Changes in public bank employment in Brazil: perceptions of bank job by two generations of bank workers.

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Abstract
The 1990s were a decade of dramatic changes, marked by fusions, acquisitions and privatizations of public banks, intensification of work through expressive extinctions of formal jobs, precariousness of work relations, outsourcing and wage patterns deterioration and, at the same time, profits recovering at the end of the period. Thus, this study aimed to investigate and analyze how the employees of the target bank perceive bank job after the changes (structural and ideological) produced by the restructuring process. Twenty semi-structured interviews were carried out with two groups of workers: group one consisted of ten clerks, staff hired up to 1989, who went through the sector restructuring; group two consisted of ten bank technicians, representing the new generation of bank workers, hired after the 1998 recruitment process. For both groups, the meaning of the job is no longer supported by the combination stability-status-wage, having stability remained as the central and only element. It was possible to conclude that the perception originated from a synchronic comparison, where the job appears as an alternative to temporary, unstable or flexible work experiences, seems to shape the perception originated from a diachronic analysis, which evinces the historical losses of bank work.

Keywords: Brazilian bank sector; state bank employment; job perceptions; bank workers
1. Introduction

The 1990s decade was a period of great importance in the Brazilian history, especially due to economical and political changes that happened in a context characterized by an inflationary and unstable economy. In order to cope with those problems, the government developed a series of neoliberal policies, whose consequences led to the internationalization of the economy (Araújo, Cartoni & Justo 2001), resulting in an increasing competition in the national market and in a rationalization process.

In such a context, organizations from bank sector which did not adapt to that new competitive environment went bankrupt or were taken over by those which were able to adapt (Alexandre, Lima & Canuto, 2005; Schmitz & Mahl 2000). The 1995 bankruptcy of the banks Economico and Nacional (respectively, the fourth and the third biggest national banks at that time) pointed to a systemic crises in the sector (Corazza 2001).

During the monetary stabilization period, in accordance with Cavalcante (2002, p. 207), state banks endured an even tougher situation than private banks, “given that they were more vulnerable to risky transactions, including huge loans for those that control the bank (the State itself), that often go into default”. From 1995 to 1996, the percentage of state-owned banks which were in the red went from 64% to 72%. In order to solve that problem, in August 1996, the government set a program called PROES (Programa de Estímulo à Redução do Setor Público no Sistema Financeiro¹), which aimed to restructure state banks, offering bailouts under the following conditions: “privatization, liquidation or being turned into public funding agencies” (Cavalcante 2002, p. 207).

¹ Program to Stimulate the Reduction of State Influence over the Financial Sector.
For the remaining banks, adjustments were demanded. Those adjustments were called “inner adjustments” and “outside adjustments” (DIEESE\textsuperscript{2} 1997, 1999). The first one refers to changes that happened inside the organization, including: the introduction of new technologies and new managerial models, and also the reduction of the staff. On the other hand, the second one refers to changes concerned to products, services and other forms of interaction with external public (DIEESE, 1999)

As a result of those changes, on the one hand, there was a recovery of the sector profitability that started in 1997, when it presented a positive result estimated in R$ 5 billion (DIEESE, 2007); nevertheless, on the other hand, it was a period in which:

the bank job has been characterized by a constant insecurity and uncertainty and in which the hope on making it a career practically disappeared. To be a bank worker is no longer acknowledged as a profession. This fact is particularly clear and more severe in State Banks, because the status, the social insertion and the stability guaranteed by the Banco do Brasil\textsuperscript{3} entry test\textsuperscript{4} is no longer there. (Druck et. al. 2002, p. 229)

These findings are related to a scenario marked by the extinction of 400,000 formal jobs and casualization of labor by means of subcontracting, outsourcing and deterioration of the standard wage within the sector. Regarding the public sector, in a context of "visible reduction in the possibilities of resistance of state bank workers, constrained, like other workers, by the permanent threat of unemployment and underemployment", there was, from the second half of the 1990s decade, a process of reshaping the state bank job in accordance with the private model. In that process, a wage freezing strategy was adopted in

\textsuperscript{2} The DIEESE (Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies) is an institution of linked to the Brazilian labor movement.
\textsuperscript{3} One of the biggest Brazilian State Banks
\textsuperscript{4} In Brazil, state bank workers have to apply for an assessment to get a position in there. Besides that, state bank workers used to have a different regulation from those who work for private banks. That regulation used to provide more stability and a series of benefits. But after the restructuring, bank workers are no longer under a special regime of employment (although high regarded state employees still maintain a special regime of employment in Brazil). They are under the ordinary regime, even though they still get some benefits from the collective bargaining process.
order to “approximate the wage conditions in the state bank institutions to those of private banks” (Jinkings 2002, p. 331).

In a context of productive reorganization, which, ultimately, brought instability and unpredictability, even for public sector workers, the aim of this research was to investigate and analyze how workers perceive the federal state bank job. Thus, the questions that guided the research were: to what extent restructuring transformations have changed (or not) the perception of the job, which used to be perceived as a space for professional development and stability? Given what has changed and what has been lost, what does it mean to be a federal state bank worker? Is there still any difference between working for a state bank or for a private bank? Does the state bank job have become a mere interlude for workers, instead of a proper career?

Two hypotheses related to those questions were raised: firstly, the sector restructuring had a negative impact on the way workers from state bank perceive the job (impacting as well on their ways of being and behaving); secondly, this perception change needs to be analyzed taking into account the ideological changes linked to the institutional transformations connected to a new model of capitalism, called “flexible capitalism”, whose ideas implied on it can work as justifying and legitimizing mechanisms of our nowadays economical system (Boltanski & Chiapello 2009).

In order to answer those questions, semi-structure interviews were carried out. Twenty bank workers from a federal state bank (that from now on will be called X Bank) were interviewed. All of them worked in Bauru, a city located in São Paulo State, whose population is around 340 thousand people.

Two groups of workers were interviewed: Clerks and Bank Technicians. These groups were composed of two different generations of bank workers. The first one was formed by workers who started working for X Bank before 1998, year in which a new
category of bank workers was created, the Bank Technicians, to replace the Clerks. It is important to note that this change meant more than a nominal change, given that beyond it, benefits, employee’s career plan and wage patterns were altered to worse, even though the same did not happen to the work content. Thus, according to our understanding, it was a very important symbolic and institutional alteration, that brought to the bank new bank workers, whose social and professional identities may have been forged in a different context of working relations. It is important to stress that during the 1990s outsourcing was a way largely used by the bank to hire employees, replacing the admission test and traditional ways of hiring bank workers, which contributed to the detachment between workers from the two generations.

Considering the transformations in work and power relations, habits and in geopolitics that have been happening in our capitalist society from 1980s decades on (Harvey 1993), we strongly believe that different social generations might have impacted in the delineation of what is new and what is old in the bank context. In that sense, we can infer that people from the Clerk group was formed in a context that is closed related to what Godoy (2001) called standard model of working relations, while the other group was formed in a context called flexible model of working relations⁵.

The strategy of working with two different groups of interviewees was taken due to the possibility of comparing perceptions of both groups, given their different backgrounds. The interviewees’ characteristics are presented in the tables below.

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⁵ According to Godoy (2001) the main characteristics of the standard model are: continuous and stable working relations; wage aiming to afford worker family’s survival; standard and usual working hours; legal rights; well-being; work as a space to build a social identity; unions acting from a collective perspective. While the flexible model is characterized as following: different employment conditions, remuneration, and working hours; increase number of workers with multiple jobs; high demanded knowledge jobs; merit system no longer based in antiquity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital State</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Post-graduation degree / area</th>
<th>Hiring year</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
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<td>Adão</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Civil Engineering</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
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<td>Érika</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Accounting</td>
<td>Yes / Business</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Junior Analyst - 8 hours</td>
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<td>João</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>Marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Civil Engineering</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1984</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Yes / Human Resource</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Human Resource Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mário</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1982</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Consensual marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Physical Therapy</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Junior Analyst - 8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedro</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Yes / Finance</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Analista Pleno 8h</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Law</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Human Resource Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vagner</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Law</td>
<td>Yes / Business</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Senior Analyst - 8 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Clerk characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital State</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Post-graduation degree / area</th>
<th>Hiring year</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<td>Abel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Law</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Bank Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>André</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Consensual marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Agronomy</td>
<td>Yes / business</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Foment Technician - 8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aparecida</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Law</td>
<td>Yes / Human Resource</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Bank Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caio</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Civil Engineering</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Bank Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joana</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Information Technology</td>
<td>Yes - Information Technology</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Bank Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Business</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Bank Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberta</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Phonology</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Junior Analyst - 6 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simão</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Geography</td>
<td>Yes / Geoprocessing</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Customer Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Journalism</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Bank Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomé</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Consensual marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor: Geography</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Foment Technician (8 hours)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Bank Technicians Characteristics
It is important to emphasize that the interviews were carried out during the years of 2009 and 2010, when the researcher used to work as a Bank Technician for X Bank (I worked for the bank from 2005 to 2010). In that sense, some of the initial inquires were also motivated by the author own experience.

The interviewees’ narratives will be presented in the following topics, highlighting two main moments: firstly, the determinants that led them to choose the state bank job; secondly, the meaning (past and contemporary) of this job. Considering the paper limits, we decided to select the most significant narratives.

2. Why did I turn into a state bank worker?

2.1 Clerks

We present here the life history of some of the clerks interviewed in order to understand the reasons that led them to opt for a state bank job. Thus, we will seek to provide information to understand what that job used to mean at that time.

Adão, married, graduated in Civil Engineering, has been working for the X Bank for 20 years. Before starting his career in X Bank, he used to work in the construction industry with his father, "we used to do anything, builder assistant, anything that came across...". Adão dreamed of attending an Agricultural Engineering undergraduate school, but due to the financial condition of his family, he studied Civil Engineering at UNESP – Bauru (a state owned university, where students do not pay fees), after unsuccessfully trying to afford the cost of an undergraduate school of Business, in a local private institution. Thus, in some degree, his professional trajectory reflects his academic trajectory, both limited by his economical condition of life, leading him to assert that:
As I said, it was not a real option, a dream [being a state bank worker], properly speaking. It was my need that led me to that way. (...) Even when I graduated in Civil Engineering at UNESP, it happened due to a lack of choice. It was not what I really wanted. I dreamt of being an Agriculture Engineer, but there was not that course in here. So, if one did not have money to afford the costs [of a course in a private institution or to live abroad], what would one do? I applied for UNESP, where the courses were free of charges, and there I chose Civil Engineering, that was not my real dream.

Adão reports that, at that time, his initial goal was to achieve a position in a state organization, acquiring financial stability and perhaps raising some money to study and, in the future, maybe work as an agricultural engineer. He succeeded in the first stage of his plan, but not in the second, being approved in the selective process of the following state organizations: Local Courthouse, Nossa Caixa Bank and X Bank. Among those possibilities, Adão decided to work for the X Bank, whose salary was higher. Over time, however, what would be a means to an end (i.e. working for the bank aiming to raise money to become an Agricultural Engineer) became an end in itself:

I started my bank career with the idea of leaving it in a near future. But, then, you get used to it, you make friends, you learn from the work, you develop yourself. Then, I ended up staying there. In the middle of my way I decided to stay in the bank. (Adão)

Marta started working for X Bank in 1982. She lived in São Paulo city, at that time, and used to work with her father who owned a shop in a local market. Before the bank, she also worked as an assistant for: a book publisher; a soy distributor; a university in a research project. When asked why she chose to work for the bank, she affirmed that “it was not on purpose”, meaning that she did not plan it. Just after getting a degree, she decided to
apply for a position in state organizations and was approved in the following ones: São Paulo Council and X Bank\textsuperscript{6}.

Isaac, 50 years-old, 20 out of which working for X Bank and another previous 7 years working for a private bank. Before that, he worked for the National Navy in Rio de Janeiro during the 1970s decade, but due to what he calls "the remnants of the dictatorship", he decided to quit the job. It is important to note that Isaac manifests some regret when talking about that, once that now he is aware of the benefits that he used to have in the navy. He also worked for a company which exported and imported products, where he was responsible for the calculation involved in these processes. Proudly, Isaac stresses that he had the opportunity of using his English to talk to people from abroad. With the closing of the company, he managed to keep on working with international transactions in an organization from Angra dos Reis City. Because of that job he gave up his studies.

Back to Rio de Janeiro, he worked for about three years in a company that used to sell tractors. After the failure of that organization, he started working for Bradesco, a private bank. He stayed there for seven years, even having claimed that he would never work for a bank. In this bank, he served as a cashier (even without having done a course to perform that job), cashier supervisor and treasurer. In 1987, he was transferred to Porto Ferreira in order to get married. At the end of that year, and already married, he decided to apply for the X Bank selection process. He succeeded and in 1990 he was invited to work for the bank. After talking to relatives and friends, including people who worked for the X Bank and whose lives relied on that organization, he decided to accept the job. Isaac stresses that the stability, which he considered very important for a married man, and the good references were very important in his decision on working for the X Bank.

\textsuperscript{6} She also tried to get a position in a São Paulo State Bank, but she failed.
Rose claims that she was prepared by her family for a career in the public sector. Daughter of public employees, she had as a life goal to get a job which could offer her the stability implied in the public one. According to her, "twenty years ago, there was a huge competition to get a job in X Bank, because, beyond the stability, it also used to offer good status, and the payment was among the best ones”

Erika, married, former clerk of the Police Station, has been working for the X Bank’s since 1990. When reporting the reasons that led her to work for the bank, said that "working for X Bank used to mean status". This interviewee reported that, although she had a degree in accounting, she was not sure about her future career and had few expectations related to that. Erika admitted that she used to feel unwilling and lost during her undergraduate time. Given that, she was advised by her parents to "try a career in the public sector, in order to ensure employment". Then, after finishing the university, she started applying for selection processes in the public sector and, after getting a position with the Police, as a clerk, she gave it up and began her career in the X Bank.

Overall, it is possible to infer that the reasons for the clerks to opt for the bank job seem to be grounded on the tripod: stability, salary and status. Moreover, the evidences highlights two positions regarding the entry of the respondents in the X Bank, that are aligned to Romanelli’s (1978, p. 149) categorization, according to which there are two groups of workers: 1) one formed by those "whose goal is to build a career in the bank and, therefore, that consider his job as definitive", 2) those for whom the bank "is a mere 'stepping stone' to be used until they, in an indefinite future, become able to turn what is regarded as a temporary employment into a definitive one".

Thus, there is, on the one hand, a majority that linked the beginning of their careers in the bank primarily to a necessity of life or to a lack of opportunity instead of

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7 Presented in his study of the work and aspirations of bank workers from the São Paulo State Bank, in the 1970s.
something planned beforehand. Even if the employment for these workers was once perceived as a transient job, this idea has changed due to the difficulties connected to entering a specific labor market that could offer similar working and salary conditions. As a consequence, what used to be a temporary job was turned into a permanent one. The history of Adão, for example, shows a typical case of this phenomenon called by Romanellli (1978) the *transitory-permanent* situation/job.

On the other hand, there is a minority that does not fit into this concept, once that, since the beginning, the job was taking as a permanent career. Here, the bank, in fact, emerges as a life project capable of providing better living conditions for: a former employee of a private bank; new graduates, with no professional expectations; and also for the daughter of former employees from public organizations, who have always dreamed of a job for their daughter capable of offering similar benefits and working conditions (including the stability).

### 2.2 Bank Technicians

The narratives of the newer staff, Bank Technicians, are going to be presented above. In that sense, in the following topic, the reasons why they opted for the bank job will be explored. In doing so, it will be possible to find elements to grasp the contemporary meaning attributed to that job.

Simão, single, 31 years old, a former student of a Data Processing Technical College, graduated in Geography, with a post graduation degree in Geoprocessing, took part of the bank selective process in 1998. But his history with the X is a little older. Between 1994 and 1995, when he was 14 years old, he became an X Bank apprentice. When he turned 18 and his apprentice situation was over, he worked as a casual worker for local
market companies, usually using his knowledge in IT. After experiencing unemployment, he was invited by his former X Bank boss to work for a subcontractor company which provided services for the bank (helping the bank staff to take care of a public Severance Pay Fund, which is administered by the X Bank). He accepted the invitation. In that period he attended a course offered by the bank, whose aim was to prepare the subcontractor staff who wanted to take the bank admission test. In 1998 he applied for that and succeeded. In 2000, he started working as a Bank Technician in a city 60 km far from his hometown (Bauru). When asked about the reasons that led him to choose the bank job, he asserted that he was aware of the "stability" regarded to the job and that being a bank worker was “the natural path”. In addition to these reasons, Simão suggests a third and very important one: the job was a good alternative in comparison with the local possibilities (whose remuneration, benefits and working conditions were worse). In that sense, he says: “if one compares the bank job with other local jobs, like for example, local trade’s job, these represent a much lower level of remuneration, especially here, in a city far from the capital”.

Caio, single, 36 years old, graduated in Civil Engineering at UNESP-Bauru, began his career in the bank in 2002, after being approved in the entry test provided in that same year. When he was 16, he began his professional life working for his uncle, in a bakery. During his undergraduate years, he used to work in there, because it was a casual activity and, therefore, he was able to work only on weekends and on holidays, for example. In 2002, one year after finishing his undergraduate course, and one month before the X Bank test, he devoted two hours daily to study for it. When asked about why he chose to work for the bank, he says, “Oh, because of the entry test (...) because it is more stable and so on, you know?”.

Joana, married 38 years, graduated and post-graduated in Information Technology, began her career at the Bank in mid-2005, after leaving her hometown to reside in Bauru (100 km away), to work in the Human Resources department. Before becoming a
bank worker, she had worked for ten years as a self-employed teacher. Among the reasons that led her to the bank job, she stresses: a) the seasonality of work and payments to which she was subject as a self-employed teacher, b) the consequent uncertainty associated with this fact, c) the very nature of the teaching activity, described as boring. As a consequence, she decided to take the X Bank test, seeking: "a more structured" job condition and a better opportunity for her professional future. In that sense, she believes that generally “one really wants to get stability. Mainly, that is what one looks for when applies for a civil service admission test: job security”.

Teresa, married 31 years old, graduated in Journalism, was approved in the 2006 test and began his career as Bank Technician in 2007. Before that, she had worked as: a supermarket cashier and a dental assistant. Like Simão, she worked from 1999 to 2007 for a subcontractor company which used to provide services for the bank. During this period, she took the 2002 entry test, but did not succeed. Still working for a subcontractor company, she dreamed of being an X Bank worker. Given that she had not succeeded in her first attempt, she decided to invest and look for some help. Thus, she started attending classes whose focus was civil service admission tests like the X Bank one. Due to her effort, she succeeded in the 2006 test and eventually got a position in the bank. Asked about the reasons that led her to the X Bank job, she said: "I really wanted that! (...) Because, you know, there is this belief that public sector jobs offer stability. I already knew that I would not earn lots of money in the bank. It used to be like that, but nowadays it is not anymore”. However, just after having said that, she made an interesting consideration, claiming that for those who used to work for a subcontractor company, the bank employees’ wages are not bad at all. In that sense, she stressed, as an example, when she used to work for the subcontractor company she had a meal ticket that was called, for fun, “poor-ticket” (whose value was close to R$ 90.00), and now, in the X Bank, she has what her former friends used to call “rich-ticket” (whose value
was close to R$ 600.00). Eventually, she concluded: "So, these factors call the attention in these days, especially in Bauru, where the wage level is really low".

As we can see, even though the X Bank employment is not perceived anymore as a place where one can earn "lots of money", it is still a desirable job, at least in the context of a medium-sized city. Furthermore, it is possible to emphasize that the stability again appears as a decisive factor in the X Bank job choice. In general, taking into account the reports from Bank Technicians, it is possible to identify a number of common points with the testimony presented by the Clerks. Thus, the entry decision has been explained, even without much enthusiasm, as a social and career advancement, which usually is based on a comparison with a past situation. However, the fulcrum of this advancement seems to be moving from the tripod wage-status-stability to a solely base: the stability. While reports from Clerks refer to the social prestige that used to be associate with the Bank X job and also to a recurring mention of good payment, Bank Technicians refer to a salary that can be considered reasonable in a specific context, emphasizing, mostly, the stability related to the job.

Considering that, some questions arise, like the followings: why does the stability hold a central position, acting as catalyst for the new bank workers? Is not the deterioration of wages and status a force strong enough to repel new workers? It seems that the answers to these questions must take into account the objective conditions of the current world and also the reconfiguration of the institutions and values of our society.
3. The state bank job: new and former impressions

Another focus of analysis was the workers’ perceptions related to the job itself. Below, similarly to the topic above, we are going to present the first clerks’ impressions and after that, the bank technicians’ impressions about their jobs.

3.1 Clerks

During the clerks’ interviews, we tried to explore the differences between what being a state bank worker used to mean and what it means now. Moreover, we inquired them about the differences between being a bank worker in private and public sector.

Concerning the first question, all the interviewees claimed that, indeed, there is a difference between what being an X Bank worker used to mean and what it means nowadays. A common point among their narratives is the perception that the wage and the status have been decreasing over the years, even though the employment is still perceived as stable and safe, and the work itself (especially when connected to government social programs) is still well regarded by the employees. It is also important to note that the salary, when compared to the local ones, is considered reasonable.

Rosa says that the state bank employment was comparable to a nowadays State Attorney career (a much regarded career in the Brazilian context). In her opinion, the bank job “used to be stable and the salary was very good; there is no comparison”. The salary deterioration was stressed once and again by the clerks, every time they compared the old and the new situation. In that sense, according to Pedro, “in that time, the bank worker earned more. There is no doubt about that! At least the X Bank worker could buy more things with the salary”. Vagner, by his turn, defends that “in that time, remuneration used to be...
significant; it used to be far better!”. Isaac remembers that “it started decreasing some years ago”, and João adds that “if one compares the twenty years ago salary with the nowadays salary, one will notice that it was much better. So, from that time on, the category payment has been decreasing”.

In terms of status, Rosa claims that “nowadays it is not that socially regarded”. Pedro, Maria and Vagner seem to share her opinion. Pedro stresses that “in that time, it was not a work for anyone. So, if one got a position in X Bank or Banco do Brasil, he would be socially well regarded”. But, according to him, “today it is not like that. The job status has decreased”. Maria shares the opinion that getting a position in the bank was very difficult “the job has not got the same importance that it once had; the status of being an X Bank worker is not the same”. Vagner defends that the job “used to be very well regarded. (...) Nowadays it is still regarded, but not like it used to be (...). In that time, the remuneration was far better”.

Rosa, although taking into account the job’s deterioration, believes that, in the national context, it is “not that bad at all”, once that “the Bank Technician salary is around R$1,400.00, and, as a Human Resource Department worker, I know that lots of people take it salary in high regard”. This very same opinion also appears in Marta and Vagner reports.

Marta regards the working environment positively, adding that even if one earns an R$1,300.00 salary, “it is an R$ 1,300.00 salary to work wearing pants and trainers (...)” and, moreover, “one needs to be there on time, do not disturb anybody, do not steal, to be courteous and that is it”.

Rosa and Adão mentioned a very interesting point related to the social meaning of the job, when they talked about their parents’ reaction after their success in the
entry test. Rosa, reports that “there was a celebration, as if I had won a lottery prize. (…) They got very proud of me”. Adão also mentioned that:

   Everybody got happy! In that time, I was not married, my father and my mother they got… oh gosh… It was a completely happiness for parents that raised a boy with lots of effort, and their son got into a bank, a state bank. So, for them, it was the best, especially at that time. They used to say “oh boy, if you work for the bank you will wear tie, that is great!”. So, they got very proud.

   During Erika’s interview a joke was made that suggests the change involved in the job social meaning. Talking to the interviewer and also bank worker, she says: “when I started working for the bank, the job meant status. I do not think you felt that when you entered. In your time, instead of saying ‘congratulations’, your parents probably said ‘my condolences’ [laugh] (…) I am kidding. It is not like that yet. It is still worth working for X Bank”.

   It is important to note that, when asked about the difference between being a state bank worker and being a private bank worker, again the stability is stressed. Vagner, in that sense, affirms that, on the one hand, there are similarities between both jobs, including those related to the activity itself, the stress level, the demands and salary, and, on the other hand, that “the only thing that differs both jobs is the stability, and the fact that you enter the job by means of a test, and not because of your personal contacts”. João defends that private bank workers, even though well paid when in some positions, do not have stability and the security related to the state bank job, which is even more important during crises periods, like suggests the example given by João:

   Some time ago I was talking to a colleague from Banespa [a bank that was privatized during a restructuring process]. He worked there for twenty years, without being afraid of losing the job. But when it was taken over by Santander [a private bank] he
started getting worried. And the privatization indeed affects people’s life. Imagine someone who worked for 20 year in a state bank, with a reasonable salary and a good life standard and suddenly started working for a private bank, can you see? So, in my opinion the main difference in working for state bank is not the working conditions, nor the salary, but the security of being employed. So far, that is the main difference.

Interviewees stressed some interesting impressions concerned to Bank Technicians behavior that may be connected to the change of the job’s meaning. Thus, Isaac describes two different perspectives about the job. The first, linked to younger workers, for whom the employment is not a career, but only a step to achieve something better: “a way to raise money to pay the university or to study, aiming another admission test, because it is a six-hour job, you know? So, one can study and pay the bills, and there is a health insurance and a meal ticket…”. The second perspective is linked to older people who enter the bank aiming “to work again or to get retired later. Because, you know, they still have a good perspective related to public service jobs”

Erika also points that the newcomers have a transitory perspective about the job, very different from the clerks’: “in my time the newcomers wanted to stay in the job, because the salary was good and they knew that they had a career to develop. So, it used to be a work for life”. But, now, “mainly for beginners, like you, the job is a mere 'stepping stone' (...) So, they think ‘I will work here for some time and meanwhile I am going to study aiming something else”. In that sense, Isaac stresses that he has noticed that a great number of Bank Technicians are leaving the job after graduating or after getting a position which offers them a social and professional rising.

All those statements come from a comparison between the past and the present situation. Clerks’ perceptions indicate an increase of the temporary perspective. Thus,
the bank job as a transitory condition is a phenomenon related to the present time and the transient condition is a symbol of the new generation of bank workers.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting, remembering Romanelli’s (1978) categorization, that this transient perspective used to be taken by some of the Clerks and, in some degree, this fact appeared in their narratives when they talked about the beginning of their career at the bank. Thus, we believe that, for the vast majority of them, although the state bank job was not their first option at that time, it turned into it along the way.

At the same time, their statements suggest that the permanent-temporary condition has been increasingly replaced by what we can call temporary de facto condition among newcomers. This may be explained by the fact that the former job is not the same which has been offered for the newcomers. After the restructuring, with the income freezing, the creation of “castes”, the “bradescalization” of working relations and with the individualism increasingly pointed by clerks during the interviews, the job itself and its meanings certainly have changed. The idea of a career in the bank, desired beforehand or constructed along the time, seems to be decreasing and the transitory job, symbolized by the image of a “stepping stone” which offers conditions to push someone up, seems to be filling that space.

3.2 Bank Technicians

Overall, for employees who were hired after the 1990s, the perception related to status and remuneration seems to have changed, while the stability perception has

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8 The terms “castes” and “bradescalização” were mentioned by one of the clerks, when he was talking about the results of the restructuring process. The first one refers to a process of segmentation, stressing the division between those who hold an upper position (with better status, payment and benefits) and those who are mere Bank Technicians or clerks. The second one refers to a deterioration process in the working conditions, benefits and payments. According to that interviewee, the new model of working relation and payments is Bradesco, a private bank considered very tough with its workforce.
been a constant. In nowadays context, stability seems to be the main factor that differentiates X Bank job from other jobs, at least in the speeches of all respondents in this second stage of the research.

Joana states that the X Bank job is a "normal one” and, in that way, Aparecida claims that it is "like a regular job, like any other”. However, it is important to note that, although the later has stated that this is a regular job, she promptly highlights that, actually, this means "stability! No more status. I think the question of status was a long, long time ago, when my father entered the Banco do Brasil”. Paulo, in a stronger statement, defends that working at the X Bank "does not mean that much. The salary is very low.... At least my salary, it is like a blue-collar worker salary. So, the social status level is almost none". Caio, more cautious, said:

the meaning [of being a bank worker], in my opinion, is no longer regarded. (...) Now it has been deteriorating, let’s put like this. But of course it still gives a certain stability. You can make long-term plans, because you can be sure that you will not be laid-off as it could happen in a private bank.

Simão also share this idea about the job "it means security, i.e. comparing with local market. So, it means safety." In this direction, Roberta points out that "when I think of myself as an employee of a federal public bank, stability comes to my mind. It is the only thing that pops up: stability”. However, it is noteworthy that in the case of Roberta, the salary issue is a relevant factor, since she holds a Junior Analyst position. She has graduated in Speech Therapy and wants to work as a self-employed professional in this area, but she has not left the bank, once that: "It's worth staying on the X Bank because of factors like: the stability, my salary and the things I have earned. That is it! I say that I'm sold”. The same happens to André, an agronomist who holds the Foment Technician position. In that sense, he
claims that: "I have got a paycheck here [as a Foment Technician] which is higher than what is paid to an agronomist in the local market".

Finally, Abel, by his turn, presents a negative perspective related to the employment:

It is sad to look back and realize that very important people worked here, that this same chair was once used by them. That those people used to be proud of being a bank worker, from a federal public bank, because they used to be well regarded by the society and they could afford a good standard of life. Nowadays, this class is really oppressed, especially due to the low social regard and support. However, it is important to note that the bank has offered some benefits to workers, including a kind of scholarship. But the low income is right there, threatening our working class.

It is important to highlight that, although the stability seems to be the interviews’ common denominator, the status also is present, but in a lower degree. Moreover, unlike the stability, the social regard connected to the job is revealed in an ambiguous way. Thus, it is worth stressing that the social context plays a very important role both in the salary and in the status perception. It seems that, as a first job, for someone who has just finished graduation, in a labor market with a high unemployment level, the X Bank jobs still maintain some status, at least for the workers’ relatives, as it is possible to infer from Roberta’s statements. She reports that her parents “got really happy” when she told them that she had got the job. The same was reported by Aparecida. But, on the other hand, Aparecida discloses how relative that status evaluation is, when she claims that: “my parents keep on telling me: ‘you have to study, you have to grow and keep on improving your professional life. You need to leave the bank. It is no longer worth staying there’”.

In addition to those ideas, interviewees reported that, in general, people show some respect to the job. Joana, for instance, stresses that “sometimes people say ‘so you
work for the X! That is cool!”; the same was reported by Aparecida when she said that “apart from everything else, if you talk to people from outside the bank and tell them that you work there, they say ‘wow, so you work for the X Bank’. In the same direction, Teresa reported that “some time ago I was talking to a lady and she asked ‘where do you work?’; ‘I work for the X Bank’, “wow, at the X Bank!’ I get the impression that everyone who works for the bank has already listened something like that.” Nevertheless, Teresa believes that this evaluation is due to a misunderstanding about reality, based on a past situation, when the bank workforce was formed by an elite, like it used to happen to physicians and police officers positions. She adds that “our salary is so spoiled, that it is going to represent less than three minimum wages”. In an ironic way, she adds that she is happy because Bank Technicians will be able to claim for some benefits very soon, such as Minha Casa Minha Vida, offered by the government to those whose monthly incomes are lower than three minimum wages. After that, she ponders again, saying that, although spoiled, the salary is still okay in a region where the average wage is around R$ 600.00 or 700.00.

In the same direction, taking into account the regional context, Tomé states that:

The benefits offered by X Bank are better than the benefits offered by other organizations, even if one takes into account private banks. Besides, the city’s economy is based on commerce, so the remuneration is low and people do not have health insurance. So, particularly in this context, we [state bank workers] are in a good situation! Of course that the Bank Technician salary is not enough for those who live in São Paulo, they may suffer from starvation. (…) As a proof of that [that this job is not bad at all], one can point that the local turnover is low, because one gets social status working at the bank. People from outside the bank say “he is okay, he

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9 The Brazilian Minimum Wage is the lower level salary allowed by the government. It used to be R$ 510.00 in 2010.
10 It is a governmental program in which poor people can get subsidized mortgages.
works for the X Bank”. But we know that it is not like that. The truth is: we do not earn very well, but they earn too little.

When asked about the difference between being a state bank worker and being a private bank worker, the stability once more appears as a consensual point. In that sense, André says that: “in my opinion there is a difference. So, for example, in a strike context it is possible to notice the importance of the stability. Most of the people on strike come from state banks”. Joana believes that “state bank workers have stability and in the private sector workers do not have it. So, I think that it is the main difference”. Aparecida as well stresses that the difference is indeed the stability. “In the private bank, one can be sacked at anytime, with or without a reason, in a downsizing process, for example”. Tomé points that “in State Banks, like Banco do Brasil and X Bank, one can feel safe in one’s work, it is stable. Besides, the pressure in the private sector is high”.

Career perspective and bank workers’ expectations about their professional future are other important points to be taken into account in this analyzes. Thus, we asked them if the bank has offered career opportunities. Generally, they seemed confused when asked about that. On the one hand, they did not deny the possibility of getting a higher position in the bank; on the other hand, their opinions were always followed by a “but”.

Aparecida, for instance, thinks that it depends on luck: “Someone needs to be in the right place at the right time”. Simão, talking about himself, seems to agree with that hypothesis: ‘I was a little lucky. I was in the right place at the right time”. Teresa analyzes that issue with suspicion eyes. Although she believes that the possibility of building a career is there, particularly because there are many areas in the bank, she thinks that those possibilities are very narrow. In that sense, she revealed her opinions and dilemmas when talking about a conversation with a friend.
Sometime ago, talking to a colleague, I said: ‘Fulana, I get the impression that most of us, I mean, Bank Technicians, will get retired as a Bank Technician’; and she replied, ‘do you think so?’, and I replied back ‘Yes, I do, because it is getting tougher [to get an upper position in the bank]

Finally, Paulo, emphatically, says to believe that the X Bank only gives a career perspective “under the condition of political influence, only if you have friends or belong to certain groups”. Among those groups he mentioned are: religious groups, political groups, the freemasonry and other sort of “collusions” that may be formed in the working environment.

As a consequence of these perceptions, many of the interviewees revealed to be divided when asked about their intentions of investing in their career inside the bank or out of it. Roberta, for instance, says the following: “sometimes I feel that I want to die here at X, but then I think ‘no!’ this very thought makes me desperate…” The same hesitation appears in Joana’s report.

Aparecida, in her turn, ponders that her current job should be considered as something transitory: “It is a good job, the salary is good, but we know that we are here and it has to be temporary. Our stay here in X Bank should be briefer, briefer than it has been”. In that sense, Paulo affirms that he intends to invest in new opportunities, that is, in his career outside the bank, like other fellows, ex-bank workers, who did manage to make the job a temporary-de-facto condition. It is important to note that the mention to others’ success is a way of reinforcing the myth of temporariness, whose efficacy and updating depend on its realization, at least for a minority (Romanelli, 1978).

Thus, for Paulo, the bank job’s role in his life is limited to “guaranteeing the basic maintenance”, meaning that it does not constitute a place for future development. Similarly, Caio admits that he does not foresee “perspectives to grow, to achieve professional
development (...) and also human development”; he defends that the job at X Bank “is a passage, it is not a place to stay for your whole life. At least now, in these times…”

Bank Technicians’ reports, which disclosed their future expectations in relation to the job, suggest the idea that a temporary condition converting eventually into a permanent one is still present in the bank work context, as can be inferred, for example, from Tomé’s speech, when he declares a platonic desire to leave X Bank but, due to his objective conditions, cannot be realized; and from Roberta’s dilemma, who dreams of a career as a Speech Therapist, but objectively keeps on working for the bank; and finally from André’s life trajectory, who got a degree in Agronomy, but is yet a bank worker.

4. Conclusion

In order to comprehend the meaning of the state bank employment after the 1990s restructuring process, the first step we took was to understand why and within what context bank workers, Clerks and Bank Technicians, opted for it. In doing so, a common point was revealed: for the vast majority of both group’s members, the decision to opt for the bank was based more in their life necessity than in a previous desirer or dream.

Nonetheless, one point called our attention: the fact that Bank Technicians (post-restructuring workers) have showed, when talking about why they opted for the job, equal or stronger interest in the job than the Clerks. This suggests that the job is still perceived as a good option for those who: are starting a career; have worked for subcontractor organizations; have experienced the casual working and the unemployment situation; have worked as self-employed (teacher).

As a result of the comparison between both groups analyzed, it is possible to stress that the stability, important for Clerks, appears as central and even more decisive for
Bank Technicians. The stability has become, according to our interviewees, the main element, leading workers to this employment and justifying their continuity in it, even considering the historical losses in terms of remuneration and status, which seems to be, in a great extent, related to the new social and ideological configuration of our society.

The deterioration previously mentioned is indeed felt in terms of a historical comparison of what public bank job once was with what it concretely is in the present historical moment; nevertheless, it becomes relative before an external scenario characterized by even more intense and generalized worsening of working conditions and payment levels. In that sense, the regular working relationship (Godoy, 2001) becomes an exception in the life trajectory of our interviewees.

In the world of the short-run, contractual and sporadic work, in which the ties are very weak and relations are flexible (Sennett, 2008), characterized by the rising of the hyphenated worker (Beynon, 2002), the stability becomes an “isolated island or paradise” facing an undesired and frightening continent. This is the very context in which state bank employment’s sense has been reconstructed and in which the stability has gained its value. Thus, it seems that the perception derived from a synchronic view, in which the job appears as a good alternative for those who have experienced casual, instable and flexible working conditions, has been able to replace a diachronic one, which takes into account the historical losses.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the lost island or paradise analogy has its limits revealed when the interviewees show hesitation about their future careers in the bank. Thus, although there still is a social regard concerning this employment, and even considering that the salary is not bad at all when compared to the local ones, the vast majority of the new bank workers disclosed their desire of leaving the bank if possible. Apart from two Bank Technicians, all the rest stated their intention to try new opportunities outside the
bank. In that sense, it is worth noting that those opportunities are not any one, but stable opportunities that can also provide better wage and status, i.e., that are based on the tripod that once was linked to the X Bank employment. On the other hand, it seems to us that it is also possible to recover the losses inside the bank, that is, via promotion, what, in some degree, explains workers’ hesitation about their future career (in or outside the bank), and the tension between the permanent-temporary and the temporary the facto perspectives.

In that way, it is possible to predict a relation where the fewer the promotion possibilities, the stronger the idea of the bank job as a temporary period in someone's life becomes. Finally, it is important to stress that, in the last analysis, the possibility of this fact becoming true or not will depend on the labor market, an outside force.

In summary, it is possible to characterize the transformation process of the state bank employment meaning as a process that involves rupture and continuities. Ruptures were revealed by the fact that its meaning is no longer based on the tripod: status-stability-wage, suggesting a clear process of degradation. The continuities were revealed by the fact that the stability is still there, even more significant due to the new configurations of our society, as well as by the intensification of the tendency represented by the idea of temporariness of the bank employment.

References


