in Maracanaú or in other medium-sized or large cities in Brazil, refer to the studies presented by Haesbaert (2005), when he states, based on Lefebvre's thinking, that dynamics and process of construction and appropriation of space by social actors are loaded with the marks of the lived, of use and exchange value. In this way, as lived space-time, the territory is always multiple, diverse, and complex in its visibility of formation and reproduction in urban morphology.

According to the field research, these territories in Maracanaú are mostly represented by people who are not part of the labor market, with low levels of education, and the majority of their workers are female and between 40 and 50 years old.

It's important to note that, according to the answers to the questionnaires applied in the field, as well as workers from Maracanaú, the lower circuit also included former street traders from the center of Fortaleza who once worked in Beco da Poeira and at the José Avelino street market. It is also important to note that the 50-60 age group includes three "ex-galegos" (peddlers) and eleven "ex-sacoleiras".

Regarding the term "galego", Gomes (2015, p. 134) points out that "in Ceará, one of the first forms of commerce developed was that of peddlers. These traders were called galegos, because it was the Portuguese immigrants - and later the Syrians - who spread this practice on a larger scale through the streets of Fortaleza". As for the term "sacoleira", it refers to both the tourist-buyer (consumer) and the reseller of popular goods (Vaz, 2018, p. 28).

Thus, according to the fieldwork, in the spaces designed to accommodate commerce in the lower circuit, as a positive aspect, traders mention the low rent, cleanliness, safety, and the issue of personal health, since, in these places, there is no daily need to set up and dismantle the tent, carry weight and be exposed to the sun, rain, and dust.

The covid-19 pandemic has affected market territories as a whole. Traders reported, in addition to the issue of mourning, with the loss of fellow traders who died from the lethality of the virus, the decrease in sales and the closure of stalls, relating to the Carlos Jereissati Market and the Industrial Fair, since it was not a problem that occurred at the Entrepreneur Center, since its operation refers to the gradual reopening in 2022.

The shopkeepers at the Entrepreneur Center and the Carlos Jereissati Market are complaining about the redevelopment of Avenida V, also known as Carlos Jereissati, Maracanaú's main commercial corridor, which has led to a reduction in the circulation of people; they also question the location, as they have been distanced from the North Shopping Maracanaú, where the largest flow of passers-by occurs on Avenida V, which has affected sales at both locations.

As far as the Crab Fair is concerned, the street vendors cite the limited time they can operate in the space, which only takes place on Sundays; at the Industrial Fair, despite having a representative from the municipal government managing the space, they question the lack of publicity for the trade in this location; this was also considered a shortcoming by the traders at the Entrepreneur Center and the Carlos Jereissati Market.

Platform economy and uberization in the lower economic circuit in Maracanaú

As mentioned above, the popular clothing trade in Maracanaú is widespread in the traditional street trade and in places planned for its operation. Its reproduction in the territory is overseen and regulated by the city council, through the Plano Diretor da Cidade (City Master Plan), which offers the following regulations on the use of urban land, before its occupation by small or large entrepreneurs, present in its article 3: "VII - the strengthening of public regulation over urban land through the use of redistributive instruments for urban income and land and control over the use and occupation of city space" (Maracanaú, 2012, p. 2).

Thus, the popular clothing trade in Maracanaú is found in the street trade, at the Crab Fair and at certain intersections of Avenida Carlos Jereissati, an avenue that has already hosted the Calçada Fair, some patches of street vendors at the intersections of the avenue, in the corridor of Avenida VII, a new sub centrality formed in the municipality, in the neighborhood of Pajuçara. However, in this new commercial corridor, as far as the lower circuit is concerned, the food trade predominates, especially at night. On the other hand, the places designed to receive street vendors

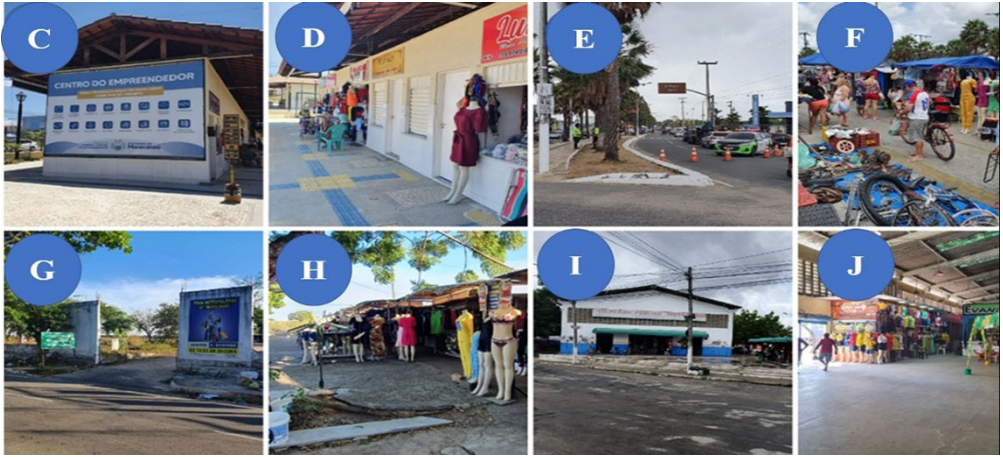
include the Carlos Jereissati Public Market, the Entrepreneur Center, and the Maracanaú Metropolitan Popular Fair; in the specific case of this fair, fieldwork revealed interactions with municipalities around Maracanaú and even other Brazilian states, a process facilitated by the 4th ring road.

Figure 2 shows the records of fieldwork carried out in Maracanaú in the territories where the popular clothing trade takes place between June and September 2022.

In Figure 2, points C and D show the Entrepreneur Center, points E and F show the Crab Fair, points G and H show the Maracanaú Metropolitan Popular Fair, and points I and J show the Carlos Jereissati Market. Through the fieldwork, we identified the main shopping streets in Maracanaú and checked where the popular clothing retail territories linked to the lower economic circuit are represented, with the exception of Megashopping Moda Nordeste (MSMN), whose private capital space linked to the upper economic circuit will market the same segment of commerce.

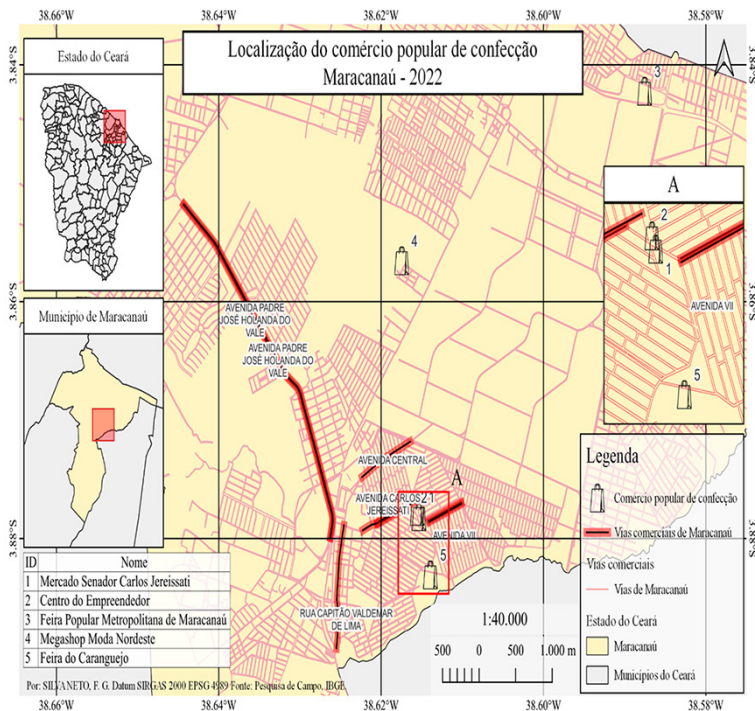
The popular clothing trade is presented in its most traditional form in the urban space of Maracanaú, in free markets, in the case of the Crab Fair. However, there is also the action of the city council through the displacement of its activities and the control of car traffic in its operation. It is also possible to see (as shown in Figure 3) scattered patches of street vendors at the intersections of secondary streets to the

Figure 2 – Popular clothing trade territories in the lower economic circuit in Maracanaú



Source: Queiroz, 2022.

Figure 3 – Location map of the popular clothing trade in Maracanaú - 2022



Source: IBGE, 2022. Adapted from field research.

municipality's main commercial thoroughfare, Avenida V, but in smaller numbers, which is reminiscent of former street vendors at the Calçada Fair, who resist the exit organized by the municipal government; but they are under greater pressure, given that it is a strategic space that concentrates the largest circulation of people and goods in Maracanaú (Gomes, 2015).

The questionnaires used in the investigation enabled us to understand the dynamics and specificity of this trade. According to the responses of the permission holders, we unanimously observed that, in the areas of the clothing trade linked to the lower circuit, the traders do not produce or buy in Maracanaú. The workers reported that they negotiate wholesale clothes from the traditional shops in the center of Fortaleza for resale in Maracanaú. This is justified by the issue of "price" and variety. Even though distance is an important factor, one trader stated:

It's not worth buying or producing in Maracanaú to resell in the city, it's much more expensive, in Fortaleza we already have our contacts, and we don't even need to go to the capital anymore, although sometimes it's good, because we go to the street, there's all that movement, we see and touch the merchandise, besides taking a walk on the beach, today, the business is all done through the catalog sold on WhatsApp, we look at the products and they are always updating according to the fashion of the moment, I make the PIX, and that's it! The seller separates everything and sends it to us by Uber Deliveries, it's much more practical, depending on the quantity we don't even pay for the shipping.

Slee (2017) takes as a paradigm the concept of the sharing economy and its characteristics of precariation and uberization, which end up creating a just-in-time worker, i.e. who is paid only for the time worked. This creates a new morphology in the world of work in which the companies that used to fight against the big corporations take their place.

Thus, the speech above highlights the use of the Uber platform to make deliveries of garments from the center of Fortaleza to Maracanaú; this is currently a mark of the so-called "uberization of work", which is roughly the sale of a service, usually related to delivery, to an individual or a company independently, through certain virtual platforms that provide the service.

The term uberization was coined to characterize this new way of managing and organizing work. Although the name refers to a company, it exposes a trend that is permeating the world of work and which, globally, is affecting various occupations. In addition to recent digital tools, this process is a remnant of decades of labor flexibilization and is increasingly taking hold. (Jornal da Universidade, 2019)

Thus, Cantor (2019, p. 51) states that:

The working time of cognitive workers has been "cellularized" because it is divided into fragments in cells, which capital circulates through the network in a depersonalized way, and through the cell phone there is perpetual connectivity, which forces precarious workers to be available, like postmodern slaves, whenever capital needs them.

Regarding the use of apps in current working relationships, Chan, Pun, and Selden (2019, p. 26) point out that:

The pursuit of higher profits by corporations has benefited from the use of efficient transport and communication technologies, neoliberal trade policies, and international financial services, as well as the availability of immigrants and surplus labor. Multinationals have reduced, perhaps eliminated, the main barriers to mobility between areas of unequal development.

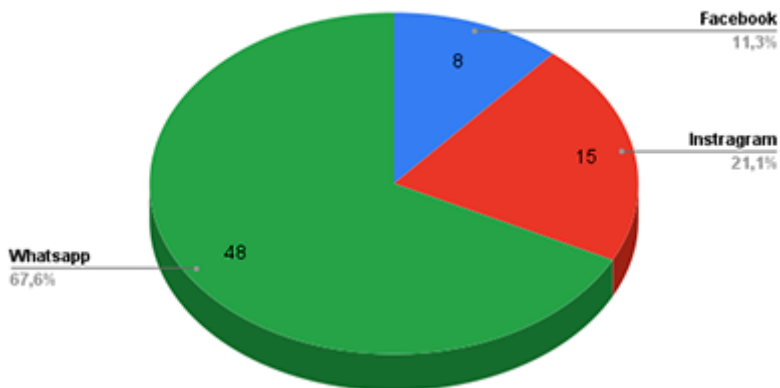
In addition, the services provided by third parties for apps sell the following image to their service providers: "You are your own boss", "Autonomy and flexibility", "Processes are less bureaucratic", "Your income increases in line with your efforts" and "Broad market opportunities". However, Abílio, Amorim, and Grohmann (2021, pp. 38-39) raise the following question:

Subordinated work through platforms has to be understood in the context of the destabilization of the categories of analysis that have been formed around formal employment. The problematic dualities that guide the understanding of informal work as a

"mirror of the wage relationship" [...] In the subordinated work through digital platforms, workers are not hired or even recruited. There are no predetermined vacancies or selection processes - apparently, all you have to do to work is register. The employment contract is now a contract of adhesion. However, companies have been successful in monopolizing sectors of activity and controlling huge numbers of workers. The relationship of subordination itself has become informalized. This informalization involves the loss of clear or stable predeterminations about working hours, the distribution of work, and even its pricing. [...] The criteria are not clear and may not even be mappable, but they are permanently present. They are part of algorithmic management: through automated - but humanly programmed - mechanisms, access, distribution, and pricing of work are carried out. This programming involves ranking, offering bonuses, punishments - elements that materialize the means of controlling work.

Therefore, through the use of digital platforms for purchase in Fortaleza and resale in Maracanaú, we provide the following data acquired through fieldwork.

Graphic 2 – Digital platforms used to buy clothing in Fortaleza for resale in the Lower Circuit in Maracanaú



Source: prepared by the authors, 2022.

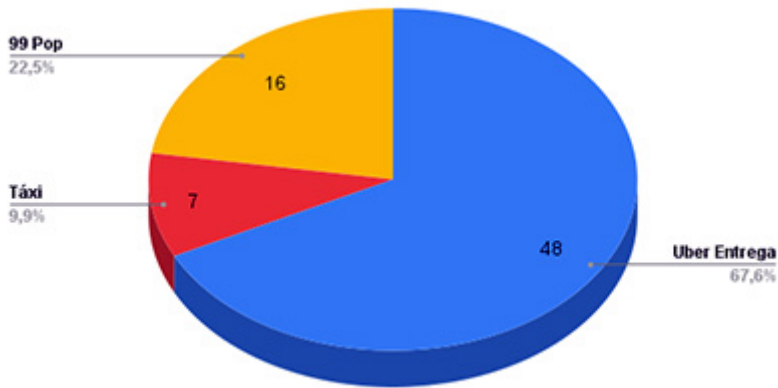
Graphic 2 shows the use of digital platforms by the lower economic circuit to buy garments in Fortaleza and then resell them in Maracanaú, highlighting the use of the popular WhatsApp application. Regarding this digital tool, we highlight that: "WhatsApp in Brazil is a unique case in the world. The Digital Brazil 2022 study, carried out by the companies We Are Social and Hootsuite, showed that at least 165 million Brazilians use the tool, the highest penetration in any nation on the planet" (Neto, 2022).

The platform economy, which has repercussions on activities in the service sector, presents new mechanisms for precarious labor relations, given that it is based on activities with high technological use linked to national and

international business corporations, but that it does not offer guarantees of social protection for its workers, understood as collaborators (or even entrepreneurs) because it presupposes autonomy of the work to be done, and leads to increased intensification of work through long hours throughout the week. (Ribeiro, M. G., 2020, p. 44)

According to Graphic 3, we can see that the Uber Entregas (Uber Delivery) platform is the most used for delivery logistics of garments via digital catalog from Fortaleza to resale in Maracanaú; a service that is present in the routine of workers in the lower circuit of Maracanaú's urban economy, something that is a reflection of the covid-19 pandemic, given that social isolation has corroborated

Graphic 3 – Means of transportation used to deliver garments from Fortaleza for resale in the Lower Circuit in Maracanaú



Source: prepared by the authors, 2022.

the increase in delivery services by digital applications, which, with the gradual return of work activities, still remain as a mark of this historic global health crisis in the current context.

The digital transformation of the Brazilian economy has intensified with the pandemic, which has changed the behavior of companies and people, driving up demand for information technology (IT) services. In October, the segment was 73.7% higher than in February 2020, before the impact of the health crisis. Activities such as application and software development, cloud data storage, and information security were some of the most sought-after by companies that had to adapt to the need for remote working and social isolation. (Carneiro, 2023)

Thus, it is important to note that Fortaleza, given the history, structure, and logistics of the clothing sector, according to the answers given in the questionnaires, often ends up winning the competition in terms of quality and final price, even including travel. It's important to mention that, nowadays, commercial transactions in large or small volumes demand "practicality and speed", through the use of technologies provided by digital platforms, the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Antunes (2019, p. 15) points out that:

In this movement, all possible spaces become potential generators of surplus value, since the services that have been privatized have given rise to new mechanisms used by capital. These

mechanisms are carried out by male and female workers (always taking into account the gender dimension) who work in information and communication technologies (ICT), call centers, telemarketing, hotels, cleaning, retail, fast food, hypermarkets, care work, etc., who often do intermittent, temporary, informal, self-employed, unregulated work, outside the social protective labor legislation.

The use of ICTs has intensified in the popular clothing trade between Fortaleza and Maracanaú, in the interactions of the lower and upper circuits. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, through social distancing, the use of information technologies has been very present in business, service provision, and logistics, dialoguing with the concept of "space-time compression" (Harvey, 1993).

The development of technology in the means of transportation and communication has led to an increase in speed and the false impression of a shortening of distances in trade practices and the circulation of capital. Castells (1999) calls this phenomenon the "network society", the development of which was marked by the appropriation of the Internet for the reproduction of the capitalist system. The network society is also studied by Levy (1999) through the term "cyberculture", a space represented by interactions motivated by virtual reality, in other words, created by computer cultures.

These are languages, uses, sensory perceptions, new identities formed, and symbolic exchanges that are entangled in networks, which do not even rule out the economic aspect within these new relationships. From the point of view of the economy, the network has brought profound changes to society, redefining

the categorizations of the International Division of Labor (DIT) between countries and economies. (Simões, 2009, p. 2)

On the use of information technology by the capitalist system, Castells (1999, p. 50) comments that:

It originated and spread, not by chance, in a historical period of the global restructuring of capitalism, for which it was a basic tool. Therefore, the new society emerging from this transformation process is capitalist and also informational, although it shows considerable historical variation in different countries, depending on their history, culture, institutions, and specific relationship with global capitalism and informational technology.

Thus, in the globalized world, ICTs for business practices are produced in the upper circuit and introduced into the lower circuit of the economy. The geography of business allows its users to buy for consumption or for resale; in this way, it is a present and constantly evolving reality, in view of its use by the capitalist system in the social interrelationships of business. Therefore, this corroborates the "processing of messages from many to many, with the potential to leverage the multiplicity of receivers and connect to an endless number of networks that transmit digitized information around the neighborhood or the world" (Castells, 2013, p. 15).

We live in a society that is widely connected, where technology is no longer the privilege of a few and has come to permeate most individuals. Access to information, which used to be monopolized, is now within the reach of many. Ubiquitous digital technology has created new environments

for consumers, organizations, and institutions. Faced with this new reality, marketing relationships are impacted and new challenges and opportunities arise, which can alter traditional business models. (Guidini, 2018, p. 59)

Finally, the territories that reproduce the commerce of the lower circuit in the urban space of Maracanaú, as well as in Fortaleza, are those that, in addition to promoting opportunities for those not in formal jobs, make consumption possible for the population with lower purchasing power. In addition, they are territories with a network of influence for other municipalities in the metropolitan area and beyond, given their links with the upper circuit of the urban economy.

Final considerations

In view of the above, the transformations in the world of work in the face of the crises in the capitalist system and the context of the pandemic reveal growing unemployment, informality, exploitation of labor, new categories of work, and loss of labor rights; many workers, in turn, find in the lower circuit a "refuge" that can be temporary or permanent.

In this way, the lower economic circuit linked to the clothing industry in Maracanaú is a dynamic and wide-ranging space with various specificities. During fieldwork, it was possible to verify the network of influences that extends beyond its territory, connecting with neighboring municipalities, including the districts bordering Fortaleza and even with

other Brazilian states, as in the particular case of the Industrial Fair, a process facilitated by the 4th ring road.

At the same time, its diffusion in space is a consequence of conflicts between public authorities over the use of urban land, which has led to its reorganization and reinvention with a view to adapting to e-commerce related to platformization, uberization and "precarious" work (Stading, 2014), marked by high turnover and a reduction in labor rights. The advance of information and communication technologies, in turn, allows us to reach increasingly distant territories, which leads us to ratify what Harvey (1993) tells us about the "compression of space-time".

The right to work in decent conditions is still a challenge for many who are part of the army of people excluded from work, income, leisure, consumption, housing, basic sanitation infrastructure, access to health services, and education, in other words, the vast majority of this population is denied the right to the city, which is part of the city that has become a commodity, the city of business.

We need inclusion policies in urban reform; we need to think about effective inclusion policies so that the right to work in the city becomes a reality for the working class (Antunes, 2018) and not a utopia.

For us to be able to talk about economic growth in the RMF, new centralities, expansion of the urban network, redefinition of production and consumption circuits in the metropolitan economy, public and private investment in structuring projects must be accompanied by an increase in work, credit, income, decent working conditions, and their reproduction.

The interactions between the upper and lower circuits of the economy linked to the clothing trade reveal their effects on the urban

economy of metropolitan Maracanaú, driving new flows and altering the urban dynamic with diffuse territorialization beyond the metropolis.

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Note

(1) Municipalities in the RMF: Aquiraz, Cascavel, Caucaia, Fortaleza, Chorozinho, Eusébio, Guaiuba, Horizonte, Itaitinga, Maracanaú, Maranguape, Pacajus, Pacatuba, Paracuru, Paraipaba, Pindoretama, São Gonçalo do Amarante, São Luís do Curu e Trairi.

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