
Between Formal and Informal Work: Entrepreneurialism in Colombia

Julián Medina-Zárate
(Cardiff University, U.K.)
medinazaratej@cardiff.ac.uk

This article explores perspectives for the application of multi-sited ethnography in the study of the Colombian formal and informal world of work in relation to entrepreneurial practices that can be traced in the local and global contexts. The core idea is that, in neoliberal globalisation, the Colombian world of work is expressed in diverse ways that cannot be studied as isolated phenomena. Instead, they must be examined in relation to broader contexts and to the juxtapositions and synergies between different systems. A multi-sited ethnography provides a framework to understand the entrepreneurial field of Bogotá in terms of movements, forces and imaginaries. The emerging reflections stimulate criticism of the division between formal and informal work and encourage an understanding of the different expressions of work around the world as interconnected and interdependent.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, discursive practices, informal work, formal work, precarity, subjectivity.

Introduction

A fascinating figure arises while I research about identities and subjectivities of precarized entrepreneurs around the world. His name is *San Precario di Milano* (Saint Precarious of Milan). He is a Catholic saint who appeared on February 29 of 2004 in protest against precarization of work in Italy. San Precario is the patron saint of all precarious workers: the flexible workers, the temporary employees, the informal workers and, in general, all those workers who experience at different levels the insecurity and vulnerability of neoliberal regimes of work. That is why this Saint has no nationality, even if he appeared in Italy for the first time.

What catches my attention is the attempt to represent a common base to express and to make visible the conditions of workers that experience precarity, intended as the embodiment of the power relations and forces that constitute the state of this condition under neoliberal capitalism (Tsianos & Papadopoulos 2006). So, this image is used by many different groups, such as workers of the fashion industry in Milan, Mc Donald's workers from Paris or feminists in Spain, the *Precarias* (Shukaitis 2007).

Immediately, this makes me ask, who else could pray to or ask for help of San Precario in Colombia? Could it be the sub-employed workers that are searching for more hours of work to earn sufficient money to subsist? Could it be the street sellers who work in insecure and inadequate contexts while making just the basics to live? Further, what about the 'formal' employees of creative industries that are paid by product, independently of the time they invest in each duty? Also, what about the academic workers who have to deal with a combination of academic, bureaucratic and administrative tasks, which impairs the formal academic and educative activities? And what about the self-employed workers and entrepreneurs who invest both their capital and their workforce because of the lack of job opportunities, forcing them to make work the core of their existence?

In many ways, San Precario represents all these workers. Even though their professional and economic backgrounds are different, using a material image to represent them is a robust strategy oriented to find shared experiences that configure the injustices and inequities of the globalised neoliberalism. For this reason, San Precario will be the principal character of this

article, making it possible to refer to shared experiences of neoliberalism rather than to specific groups of people. I will start by discussing the global work system that configures diverse experiences of precarity in local contexts. Then, I will introduce global entrepreneurialism as a context in which Colombian entrepreneurship is configured in relation to the division between formal and informal work. I will consider continuities and discontinuities of entrepreneurial discourse that while practised define the subject — in this case, the Colombian entrepreneur — who performs them (Parker 1996) between the formal and the informal systems. Therefore, informal and formal work will be characterised looking at public policy, statistics and regional data. Moreover, I aim to analyse how entrepreneurship is related to both these kinds of work. Also, I will problematize the categorisation of formal and informal work from the perspective of entrepreneurial activity in precarious work contexts. I will describe the Colombian case emphasising the geopolitical economy of the country to show the complex network that configures precarity across the territory. Subsequently, I will present concepts from multi-sited ethnography, labour process theory and univocity that emphasise the relationship between the global and the local expressions of work as a whole and the *rhizomatic* conception of the fieldwork. These concepts will be developed while establishing links between global entrepreneurialism and the Colombian world of work. Specifically, I will suggest that it is essential to reflect on the epistemological issues relating to the ethnographic research of subjectivity and the world of work. Finally, I will reflect on the possibilities and the pertinence of a multi-sited perspective in studying the Colombian entrepreneurialism in relation to the global world of work. These reflections are meant to encourage researchers in the social sciences to consider the continuities and discontinuities between the formal and informal systems, for an empirical understanding of this phenomenon may contribute to public policy, activism and academy.

***San Precario* and the Global Work System**

The appearance of San Precario in 2004 not only represents an icon that gives a face to the flexible Italian workers in their struggles; it embodies the conception of a life characterised by vulnerability and the deterioration of the social relations that constitute subjective experiences (Tarì & Vanni, 2005). This conception of the effects of exploitation in neoliberal global capitalism as more than a lack of capital or wellbeing is fundamental because it addresses the experience of the impact of neoliberal regimes of work. Focusing on the experience of precarity rather than on capital accumulation or econometric rates bring challenges as well as opportunities.

However, this focus on the experiences of precarity could be misunderstood with individualising and psychologizing discourses, leading to superficial conceptions of precarity as just a ‘state of mind’ or a ‘subjective perception’ of natural conditions of work and management. This would be extremely dangerous for understanding how precarity is experienced because it would imply a detachment of the experience from the material conditions in which it emerges. I say ‘dangerous’ in view of the political implications of separating the precarious material conditions from the precarious modes of existence. This subjective comprehension of precarity, like a psychological experience, does not allow

questioning the system in which it arises. Precarity, even when experienced subjectively, is not just a matter of perception; the material conditions that enable the experience of precarity cannot be ignored.

Hence, precarity is neither the lack of capital nor the perception of the lack of capital. Far from this dichotomy, precarity is a distinctive way of existence lived in different contexts by different communities and subjects (Pardo 2012, Casas-Cortés 2014, Campbell and Price 2016). This opens the question, if the material underpinning of the experience of precarity is so relevant, how pertinent is such an icon as San Precario, who represents different groups of subjects in qualitatively different contexts? To answer this question it is important to analyse the relation between the global organisation of work and the configuration of precarious local settings. This approach is relevant for us to understand how different contexts present continuities and similarities in terms of precarity. For example, regarding continuities and discontinuities between different contexts of entrepreneurship, the Colombian case illustrates how similar experiences and discourses can be traced in different entrepreneurial narratives. During interviews with entrepreneurs in Bogotá who participated in my research, different narratives emerged that brought out similarities and connections among experiences that were apparently not linked to each other.

Let us compare two cases of entrepreneurship from my ethnography. On the one hand, we have the experience of a street seller, Fernando, a 46 years old man who has been working informally for more than 20 years near a private university in Bogotá. On the other hand, we have the experience of Felipe, a 25-years-old graphic designer who has worked on different entrepreneurial projects in a software company and is now working on a political campaign in the run up to the elections. At first sight, their experiences and discourses are very different. However, they articulate some of those experiences in similar way. For instance, even if their socioeconomic, educational and cultural background is different, their narratives about the wage labour are comparable, which in both cases is seen as a source of wellbeing, security and stability. In the narrative of Fernando, wage labour is a utopic work condition for people like him who have been working on the streets all their life; it is seen an alternative option in a culture that promotes individual effort and flexible life-style. In the case of Felipe reflections and mediations emerge between the mainstream discourses of entrepreneurship, where the wage labour is presented as obsolete, and the entrepreneurs' experience of the struggles involved in the entrepreneurial activity.

In the Colombian context, the idea of wage labour as a source of psychosocial tranquillity associated with the benefits offered by this kind of job is limited even for those who are supposed to be in 'privileged' social positions. This generalisation of economic and social insecurities among a significant proportion of the different social classes that compose the Colombian socio-political system — which I call 'generalised precarity' — extends to the entrepreneurs in Bogotá. The narratives of some entrepreneurs with 'privileged' socioeconomic backgrounds also show a deterioration of their living conditions. This situation is illustrated by the case of Camilo, a 26-years old-man who is CEO of his school of social entrepreneurship. Being a wage worker was not attractive to him as a life project because of the conditions in the neoliberal labour market and the distance between most of the standard

jobs and organizations and his ethics and political values; that is, teaching that enterprise should be reasonably socially and environmentally sustainable. So, he decided to start his own enterprise. This decision has produced some benefits and freedoms that he recognises as fundamental in his life. However, this also has exposed him to economic struggles that affect his life in different ways. The bureaucratic structure and fiscal weight are among the difficulties faced by many entrepreneurs who work in the formal sector. In the case of Camilo, the social and political emphasis of his project applies to the kind of smaller network that is widespread worldwide. The question that he raises about the impact and the sustainability of an entrepreneurial project is, however, not frequently addressed. So, he needs to establish new links regularly in different spaces and at different times. Between the work required by the programmes offered by his school, the management work and the networking needed to expand the network of possible allies and clients, his daily experience is characterised by a high flexibility of time and space. This translates into long and irregular trajectories across the city, working in diverse places such as universities, coffee shops and co-working offices, and the need to work at different and alternate hours for most of the day. His experience embodies what Tsianos and Papadopoulos, referring to the experience of precarity in neoliberal regimes of work, call ‘unsettledness’; that is, ‘the continuous experience of mobility across different spaces and timelines.’ (2006: 4).

This political position of the precarious worker is why San Precario can reach different places where precarity is experienced. This way to understand the experience of neoliberal exploitation implies positioning this process in a global work system that is tending to deteriorate people’s life experiences, both in terms of material conditions and of psychosocial relations. Even if precarity is experienced in places separated by oceans and continents, the pervasive effects of global neoliberalism have configured the experience of individuals and communities, making them more insecure and unstable in terms of social rights and general well-being. As Siegmann and Schiphorst indicate:

‘We argue that work-related insecurities offer a conceptual umbrella for the conditions that a large and increasing number of workers in the global North and South experience. They emerge in the context of neoliberal globalization that intersects with marginalization based on social identity as well as with the denial of political rights. Such multidimensional causation of labour precarity offers starting points for intervention. For instance, for precarious workers’ struggles to be successful, organizational strength needs to be combined with the forging of coalitions that transcend class identities.’ (Siegmann and Schiphorst 2016: 112).

From this viewpoint, precarity is not only an objective condition of work mediated by subjectivity. It is a global, widespread and dynamic phenomenon, meaning that the interconnections between different scenarios of the labour world form a network that needs to be understood as a whole, complex system. As a concept, precarity is a tool that helps us to approach the multiple expressions of the labour world in a neoliberal and globalised context as a whole rather than as isolated, static, organised and hierarchized realities (Casas-Cortés 2014). Considering this, factors such as the extreme mobility of the workforce around the

world and the dislocation of workplace boundaries configure unstable and atypical labour relations characterised by low income, high risk of being fired and the dismantling of social protection.

Siegmann and Schiphorst (2016) correctly point out that the experience of neoliberal capitalism is lived in various ways simultaneously across the global work system, linking precarity to transnational capital accumulation. This relation between a *generalised precarity* and the global trend of accumulation of capital and wellbeing by the global élites is highly relevant because it affects the core dynamics of global capitalism that impact decisively in the diverse spaces where precarious experiences take place. This has motivated social scientists to study the relationship between neoliberal policies and precarity from different perspectives. For instance, the analysis of the colonial relation between the Global North and the Global South, migration and social class studies, new feminist perspectives and the production of interdisciplinary knowledge on international precarity have enriched the debate on this global issue (Casas-Cortés 2014, Campbell and Price 2016, Meyer 2016, Mosoetsa et al. 2016, Munck 2013, Siegmann and Schiphorst 2016, Worth 2016). Studies carried out in geopolitical places as different as North Atlantic countries, Africa, Asia and Latin America (Mosoetsa et al. 2016, Munck 2013) have produced knowledge on contexts marked by high vulnerability and inequity — as they are reproduced in an interdependent world system — and have highlighted power dynamics that mark the transnational concentration of wealth and the spread of precariousness around the globe (Harris and Scully 2015, Siegmann and Schiphorst 2016).

Paths of Precarity: The Colombian Work System and the Global Entrepreneurialism

In Colombia, the entrepreneurial paths through which San Precario may circulate are diverse and interconnected. The complexity of the networks that shape the precarious experience in some entrepreneurial trajectories implies connections among spaces, practices and imaginaries that are not necessarily determined by the division between formal and informal work. As Pardo (2012) has illustrated in the case of entrepreneurs in Naples, this kind of subjects find in informality an option to make their economic activity easier or even sustainable. Hence, informal work can represent a source of security and wellbeing as the entrepreneur is not exposed to the difficulties and bureaucratic requirements of formality. These dynamics between formal and informal work cannot be understood in a binary system. They cannot be understood without considering the complexity of the phenomena that emerge within these categories and the experience of work as a whole. In this light, in order to approach the fields where precarious experiences take place, it is essential to consider some key economic, political and social features of the Colombian world of work.

In Colombia, as a country of the global south, there are expressions of precarity similar to many other countries in the region. Since the end of the 20th century, Colombian governments have adopted international policies in their attempt to reduce poverty, mitigate inequality and increase economic growth. They have mainly applied the financial strategies suggested by international organisations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which have a high impact on the internal and external policies of most Latin

American countries. Most of the recommendations made by these international bodies are oriented to promote entrepreneurship as the solution to social and economic problems. They stand for the reduction of State influence on individual economic liberties, which, it is argued, helps to increase the levels of entrepreneurship because ‘an environment consistent with economic freedom encourages entrepreneurial activity and economic growth.’ (Larroulet and Couyoumdjian 2009: 95).

Following these recommendations, the Colombian governments have implemented legal and political devices — such as laws, decrees, public policies and social programmes — to promote entrepreneurship. For example, the *Law 1014 of 2006 for the Promotion of the Entrepreneurship Culture* was implemented to promote the entrepreneurial spirit at different social levels and to guarantee a good environment for entrepreneurship (Presidency of Colombia 2006). This policy was constructed following studies made by international academic bodies that provide suggestions to international organisations. For example, the *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Project* and the *Doing Business* study by the World Bank were used to construct the aforementioned legislation.

However, even if entrepreneurship is a growing phenomenon in Latin America, especially in Colombia, the economic growth and development rates are still low. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), this region has high rates of entrepreneurship but despite this the economic situation in Colombia does not reflect the positive correlation between entrepreneurship and economic growth (Amorós 2011, Larroulet and Couyoumdjian 2009). Even though the GDP has shown a relatively consistent growth since the economic aperture of 1991, the experience of more than 20 years of neoliberal politics is distant from these rates. In 2015, the World Bank (2016) rated Colombia as the 39th country with a larger GDP. However, in 2014 the Gini coefficient for the country was 0.53,¹ which makes Colombia one of the most unequal nations in the world (World Bank, 2016). Moreover, in 2015 the poverty rate in Colombia was 28%, amounting for almost a third of the total population (National Administrative Department of Statistics 2017).

Today most Colombians live in dramatically difficult socioeconomic conditions characterised by inequities regarding labour conditions and a lack of opportunities for acceding to social rights such as education, health, housing and work. Most people are unemployed, sub-employed or self-employed workers; this, without considering the illegal economies. In short, the world of work in Colombia is characterised by high rates of inactivity, sub-employment and informality. According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (2017),² in the last year more than 30% of people of working age were inactive; the level of unemployment is over 7% of the working force; and informal employment and self-employment account for almost half the work market. These people do not have access to the guarantees, security and rights traditionally offered by formal work. Taking this into account, we can understand the world of work in Colombia as a context

¹ This is an indicator that shows how concentrated is the production of wealth in relation to the number of people.

² DANE is the acronym in Spanish.

characterised by a lack of job opportunities and high insecurity and instability in terms of survival.

Things are not much different for the formally employed. A study made by Ferreira (2016) revealed the inconvenience of the division between formal and informal work in the Colombian context. She points out that there is not necessarily a relation between formal employment, the quality of jobs and socioeconomic growth (Ferreira 2016, Siegmann and Schiphorst 2016). She concludes that, first, there are different configurations of the informal sector that are not necessarily related to vulnerability and precariousness and, second, that precariousness is present at various levels in both formal and informal work, for the study shows that in the formal work sector, too, there are significant expressions of precarity. If we analyse the different characteristics of the experience of precarity proposed by Tsianos and Papadopoulos (2006) we can see how they can be found in formal and informal work. According to these authors

‘The embodied experience of precarity is characterised by: (a) vulnerability: the steadily experience of flexibility without any form of protection; (b) hyperactivity: the imperative to accommodate constant availability; (c) simultaneity: the ability to handle at the same the different tempi and velocities of multiple activities; (d) recombination: the crossings between various networks, social spaces, and available resources; (e) post-sexuality: the other as dildo; (f) fluid intimacies: the bodily production of indeterminate gender relations; (g) restlessness: being exposed to and trying to cope with the overabundance of communication, cooperation and interactivity; (h) unsettledness: the continuous experience of mobility across different spaces and time lines; (i) affective exhaustion: emotional exploitation, or, emotion as an important element for the control of employability and multiple dependencies; (j) cunning: able to be deceitful, persistent, opportunistic, a trickster.’ (Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006: 4).

Workers in both the formal and informal sectors face similar demands on how they can be desirable to the neoliberal labour market. This issue is illustrated in the experience of precarity made by entrepreneurs in the formal and informal sectors in Bogotá. The case of Yanira, a producer of organic cocoa and chocolate bars who has run her business for seven years, is exemplary. She distributes her products in the organic markets of Bogotá. However, she can only distribute what she produces in markets that accept products that are not licensed according to certain requirements demanded by the industrial authorities because to fulfil such requirements she would have to make an investment that she cannot afford. As a result, Yanira, like other producers and entrepreneurs, has been forced to develop alternative networks of exchange for her products. For example, they work alternative gathering centres like the one owned by Natalia, a Spanish woman who studied in Bogotá and has been an entrepreneur in the city for a year. She has established a network of entrepreneurs who share the same problem and need to organise and find an alternative to work informally because their entrepreneurial projects are oriented mostly to survive, not to grow economically. They struggle with several problems, which they try to solve using resources closer to their

experience, such as networks and connections, as opposed to investing capital or taking loans that they would find difficult to repay.

We can compare this case with the case of Andrea, who owns a bakery shop and embraces a hiring policy based on the inclusion of LGBTI communities. She has received support from different sources such as her family and her academic network and social circle, and has participated in the programmes for entrepreneurs offered by the government. She is in the process of finishing the premises for the bakery, which has presented additional worries, and consolidating the business model. She is looking forward to getting a return from the investment she made with her partner. The insecurity involved in finding a balance in their business is one stress factor alongside others, such as dealing with the initial stages of formalisation of the business.

In the cases that I have briefly described we have observed shared experiences of informal and formal work characterised by the struggle with formal requirements, even if the experience and agency as entrepreneurs are different. In the cases of Yanira, Natalia and Andrea, we have seen that the distinction between formal and informal work is unclear and that the generalisation of precarious work conditions and modes of experiences has implications for the entrepreneurs' lives (Pardo 2012, Ferreira 2016). About this situation, Pardo (2012) has highlighted the ambiguous relation of entrepreneurs with the division of formal and informal work. In his work, Pardo questions this binary view of work, showing that entrepreneurial activity involves implied interconnections between formal and informal spaces and dynamics, thus relegating this division to a matter of law and governance, for it is not a categorisation that describes the different conditions of work accurately. These reflections contribute to our understanding of the continuities of entrepreneurial practices and beliefs between formal and informal labour and, also, of the discontinuities between models of governance, management and citizenship in the socioeconomic spectrum (Pardo 2009, 2012).

The work of Pardo on entrepreneurial experiences in Naples and of Ferreira on the experiences of precarity in Colombia share a critique of the modern organisation of work into formal/informal, material/immaterial, legal/illegal (Ferreira, 2016, Pardo 2012). This critical comprehension of the world of work highlights the gaps between the binary divisions that inform the political and legal bodies that regulate labour and the economy, and the experiences of workers in their struggle to succeed economically. Therefore, in order to understand entrepreneurship in the Colombian context, we need to approach the incoherence that I have pointed out between the entrepreneurial boom and low economic growth moving beyond the separation between formal and informal work. It is necessary to shift to an analysis based on the experiences of the entrepreneurs, which enables us to understand more accurately the relation between socioeconomic practices, individual and collective identities and global macro systems.

However, a perspective rooted in the daily experiences of entrepreneurs in precarious contexts implies moving away from traditional boundaries, such as the modern definitions of labour, time and territory. In the next section, I will review concepts drawn from the literature on multi-sited ethnography, the labour process theory and *univocity* that are useful in our

study of the relation between the global and the local expressions of entrepreneurship and precarious work.

A Multi-sited Understanding of the Global Work System: Perspectives from Social and Ethnographic Research

In Colombia, the entrepreneurial paths in which San Precario could circulate are many, diverse and interconnected. The complexity of the networks that constitute the Colombian world of work implies different positions and trajectories. Hence, the experiences of precarity by local communities and subjects are also diverse and develop at several levels (Casas-Cortés 2014). So, the paths in which San Precario might circulate through Colombian entrepreneurialism cross a wide variety of lines related to different social classes, territories, identities and socioeconomic and political issues.

When studying a complex phenomenon that implies such high diversity, we face the challenge of grasping the variations within the entrepreneurial networks while systematising and organising the information and knowledge produced by the research. To avoid the practice of modern sciences of categorising the empirical data in binary systems, we need to engage with a more sophisticated understanding about the intrinsic difference among the empirical experiences. Therefore, in view of the conceptual developments of the philosophy of difference, it is more than pertinent to face the challenge of grasping the diversity and difference that mark this global phenomenon.

In his work, *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze (1994), one of the most prominent philosophers of difference, presents a perspective of difference strong enough to escape traditional superimpositions of binary categories over specific and general multiplicities. He problematizes how the determinations imposed by representation imply neutralisation, a literal impossibility of *making, producing difference*, of the substantial multiplicity in a series of multiple and diverse events (Deleuze 1994). When addressing the entrepreneurial networks of Bogotá, it is critical to question the relationship between the individual efforts of the entrepreneurial agents and the extensive series of practices marking the broader entrepreneurial system. How can we understand this series of events if each expression of the series is different from the others and from the wider network itself? It is here that the Deleuzian concept of *univocity* seems to be a useful conceptual tool. Aware of the substantial and immanent difference among singularities in broader context, Deleuze proposes to use this concept to develop an understanding of the relations among different events. Univocity implies a denial of division in a series of events — in this case, the series of events that constitute the global work system — and among the events that constitute such a series — in this case, the different levels and experiences of the global work system. For him, there are distributions and hierarchies within a group of singularities. However, this does not imply that they are isolated from each other and the series in which they arise. The difference between events and series of events *is* difference itself, intended as the ontological condition in which a particularity can be related with a totality. This means that the difference between events is what can make a series which is, at the same time, different from the events that constitute it (Deleuze 1994, Tormey 2005). From this viewpoint, the totality can only be expressed by the

constitutive diversity of its elements and the differentiation among them; at the same time, all the differences among the events in a series is what makes that series distinctive from the terms that constitute it.

When dealing with the global world of precarious work as a series of interconnected expressions marked by profoundly different local experiences, it is important to highlight that it is the plurality at the local level that brings out the global dimension of the work system. I mean that the multiple experiences of precariousness at local level are what produces a general phenomenon of precarization in the world of work that is also distinctively different from the expressions within it. Specifically, the distribution of knowledge through a widespread and dynamic system such as that of global entrepreneurialism makes the local experiences around the world at once qualitatively different from each other and a global entrepreneurial system of practices; thus, these different forms of entrepreneurialism acquire their global dimension.

This view of the diverse expression of precarious work at different levels and distributions is embraced by the Labour Process Theory (LPT). Some perspectives in this body of knowledge recognize how labour issues occur beyond the limits of the strictly defined modern workplace, and that other ideological and political factors configure the process of labour and the diverse experiences of it (Burawoy 1979; Litter 1986, 1990; Nichols 1980; Thompson and Smith 2009). As Thomson and Smith have pointed out, ‘[...] The central argument was that the dynamics of relations between capital and labour as actors in the workplace cannot be assumed to be continuous with capital and labour as societal actors. In other words, labour process struggles might have diverse, not predictable or singular, outcomes at the level of the political and the political within work.’ (2009: 918).

Burawoy (1979) encourages us to understand the labour process as a complex global system in which transnational labour relations constitute a network that configures local expression. This understanding is highly relevant to the study of global phenomena such as entrepreneurialism and precarity with regard to local experiences. Deleuze’s concept of univocity applied to the global world of work and the different phenomena in it, helps us to identify the relation between global entrepreneurialism in times of generalised precarity and individual entrepreneurial experiences in precarious contexts. The general context (global capitalism, global entrepreneurialism, generalised precarity) finds always local expression in different forms that differ from the broader context while being part of it.

These ideas open the door to new approaches in the study of global and local systems of work. For instance, Thomson and Smith argue that ‘Multi-site, multilayered research studies can overcome some of these issues, but these often end up disconnected from actual labour processes’ (2009: 923). This poses a challenge and an opportunity for multi-sited ethnography, for a multi-sited ethnographic understanding of global issues such as precarity or entrepreneurship could provide new insights on the relationship between these two categories in the local/global context and on the division between formal and informal work.

According to Marcus (1995, 1999), multi-sited ethnographic work arises not only as a study of a global system but a study of the flows of imaginaries and forces of global capitalism. This conception allows us to escape from the dichotomies between local isolated

systems and a global impossible-to-reach system. For him, ‘Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography.’ (1995: 105). More specifically, this approach enables us to study the relation of entrepreneurship to precarious local contexts in terms of the trajectories of global discourses and the ways in which they operate in diverse backgrounds; thus, we can study phenomena related to labour and employment without the spatial restrictions of traditional ethnography and extract the general from the unique and move from the *micro* to the *macro* (Burawoy 1998). Understanding the complexity and interconnections of local contexts that constitute the global world of work is highly relevant to grasping the relations between objects and spaces that are apparently unlinked.

Tracing the Entrepreneurial Practices through Precarious Formal and Informal Work Contexts in Colombia

Considering the opportunity of constructing a *bigger picture*, as Marcus proposes, of a complex system like that of Colombian entrepreneurialism in the context of global-local relations, my ethnographic fieldwork in Bogotá should be understood as a space that is configured by movements and flows of ideas, communities and objects that are significant beyond the geopolitical delimitations of the territory. The entrepreneurial networks of Bogotá are connected with wider regional, national and international systems that configure the experience of local entrepreneurs.

Following Marcus’ model of ethnographic fieldwork, it is important to define *what to follow*. We need to trace the paths of the different forces that construct the entrepreneurs’ subjectivity in precarious contexts in order to map the social correlates through different entrepreneurial spaces. According to him, *following the metaphor* is ‘especially potent for suturing locations of cultural production that had not been obviously connected and, consequently, for creating empirically argued new envisionings of social landscapes’ (Marcus 1995: 108). This, I believe, was the most appropriate way to construct the field for my study, because it allowed me to analyse social correlates of entrepreneurship in different spaces where precarity is expressed. It also allowed me to trace the entrepreneurial discursive practices that circulate between global and local dynamics of precarity in the Colombian work system.

Being in some way heterodox, a hybridisation between ‘following the metaphor’ and the single site of traditional ethnography is a strategic starting point that enables us to follow entrepreneurial practices better, in the sense of identifying better the ramifications of these practices and seeing the bigger picture of the system. This *strategic* space, or starting point, provided different perspectives from which I started tracing the entrepreneurial paths in different areas of the social spectrum, identifying connections and associations between different social spaces and configuring history, politics, macro and microeconomics, class, race or gender.

The concept of ‘strategic space’ is, in this case, a social device that involves the power to govern effectively: The Law of Entrepreneurship of Colombia 1014 of 2006. Laws are devices of government and control that affect the social body in different ways. In modern societies, they affect the everyday life of individuals and power relations, as they operate in different spaces and normative bodies. For Foucault (2005), regimes of truth and discipline are the ultimate means by which power can affect these bodies). From this point of view, laws are useful devices to organise the social body in determined spaces and times; they prescribe a repertory of movements, enunciations and functions that underpin the legal discourse that guarantees efficiency as a goal of neoliberal capitalism. As Foucault (1990) has pointed out, legal prescriptions determine both the purposes of an activity and the shape of it, the forms and methods that it must replicate to accomplish the demanded duties. The way in which laws operate in society makes them ideal devices to start tracing the economic and social practices. A large body of knowledge produced by sciences such as psychology, management and economy has also contributed to the construction of the Law for Entrepreneurship of Colombia (Law 1014 of 2006). These inputs, mostly from the transnational academic community and international organisations, identify a particular kind of socioeconomic and political entrepreneurial subject and configure the set of experiences and practices that characterize the imaginaries and behaviours of these subjects.

As it is exemplified by the Colombian normative bodies that govern the entrepreneurial world, the power relations of the global economy may be turned into legislation that has a direct impact on the experience of individuals. The Law 1014 of 2006 was passed with the specific objective of promoting the entrepreneurial spirit in different sectors of Colombian society and guaranteeing a good environment for entrepreneurship (Presidency of Colombia, 2006). This law has the objective of ‘creating an inter-institutional framework that encourages the development of an entrepreneurial culture and the creation of companies’. In this line, the law envisages the creation of an Investors Network, a National Entrepreneurship Network and Regional Entrepreneurship Networks. These are networks of public organisations, education institutions, social associations, economic groups and communities. They are responsible for the implementation of policies and for designing programmes that promote an entrepreneurial culture. These normative bodies are determinant in the way in which entrepreneurs interact with each other, with other social actors like other entrepreneurs, the academic community, clients, industries, banks, the government, public institutions, NGOs, transnational neoliberalism and the territory itself.

It is in this kind of network that the law is implemented, including education programmes for entrepreneurship, institutionalised systems that bring together socioeconomic actors interested in the promotion of an entrepreneurial culture, economic and financial programs for entrepreneurs. In the case of Bogotá, the local Chamber of Commerce and INNpulsa³ coordinate most of the official events and public programmes. These organisations are important reference points for the different entrepreneurs who shared their experience with me during my research; in particular, those who participated in the formal

³ This is the government’s office in charge of promoting entrepreneurial activity in the country.

entrepreneurial projects offered by the official institutions. Other entrepreneurs who operate informally have a more distant relationship with the institutions and remain suspicious of these programmes.

Looking at the different ways in which the Law 1014 of 2006 is implemented, in terms of the paths of knowledge and ideological features about entrepreneurship, allows us to analyse where these discourses are created, how they become *knowledge*, how they are translated into public policies and how these ideas are received at local level. These entrepreneurial trajectories; these discourses, practices and networks of knowledge around the world are observable in Bogotá's local contexts, such as organic markets, neighbourhood shops and natural parks but also in other, different, spaces such as international academic and business conferences. In order to analyse these dynamics it is necessary to extend the fieldwork into the relevant spaces. Using strategically the Colombian Law of Entrepreneurship I will expand the field to include different Colombian local contexts. Thus, the activities, networks and communities that are related with each other and that interact with this legislation will constitute an additional multiplicity of paths where ethnographic fieldwork will be conducted.

Conclusions

In the contemporary context of neoliberal globalisation, precarity is a phenomenon expressed in multiple ways. Austerity policies and deregulation of markets have shaped a precarious global labour market characterised by unstable work relations and psychosocial insecurity for workers. In this perspective, precarity is a distinctive way of existence marked by the exploitation of neoliberal work regimens.

We have seen that the entrepreneurial phenomenon in Colombia is marked by incoherence between the entrepreneurial boom and the low economic growth and that to understand this situation we need to move beyond the separation between formal and informal work. To address the relationship between the entrepreneurial social, political and economic practices and the entrepreneurs' subjectivities in a global system we need to develop a view based on entrepreneurs' experiences of precariousness. I have argued that this view of the labour process as a complex of labour relations that configures local expressions is highly relevant to study global phenomena such as entrepreneurialism and precarity. This effort finds useful conceptual and methodological tools in the concepts developed by socio-economic studies that engage with the relationship between global entrepreneurialism and generalised precarity and with individual entrepreneurial experiences and activities in precarized contexts. I have shown that, as these concepts respond to the diversity and the complexity that characterizes the entrepreneurial world of Bogotá, they enable us to trace the different trajectories of the Colombian Law of Entrepreneurship regarding movements of entrepreneurial knowledge and action; thus, they help us to understand the relationships between public policy and entrepreneurship, and particularly how legislation operates in the different contexts of Colombian entrepreneurialism.

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