

YOUNG PEOPLE'S MEANINGS OF WORK AND UNIONISM IN CONTEMPORARY COLOMBIA: A TENSION BETWEEN INTERPRETATIVE REPERTORIES

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Abstract

This article aims to examine the meanings that, nowadays, young people give to work and unionism. Nine ethnographic interviews with young workers were conducted about their working lives as unionized and non-unionized workers. The conceptual framed was composed by a review of the literature related to the following topics: the social construction of young people, the contemporary transformation of work and the history of unionism in Colombia. The research question was addressed by identifying the participant's interpretative repertoires (Potter and Wheterell, 1996). The results show a tension between the repertoires used by young workers according to their position as union or non-union members.

Keywords: young people and work; young people unionized; discourse analysis; interpretive repertoires

Youth as a historical concept

The concept of youth, as an age marker, emerged in Europe between the 18th and 19th centuries (Reguillo, 2000 in Dávila León, 2002). Working conditions and the need to regulate the population's access to the world of work, the establishment of a mandatory education period prior to work, the creation of



national armies through military service and the regulation of the right to vote are among the causes that led to this emergency (Margulis & Urresti, 1996). Despite the various definitions, they agree that "youth" refers to a transition stage between childhood dependence and adult autonomy, determined by the social considerations maintained about it; concept that refers to a "historically constructed norm,

Youth, as a historical concept, is caused by power relations, built from political and ideological decisions and allows a social group to be identified as "suitable" for work. Around this notion, institutions are defined (teaching centers, correctional facilities, reformatories), norms (legal and social that define who is young, how they should behave, the space they should occupy, permitted activities), educational systems (aimed at train productive, docile and disciplined workers) and areas of knowledge emerge (evolutionary and youth psychology, crime and youth violence), among other technologies, aimed at incorporating into work a population group whose participation allows extracting the greatest possible profitability.

The temporal limits of the "youth" category vary according to aspects related to social development, legislation, the possibilities of economic-political independence and social perceptions (Souto, 2007). According to Law 1622 of 2013, in Colombia a person between 14 and 28 years of age is classified as a youth. The differences affect the opportunities and working conditions of the young population, a central aspect of this work.

There are multiple studies on the category youth, from those who consider such expression as a mere word that arbitrarily assigns limits to place subjects in a certain place (Bourdieu, 2002) to those who highlight the sociopolitical ambiguity attributed to the category, given that it is used to assign to that age



group the responsibility of being a "solution" and simultaneously—according to the intention of the discourse—it is labeled as a "lost generation" (Palomino, 2002). Particularly interesting are investigations regarding the relationship between young people and work. In this regard, abundant production in the social sciences has observed the working conditions and the meanings that young hypermarket workers in Argentina construct of them (Abal, 2004, 2007, 2011; Guiamet, 2012, 2014; Longo, 2012), studies that have used tools such as ethnographic observation and in-depth interviews. Other similar studies have been carried out in the automotive industry (Battistini & Wilkis, 2005) and metallurgy (Svampa, 2009), in psychology professionals (Orejuela, Bermúdez, Urrea, & Delgado, 2013) and even in youth entrepreneurship. (Gámez, 2011). Despite the great methodological and conceptual differences between these works, one constant appears in most: the relationship between neoliberalism, labor flexibility, precariousness of youth work and weakening of unions. This relationship is fundamental for the present investigation, which calls for discussing some of these texts in the following sections. studies that have used tools such as ethnographic observation and in-depth interviews. Other similar studies have been carried out in the automotive industry (Battistini & Wilkis, 2005) and metallurgy (Svampa, 2009), in psychology professionals (Orejuela, Bermúdez, Urrea, & Delgado, 2013) and even in youth entrepreneurship. (Gámez, 2011). Despite the great methodological and conceptual differences between these works, one constant appears in most: the relationship between neoliberalism, labor flexibility, precariousness of youth work and weakening of unions. This relationship is fundamental for the present investigation, which calls for discussing some of these texts in the following sections. studies that have used tools such as ethnographic observation and in-



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Post-Fordist landscapes of youth work

With Fordism, the rationalization of production processes, mass production and hierarchical and inflexible organization gave rise to stable work-employment relationships (Caamaño Rojo, 2005). After World War II, the diversification of production and the insertion of information technology fragmented the labor relations model and fostered new forms of work management (Caamaño Rojo, 2005). New technologies caused the relocation of workers (Huws, 2003), the demand for "comprehensive" work skills and competencies and the combination of emotional and communicative skills (Landa & Merengo, 2010). To reduce costs, production processes were fragmented through outsourcing (De la Garza, 2003), Temporary employment became a habitual condition and adaptation to instability began to be valued as an "advantage" in the professional career (Sennett, 2000). Thus, stable employment relationships and links between people and their workplaces decreased. Remuneration systems prioritized the company's profitability over time worked, eliminated fixed incomes and

subjected the worker to contingency and inequality, increasing productivity and socializing losses.

The increase in business restructuring made production and work organization more flexible in response to the demands of competition and consumer trends promoted by international markets (Caamaño Rojo, 2005). The processes of economic integration and the transnationalization of production required mobile workers and generated changes in the perception that they have of themselves and their work, causing an increase in business intervention in the management and development of tasks, time of labor and the individualization of the subject. These transformations rethink the notion and forms of work, and give rise to the emergence of "new jobs" for young people characterized by their heterogeneity, precariousness, temporality and intensification (Frassa, 2007).

In such a scenario, the socio-labor conditions of young people become more difficult throughout the cycle: at the beginning, they face greater obstacles to obtaining employment; When obtaining it, they suffer insecure and unstable conditions and the pressure exerted by high competitiveness and the growing demand for qualifications increases; During the employment relationship, they usually earn lower salaries, some even do not earn - like apprentices - in exchange for "support assistance"; Their labor ties, generally outsourced, are unstable and prevent them from unionizing. Finally, young people face long periods of unemployment, which makes it difficult for them to complete training cycles, qualify academically and apply for better jobs (Orejuela et al., 2013).

Education is an important factor in job insertion, access to successful occupational trajectories, better jobs and a dignified life, free of severe deprivation and job uncertainties (De Oliveira & Mora Salas, 2012). However,

the changes described have truncated such expectations for many; Current market conditions do not compensate for the investments made in education and unfairly distribute job and professional development opportunities. For these authors, some young people are part of an elite workforce that is hyper-qualified and has high expectations of professional development, but they face restructuring economies that are incapable of generating enough jobs. In this context, A high level of education is a necessary but not sufficient condition to enter the workforce and successfully practice the profession. The situation is worse for young people with low education, who have access to the worst jobs, with lower remuneration and in low productivity sectors (Weller, 2008). This partially explains the high rates of unemployment and underemployment among young people, a group that concentrates those who are looking for work for the first time, face greater difficulty in finding it and, when they do find it, they tend to stay for less time.

The conditions described prevent freedom of association among young people. If undemocratic acts by some unions are added to this, distance and suspicion tend to increase. As Abal (2011) argues, the strict union hierarchy, the authoritarian forms of organization with a strong concentration of power among its leaders, the restriction of dissent and heterogeneity, among other aspects, prevent the union bond from being a reference for labor subjectivity. for young. Although these conditions are recorded by the author after studying the case of hypermarkets in Argentina, some of these behaviors are common in other countries. We will then move on to review some of the particular nuances of unionism in the South American Andean zone.

Unionism in the Andean region



Freedom of association is one of the most affected by the conditions described. During the last decade of the 20th century, several Latin American countries decreased rights at work, under the pretext that making labor relations more flexible and externalizing is inevitable to restructure the productive apparatus and face the challenges of globalization (Sánchez-Castañeda, Reynoso, & Palli, 2011). For example, through the Employment Promotion Law, in Peru, labor benefits and access to social security were eliminated for young people bound by an apprenticeship contract and the celebration of temporary contracts was encouraged. In Argentina, neoliberal governments continued the work of the dictatorship by promoting flexibility, which affected the possibility of unionization of the youngest (Abal, 2004; Longo, 2011).

In 1991, Chile approved laws guided by three principles: social consultation, equity with social autonomy and greater oversight of compliance with labor legislation (Hernández, 2006), helping to overcome the legacy left by the dictatorship. However, Chile currently presents conditions of high inequality and deep segmentation in labor insertion (Soto & Gae-te, 2013). In Ecuador, by constitutional mandate, since 2008, labor intermediation and any form of precariousness of labor relations has been prohibited (Ermida & Colotuzzo, 2009), which has generated an improvement in working conditions in that country.

Labor flexibility in the region has implied diverse legislative reforms, but with common features, in particular, those related to the proliferation of forms of temporary employment, subcontracting or outsourcing, weakening of collective bargaining and the right to strike. These changes, added to what Abal calls a lack of "own experiences of relationship with the union body" mean that for young people, unionism is nothing more than a "name empty of content and



meaning" (Abal, 2007, p. 706). . Some of the interviews collected within the framework of this investigation coincide with what was pointed out by the Argentine author, particularly in those cases in which young workers lack contact with the union movement.

Although it is difficult to determine whether the characteristics of flexibility described are consequences or, on the contrary, causes of the emerging forms of subjectivity among young people, there seems to be an evident relationship between the context of these labor transformations and what Abal (2007) points out as the lack of identity of young workers. In this regard, according to the author, many companies look for workers without an identity, in order to provide them with one in line with corporate interests; Through such action, it is expected that the young person will not challenge labor relations as asymmetrical and forceful, nor will he manage to configure the capital-labor relationship as one of an antagonistic type. Likewise,

We partially agree with Abal, insofar as part of the business strategy seems aimed at providing a certain subjectivity to workers so that it is easier to exercise control over them, which is also not new, the difference would be in the techniques used. But we disagree with the statement about the lack of identity in young people. That the referents of identity construction are not the same does not follow that young workers lack identity; They simply construct it through other spaces of socialization, within which work does not have the same centrality as for other age groups, and thus, work acquires meaning only as a mechanism for obtaining the resources necessary for the deployment of other forms. of relationship. As Dubar (2005) states,

Additionally, it is worth asking what those "certain political knowledges" capable of questioning the social order would be. We do not believe that there is

a single political knowledge capable of such a task. On the contrary, the eruptions of social movements led by young people in Latin America have shown that political struggles for territory, identity, the recovery of ancestral knowledge, the cultivation of native seeds in pursuit of food autonomy, free circulation of knowledge through movements such as the creative commons, among many others, emerge as political spaces that not only question the social order, but can even subvert it. Just as, unfortunately, many young people belonging to political parties and union organizations contribute to maintaining the status quo.

It is also worth noting that many of the protest and progressive movements in Latin America emerge as an alternative to the extreme conditions of precariousness, exclusion, unemployment, poverty and absence of the State, faced in the global south. There does not seem to be a rule by which one can generalize about the effects that belonging or not to a union produces among young workers. As Julieta Longo states regarding Paugman's statement (cited in Longo, 2012), according to which the increase in precariousness at work provokes radical but depoliticized reactions, political apathy and absence of organization, "a relationship cannot be established between precariousness and the forms that workers' resistance assumes" (Longo, 2012, p. 391). Reason assists Longo,

As we will see later, multiple and contradictory meanings of work emerge in the discourses of young workers in Bogotá, not as results of a simple lack of coherence, but as the expression of the complexity and diversity that covers the constitution of subjectivity. In this sense, it is a configuration closer to the idea of heterogeneity (De la Garza, 2003, 2011) that characterizes contemporary forms of work, rather than the loss or absence of identity among young

workers. We insist on the need to contextualize the studies in this regard, starting with a historical reconstruction of the conditions of emergence of practices and discourses, as we attempt to do in the following section.

Unionism in Colombia

As part of the documentary analysis carried out in this research, in addition to the Colombian legislation, the labor laws in force in Mexico, Argentina, Peru, Uruguay, Ecuador, Chile and Venezuela were reviewed, regarding: temporary employment relationship, subcontracting or labor outsourcing, Collective bargaining and the right to strike. The information found shows that, of the eight countries compared, Colombian legislation is one of the most restrictive of freedom of association. By allowing the employer to terminate the contract even if the need for the service persists, as well as subcontracting through temporary service companies and similar legal figures, in practice Colombian legislation prevents workers from unionizing for fear of losing their job. The same occurs with respect to the right to strike and collective bargaining, since the State enjoys broad powers to define an activity as an essential public service, thus prohibiting the right to strike, as the Committee on Freedom of Association of the International Labor Organization has pointed out to the national government ([ILO], 2006). Finally, through collective agreements, employers in Colombia manage to weaken union organizations by preventing workers from enjoying conventional benefits.

The recognition of unions in Colombia is marked by a tendency towards the violation of civil and political liberties (Rosado Duque, 2005). At the beginning of the 20th century the country began to grow economically, encouraging capital accumulation, exports and the industrialization process; At the same time, small worker sectors emerged with ideological currents different from



those of the southern cone (Urrutia, 1978). The word "union" appears for the first time in Law 83 of 1931, after unionism faced a period of stigmatization during the 1920s and massacres such as the one that occurred in the Magdalena banana plantations. Once the political hegemony of the liberal party was recovered, which lasted until the mid-40s, Colombia experienced the expansion of unionism (Rosado Duque, 2005). Two centers dominated the union scene: the CTC, of liberal affiliation, and the conservative UTC (Ostau de Lafont, 2012). Depending on the political party in the Presidency of the Republic, action was guaranteed to one center or another, and these functioned as extensions of the labor ministries on duty. The decade ended with the promulgation in the ILO of Conventions 87 and 98 on freedom of association. After the fifties, characterized by military dictatorships, partisan violence and the beginning of armed conflict, independent unionism would arrive with the creation of the CUT, FECODE and the CGT, unions that later experienced a setback due to neoliberalism and the expansion of the culture and anti-union violence during the nineties. and the UTC of conservatism (Ostau de Lafont, 2012). Depending on the political party in the Presidency of the Republic, action was guaranteed to one center or another, and these functioned as extensions of the labor ministries on duty. The decade ended with the promulgation in the ILO of Conventions 87 and 98 on freedom of association. After the fifties, characterized by military dictatorships, partisan violence and the beginning of armed conflict, independent unionism would arrive with the creation of the CUT, FECODE and the CGT, unions that later experienced a setback due to neoliberalism and the expansion of the culture and anti-union violence during the nineties. and the UTC of conservatism (Ostau de Lafont, 2012). Depending on the political party in the Presidency of the



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Through temporary service companies (hereinafter EST) and other similar figures, Colombia adopted neoliberalism since the nineties, which has deepened through reforms such as that adopted by Law 789 of 2002. Regarding ESTs, the ILO maintains that, together with temporary contracts, training or apprenticeships, in free zones, this form of outsourcing affects the freedom of



association of young people. Although ILO Convention 181 establishes strict standards on the matter and orders the adoption of measures to guarantee freedom of association and collective bargaining, Colombia has not yet ratified this convention nor has it taken effective measures to prevent the violation of freedom of association through the ESTs.

The current situation of unionism in Colombia is not encouraging. According to the National Trade Union School (2014), for the month of December 2012, 869,382 people were unionized, less than 5% of the economically active population, a much lower percentage than that registered in countries with a strong presence of neoliberalism, such as Chile. , with 12% unionization (Soto & Gaete, 2013). Despite the low membership, union organizations are still the most representative associations and the type of social movement most controlled by the Colombian State and stigmatized by citizens. More than 1,800 union members have been murdered since 1991; According to the ICFTU, 80% of trade unionists who die violently in the world are Colombians (Rosado Duque, 2005). That reality, added to the current working conditions,

Method

To investigate the meanings associated with work and unionism, we spoke with young middle-class Bogotá workers, workers from companies in the private sector, some of them linked through service provision contracts and others from temporary service companies, with various levels. of schooling: high school graduates, technicians and professionals. These approaches allowed nine interviews to be carried out, with four women and five men, between 25 and 30 years old with less than eight years in the labor market. At the time of the interviews, five of them were linked to the union movement, some worked for



the CGT, others were affiliated with that organization; the remaining four had no ties to unionism. This difference provoked an analysis that, in some aspects, The ethnographic interview, a tool used as a method of collecting information, is understood here as a conversation from which the meanings and cultural forms present in the language emerge, where meanings, values and prejudices are manifested, among other discursive formations. of a specific time and place. In this type of interview, the researcher becomes a provocateur of stories who, before attempting to lead the narrative, must encourage it and allow the narrator to reconstruct his story on his own terms, which are subjective and at the same time social.

With the interviews, the work trajectories of young people were investigated, seeking to focus attention on the way in which work and unionism are constructed within them. For the analysis of the collected material, the discourse analysis (DA) proposal of Potter and Wetherell (1996) was used, focused on the identification in the stories of the interpretive repertoires (IR) related to work and unionism.

From this perspective, discourses are understood as a set of language actions, and at the same time, strategies, which are part of constantly changing social practices. Through discourses, social relationships are built and the same subjects and objects of knowledge that are spoken about are given shape, which does not mean that they lack material existence. The starting point was to consider that through words, a reality is not only described, but also shaped, through strategic language games within which there are words, rhetorical formulas, gestures, signs, intonations. , silences and other expression mechanisms used by people who are part of the same linguistic community. It could be said then that forms of knowledge overlap in the discourses,

There is no privileged way of analyzing speeches. The analysis proposal that has been chosen involves developing hypotheses that account for the purposes and consequences of a certain way of using language, which focuses the analysis on the speech and not on the person who utters it. The analysis starts from the identification of interpretive repertoires, understood here as "relatively linked and internally consistent linguistic units" (Potter & Wetherell, p. 3), or "essential elements that speakers use to construct versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena, which are constituted by a restricted range of terms that are repeated, sometimes through key metaphors" (Potter & Wetherell, 1996, p. 3). This way, IR circulates in everyday language and the interviewees mention them repeatedly, configuring versions through which reality is meant and constructed. Summarizing, the repertoire is a particular form that speakers use to construct the meanings of everyday life.

From this approach, language acquires importance within social life as it constructs and orders our perceptions and makes things happen, performing social interaction (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Within this conception, language is not only reproduced, but produced in everyday speech, creating concrete situations and the action itself. These interactions are always involved in the interpretive work carried out by their participants, who use the knowledge they have of the context (Sisto Campos, 2012).

To locate the IRs, the interviews were initially transcribed and then read several times, first individually and then in joint work sessions, seeking to find the linguistic units that were repeated and the essential elements that the young people used to construct their explanations. . Subsequently, analysis matrices were prepared where the findings of each interview were located and discussed. Finally, a general matrix was made where the emerging IRs were

presented clearly and transversally in the transcripts, discussing their characteristics and content, and looking for their relationship with elements of the social context. In this way, through the identification of emerging IRs in the interviews,

Some of these interviews, particularly those of unionized young people, were possible thanks to contacts made through the General Confederation of Labor (CGT). It is relevant to point out this fact, given the lack of proximity and fear that can be observed in many young Colombians towards the union movement.

Results

The analysis allowed us to identify eight IRs, four related to the meanings given to work and four to unionism. The construction of work included repertoires such as: work as a means of progress, work as a form of subsistence and social advancement, education as a necessary element to get a job and advance, and finally: no job is unworthy. For its part, associated with unionism, the following repertoires were found: unionism is defensive, stigmatized unionism, unionism and contract wall and the problem of generational change in unions.

Work as a means of progress and social promotion

What happened to me here was very nice, I always saw young people when they were studying and when they entered a company to work, who took advantage of what they had and studied and studied more, and they always asked for more and more, and that's what they did. I did when I started working, I used my imagination to see myself further and further away, and further and further away (...) and not stay in what I started with, as an assistant, and with that I will live and with that I support my family, no! Rather, every day, have more vision, and ask more from life, and study, and study, and get ahead with your work, so that one does not have to sit with one's hands crossed so that tomorrow, when one

becomes old, one will realize. chest beating, I didn't do anything for this life, what did I do? Alone in an office, working there in a secretary or assistant office and I didn't do anything (...) no, it's time to search, have aspirations. (Julian)

Through this repertoire, work is constructed as a tool for economic and social development; It supports the idea that through work you can "progress", a concept that in Colombia is usually associated with moving up the social ladder. The repertoire appears repeatedly in the young people's interviews, giving meaning to a current job—often difficult—from a certain promise of a better future. In this way, the notion that young people should "have aspirations" and "always try to get ahead" is reinforced. Within a society with strong distances between social classes, the repertoire allows us to maintain that the distance can be avoided, or at least shortened, if one works with sufficient effort and dedication.

Work as a form of subsistence

What I'm telling you is that we did chopping plastic, well it was just chopping those bags, but the truth is very very unpleasant, I never thought it would touch me. No job is dishonorable but in this one one has to be very dirty, because one has to be very dirty! and the warehouse was, I don't know what size it was, but it was very big, and with mountains of bags, but they are these garbage bags, so you were working and you saw the rats walking around. Well, a brother took me to that job because I was very, very low on money, and my son was one year old, so he told me: well, there is a job, and I thought: whatever! Then he told me: but there are rats there, and I, my God, no! Well, then it's time to bend down, in fact, I hurt my waist because of that, because I already bend down and it's tenacious to stand up, because I bend down so much. Then you have to choose the plastic, you have to choose it to start, and bend down, and cut, and

some very large things are filled that they call balloons, they are like big tarps, and fill it and fill it and fill it, and whatever it weighs, imagine, filling it. all day. My mother-in-law took care of my son, but staying there is ugly and despite that I had to continue, it was simply my way of subsistence at that time (...). (Maria)

The repertoire "work as a form of subsistence" constructs work as a sacrifice, but also as a generator of economic income; Usually, this repertoire appears in relation to precarious activities or jobs that are accessed as a last resource for subsistence within an extremely difficult work environment. The functionality of the repertoire seems to respond directly to the working conditions present in the current Colombian context. With it, it is about giving meaning to jobs with poor working conditions, which are accessed as a last resort. The repertoire makes evident and is also linked to a certain discourse that exists among the Colombian population, related to 'rebusque', a term that refers to the ability to not stand still, to move and 'research' life. From here, the Colombian is constructed as a 'verraco', 'echao pablante' working subject, who accesses any job if needed. The repertoire can allow young people to sustain themselves and fight within an increasingly complicated and inequitable work order in the hope of reversing their own situation of precariousness.

Education as a necessary element to get a job and advance

Nothing is free in this life, if you want something you have to fight for it, you have to prepare for it, I have been, so to speak, a little academically precocious, because I have prepared a lot and I think that the efforts I have made have been manifested in the results, and today I feel totally complete in my academic part and the expectations I had. I feel that there are many more things coming for me at work, because I am still preparing (...). (Philip)



This may be related to an issue and is the difficulty of young people in accessing qualified jobs, it all depends on their qualification levels and training in their skills from the academic sector. And that, of course, if the person does not have great difficulties in accessing better working conditions. (Pedro)

This repertoire proposes formal education and training as essential elements when accessing work and moving up in it. Education thus appears constructed as a fundamental aspect, which can make the difference between a good job and a bad job and define better working conditions and, above all, better remuneration for young people. In interviews, the fact usually appears that education is a privilege of certain economic elites, which implies a great effort for young people who do not belong to them. Fighting and preparing can then appear as synonyms, preparing and achieving "better opportunities" are also clearly linked ideas. Likewise, the impossibility of this preparation implies closure and condemnation to the worst and most difficult working conditions. In this repertoire, education seems to be linked and subordinated, above all, to a notion of access to the labor market and greater competitiveness within it. The repertoire maintains and consolidates ideas that link training and job competence, giving priority to this function over others specific to education, which do not necessarily seek to ensure this achievement.

No job is unworthy

That was a very ugly job that I almost didn't like, there in Ciudad Bolívar it is horrible, but it lasted a long time there because at that time I was a little bad, so it was my turn (...). Personally, the good thing about having started like this is that nothing is too big for me anymore, no matter what you make me do, for me no job is unworthy. So I think that that makes you gain experience, and that



makes you like a verraquito, that gives you a verraquita to do things, that's what you achieve by working from a young age. (Juana)

The “no job is unworthy” repertoire combines the construction of work as valuable with the importance of effort at work, which has been discussed above. The emerging notion is that work is valuable in and of itself and that work cannot imply indignity for those who do it regardless of the conditions of the work. Although the repertoire builds a valuation of the activity of working and allows us to find meaning in it, in contexts such as the Colombian one, it can sustain and justify extreme working conditions, without allowing questioning or seeking to transform them. The repertoire thus makes it possible to maintain motivation towards work even under precarious and difficult conditions.

Before continuing towards the repertoires associated with unionism, it should be noted that repertoires 5, 6, 7 and 8 appeared mainly in young people linked to the union movement; In the remaining interviews, unionism does not appear as a topic, which seems to confirm discussions regarding the little prominence it has among young Colombian workers. Within the interviews in which the theme of unionism appears, a narrative emerges according to which it is the extreme conditions within their jobs that encourage union activity. At the same time, the fact that unionism is a highly stigmatized activity in the country clearly emerges.

Unionism is defensive

We met with a group of university workers who were concerned about workers' rights and decided to found the union. We formed it with 27 people out of the minimum required, which is 25 (...) this occurred because our rights have been systematically ignored by the institution, which has already led to us carrying



out different judicial and criminal actions, for violation of the right of association, administrative complaints before the Ministry of Labor and protection actions to protect our rights. (Philip)

This repertoire, found in several of the interviews, is clearly related to one of the discourses that circulates most strongly in relation to unionism in Colombia. In their stories, the young people interviewed frequently associate the emergence of unions with the need to demand the minimum rights enshrined in the law; They thus explain unionism as the last alternative to the violation of their rights and as one of the few options available to fight against the current conditions of precarious work. The repertoire allows us to understand the emergence of a culture that identifies the legal minimum with the maximum possible labor justice, losing sight of the fact that the possibility of organizing through unions to improve the quality of life and the distribution of socially produced wealth is a fundamental right. The popularization of this repertoire allows us to reinforce the belief that, in a country like Colombia, there can only be a unionism restricted to the defense of the economic rights of people with employment ties, which lacks social projection and legitimacy to be an actor. political. At the same time, the repertoire seems to have the function of validating union action in the face of increasingly widespread conceptions, which present union members as dissatisfied people, generators of problems and who "attack" companies. In a country like Colombia, there can only be a unionism restricted to the defense of the economic rights of people with employment ties, which lacks social projection and legitimacy to be a political actor. At the same time, the repertoire seems to have the function of validating union action in the face of increasingly widespread conceptions, which present union members as dissatisfied people, generators of problems and who "attack"



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Stigmatized unionism

Now a young man with all that reality goes out to look for work, goes out to work in a company, and in the company they are already stigmatizing him because usually you cannot join a union organization. There are companies where the situation is like this, so, if a person sees himself in those conditions, sees his social environment and says: no, I can't (...) if I join the union organization they fire me and I leave to earn my minimum wage, well, what are you going to do? Obviously you are going to see it in a very negative way, and you prefer not to be linked to any type of social movement. Also due to ignorance, obviously, the union issue and stigmatization is also based on ignorance. (Diana)

Although free union association is a fundamental right, the discourse that circulates in Colombia in relation to unionism seems to evoke the fear of young people. Thus, in the "stigmatized unionism" repertoire, joining a union is equivalent to putting the continuity of the employment relationship at risk. Union activity is seen, then, as a potentially dangerous act for young people, which can lead to job loss and the impossibility of finding a new one. The repertoire is tacitly associated with the idea according to which unionism threatens business freedom and stability, while exposing the way in which it has been historically stigmatized in Colombia. In the discourse, stigma



persuades young workers to refrain from unionizing. The way in which the repertoire is used justifies staying away from union activity, as this can cause problems in job development, but it also points out the lack of information and the distortion of the meaning of unionism that tends to circulate socially in the country. At this point, it is possible to point out an important difference between the stories of those who have had some contact with unionism and those who have remained on the sidelines: the discourse of the former accounts for the stigmatization suffered by those who decide to unionize, while at the same time it challenges the prejudice; Among the others, silence regarding the topic would seem to confirm the existing indifference or fear regarding it, and in turn, ignorance as a source of fear. while this can cause problems in labor development, but it also points out the lack of information and the distortion of the meaning of unionism that usually circulates socially in the country. At this point, it is possible to point out an important difference between the stories of those who have had some contact with unionism and those who have remained on the sidelines: the discourse of the former accounts for the stigmatization suffered by those who decide to unionize, while at the same time it challenges the prejudice; Among the others, silence regarding the topic would seem to confirm the existing indifference or fear regarding it, and in turn, ignorance as a source of fear. while this can cause problems in labor development, but it also points out the lack of information and the distortion of the meaning of unionism that usually circulates socially in the country. At this point, it is possible to point out an important difference between the stories of those who have had some contact with unionism and those who have remained on the sidelines: the discourse of the former accounts for the stigmatization suffered by those who decide to unionize, while at the same time it challenges the prejudice; Among

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Wall contract and unionization

First, there is an external issue such as the labor market scenario that makes it difficult for young people to join union organizations, for example, and we have already talked about it, it is the issue of forms of contracting. According to what the ILO establishes, freedom of unionization is for everyone, and it would be assumed that regardless of my form of work or my employment relationship, I could unionize without any inconvenience; But the reality is different, the reality is that those who would really be facilitated by the possibility of unionizing are those people who have some type of employment relationship that has a much broader level of stability. (Pedro)



Workers who find themselves with fixed-term contracts that can be renewed every three months, every six months, every year, can also join a union organization, what is the problem? Since the person who has this type of contract is linked to a union organization at the time the contract period ends, he will be seen in a bad light, depending on whether these contracts are renewed. (Pedro)

The repertoire "wall contract and unionization" frequently appears in the interviews of unionized young people, referring to the relationship that exists for them between the forms of contract and the possibility of exercising the right of association. Within the repertoire, temporary hiring can be thought of as a wall against unionism, since this type of contract prevents in practice joining a union, and when such a possibility exists, it occurs together with the fear of being fired for the organization or stagnating at work. This construction is related to the repertoire on stigmatized unionism, discussed above. It is possible to affirm that the anti-union culture, promoted for decades in Colombia based on the same labor legislation, has generated a well-founded fear of unionizing. In this sense, the repertoire allows us to see the way in which the restrictive Colombian legislation has been culturally sedimented; Thus, despite identifying the existence of international guarantees, the fragment indicates that domestic legal practices render such guarantees ineffective. Once again, a difference appears between those who have had contact with unionism, insofar as such experience allows them to question precarious and temporary contracts as a form of impairment of the rights that assist them as workers, thus denaturalizing the restrictive practices of free association through speech. Despite identifying the existence of international guarantees, the fragment indicates that domestic legal practices render such guarantees

ineffective. Once again, a difference appears between those who have had contact with unionism, insofar as such experience allows them to question precarious and temporary contracts as a form of impairment of the rights that assist them as workers, thus denaturalizing the restrictive practices of free association through speech. Despite identifying the existence of international guarantees, the fragment indicates that domestic legal practices render such guarantees ineffective. Once again, a difference appears between those who have had contact with unionism, insofar as such experience allows them to question precarious and temporary contracts as a form of impairment of the rights that assist them as workers, thus denaturalizing the restrictive practices of free association through speech.

The problem of generational change in unions

What happens today within the unions is that the older people who manage many departments are biased in that things have to be done as they say, and as they have been managing them for 20 years; So, for them, it has been very difficult for a young person to come and bring another vision, another methodology, another way of working, for them it is very hard to have them change their methodology, and they are going to see things from another point of view, and that is that things are not like that. So, I think that in that part it is important to train all these people that youth comes with fresh ideas and we must give them the opportunity, do not close the doors expecting them to come out with a profession, and that they automatically have 1, 2 , 3 years of experience. (Julian)

This repertoire alludes to the problem of generational change in unions, since young people express the difficulty that entering the union organization implies for them. At the same time, its oldest members are constructed as inflexible and

somewhat anachronistic, compared to the young unionists who come with fresh ideas that should be given a chance. The construction alludes to the perpetuation of the elderly in the leadership of the unions, a fact that is argued generates generational distances and a certain inadaptability of the unions in the face of changes in the world of work. With this, young people seem to justify refraining from entering the union world. The function of this repertoire seems to be related, then, with the need to express disagreement in relation to the internal management of unionism in our country. The repertoire can be associated with another element that generates the anti-union culture in Colombia: the pointing out of internal logic of the unions themselves, fed back by the fear instilled by the legal powers of employers, generating a circle that is difficult to break, in which the Fear fuels lack of participation and, in turn, this spreads fear of unionizing.

Conclusions

Based on an approach to discourse analysis (DA), this work has explored some of the interpretive repertoires (IR) that young people from Bogotá currently build on work and unionism. The framework of the exploration was achieved from a contextualization that allows us to point out some of the contemporary conditions of work for young people, in what has been called the post-Fordist landscapes of work. Among these, we must highlight instability, precariousness, intensification and a need for education and training, which once achieved, is not always compensated with a good job.

The RI found in relation to work in the nine young people interviewed allow us to point out, for the Colombian context, a strong construction of work as a form of subsistence, which means that no job is unworthy, despite the harsh conditions that it can lead to. to imply. At the same time, work is understood as

a means of progress and social advancement, a fact in which education appears as a necessary element to get a job and advance. It is proposed that these repertoires allude to a context of great social differences, where the working classes are subjected to increasingly precarious working conditions, validated from discourses that allow young people to sustain themselves and fight in usually difficult conditions, with the hope to reverse such conditions,

For its part, the repertoires on unionism were found only in young unionists, which seems to confirm discussions regarding the little prominence that union issues can have among young non-unionized workers. In this sense, it can be stated, as Abal (2007) has pointed out for the Argentine context, that in Colombia there is also a great lack of experiences of relationships with the union body among young people. The Colombian context, however, presents the particularity that unionism, more than an empty signifier, has become above all a taboo subject. This stigmatization has occurred as a consequence of practices and discourses present for decades in Colombian history, that in many cases assimilate the union movement—and many other social and political movements—with ideological apparatuses of armed groups. It is then proposed that the silence of some young Colombians regarding unionism can be interpreted as part and result of the internal polarization that the country has experienced.

In interviews where the topic of unionism appears, young people usually narrate how extreme conditions within their jobs motivated them to unionize. Thus, the notion of unionism clearly emerges as an activity that is often only assumed in extreme situations. In that sense, the IR found seem to confirm a context where unionism is sanctioned, but also where the concentration of union leadership in the oldest figures causes difficulties for generational change within them.

Finally, it is possible to observe differences between unionized young people and those who are not, in the way in which it becomes possible for the former to question precarious working conditions and situations of impairment of the rights that assist them as workers, thus denaturalizing , through speech, restrictive practices against free association. This does not mean that non-unionized people refrain from questioning working conditions, nor does it imply the impossibility for young people to develop an identity. An emerging element in the different discourses analyzed, both by those who are unionized and those who are not, is the role given to work as a builder of character, although it is not necessarily about work-employment, but, and frequently, of self-employment. We close with this because it is necessary to carry out new research in which the practices and discourses that young people construct in the framework established by "entrepreneurship" and the emerging forms of self-employment in the Colombian context can be explored, characterized by the 'rebusque' and the informality.

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