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The Commodification of Job Vacancies. Market Practices of Fee Employment Agencies in Rio de Janeiro (1950-1975)

Léa Lima (Cnam, Lise-CNRS, CEET)

Abstract : "Labor is not a commodity" : One of the earliest understandings of this maxim concerns the intermediation of employment by supporting policies to extinguish the fees charged to workers for their placement. In Brazil, fee employment agencies never disappeared. The article goes back to the period of expansion of private intermediation in Rio de Janeiro between 1950 and 1975 to observe their market practices. In order to attract job seekers and convince them to pay for an intermediation service, we argue that those actors performed the commodity-hood of job vacancies. Through the analysis of a sample of 3556 job and employment agencies ads published in the *Jornal do Brasil* between 1945 and 1975, we highlight three social processes of commoditization of job vacancies : the objectivation of job vacancies as “ real things to be bought”, the performing of profusion and collection of job vacancies as “things to be chosen”, and the rhetoric elevation of the unemployed to the status of customer. Through employment agencies market work, the world of labor appears as colonized by techniques, codes and expectations coming from the mass consumption world.

Key words: Consumer – Commodity – Labour market Intermediation – Advertisement – Job vacancies

Resumo : “O trabalho não é uma mercadoria” : Um dos primeiros entendimentos desta máxima diz respeito à intermediação do emprego, apoiando políticas para extinguir as taxas cobradas aos trabalhadores por sua colocação e para incentivar o desenvolvimento de um serviço público de emprego. O artigo propõe voltar à uma das fontes da convenção das vagas como mercadorias, examinando o trabalho comercial realizado por agências de emprego privadas entre 1950 e 1975 para

seduzir os que procuram emprego e convencê-los a pagar por um serviço de intermediação. Pode-se argumentar que o mercado de trabalho foi colonizado pela cultura do consumidor quando essas agências privadas de emprego importaram técnicas, códigos e expectativas normativas específicas para o universo do mercado consumidor de bens materiais.

Palavras chaves : Consumidor – Mercadoria – Intermediação do mercado do trabalho – Publicidade

- Vagas

The commodification of job vacancies: market practices of private employment agencies in Rio de Janeiro (1950-1985)

“Labor is not a commodity”: this principle founded the International Labor Organization (ILO) in its 1919 constitution and has been enshrined in the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia. The authorship of this maxim is not unanimous in the community of historians (O’Higgins 1997; Evju 2013). ILO actors invoked it in support of various policies, backed by the idea that labor can not be separated from the worker whose dignity should be protected: the defense of non-market mechanisms for wage setting, the prohibition of the transfer of a worker from one employer to another without his or her consent, or the fight against migrant labor traffic. On a theoretical level, Karl Polanyi (Polanyi 1944) conceptualized the processes of commodification of labor through social forces whose stake is the availability of labor force to capitalist interests. In this Marxist reading of the “fictitious” commodification of labor, the concept refers to a materialist conception of history in which the social actors representing class interests and embedded in power relations determine the material conditions of the degree of submission of workers to the institutionalized rules of supply and demand. This is the case of the social laws conquered by the organized workers, allowing the regulation of work according to other principles than that of the free market. In this sense, the history of social conquests, limiting the availability of labor force on the one hand and offering socialized income to replace labor on the other, is that of a progressive decommodification of labor (Offe 1984; Esping-Andersen 1988). Therefore, commodification/decommodification processes are understood in a materialist perspective and concerns worker’s earnings, i.e. the supply side, rather than the demand of labor.

However, one of the earliest practical understandings of the maxim “Labor is not a commodity” concerns the employment intermediation by supporting policies to extinguish the fees charged to workers for their placement. Based on the 1919 constitution, different ILO conventions have reaffirmed that no financial cost should hinder access to employment for workers and that job vacancies cannot be traded. Thus the idea that workers should not pay to be allowed to work is the

second facet of the labor decommodification norm, positioned on the demand side. Most countries, including those in Latin America, have taken steps to regulate this area, and the norm of intermediation at the expense of employers or the State is taken for granted. Brazil is one of the few countries, however, where workers pay for access to online job boards and employment services, despite the existence of a public system for placing the unemployed. Hence, the situation in Brazil raises a twofold question: How did the job vacancy become a “thing” to be traded? How did workers agree to pay for the matching service?

The article aims to go back to the sources of this norm of vacant jobs as commodities by considering the commercial work done by private employment agencies between 1950 and 1972 to seduce job seekers and convince them to pay for an intermediation service. It sheds light on a part of the activity of these employment agencies that is generally little studied because the literature focuses on the function of matching labor supply and demand (Autor et National Bureau of Economic Research 2009; Marchal et Bureau 2009), which leads to direct the selection of the workforce and the circulation of economic information. The best example of sociology of work applied to employment agencies in Brazil is the research led by Nadya Guimarães (Guimarães 2009) which offers a very thorough analysis of the intermediation system in the Paulista metropolitan area in the 2000s.

To say that private employment agencies transformed job vacancies into commodities may seem absurd to a somewhat objective labor economist. Indeed, it will not escape any specialist in labor market intermediation that private employment agencies do not sell job offers but rather a service of putting workers in touch with recruiters and preparing them for the labor market, i.e. for the selection tests of employers. In addition, researchers are able to differentiate between a job vacancy and a job advertisement, the second being a material representation of the first.

Hence, from our culturalist and situationist perspective (Appadurai 1986), the production of commodities is a cultural and cognitive process as “commodities must be not only produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain kind of things” (Kopytoff 1986,

64). In western mercantile capitalism like the one, the Brazilian middle class was experiencing in the 1950ies, one object or service becomes a commodity when it is marked symbolically as a saleable thing.

Many sociologists give a moral meaning to this symbolic marking, describing the historical processes of normative regulation that tend to separate the world into two classes of objects: those that can be traded and those that are priceless and untradeable. They focus on collective action contesting the commodity-hood of certain class of objects, in particular people, on a moral point of view (Radin 2001; Satz 2010). Indeed, I showed elsewhere how, during the first years of the dictatorship, Brazilian private employment agencies collectively responded to the timid moral contestation of the monetization of workers by the State (Lima 2022).

In fact, the moral acceptability of the salability of a thing is one very important condition to commodify an object or a service. However, it is not the only one. The object or the service might be also marked as a thing belonging to the middle class shared consumer culture, made of promises of abundance, free choice between an ever-increasing range of goods and experiences and accumulation of material and immaterial services. Consumer studies have taught us to consider the consumer not as a universal anthropological datum, an ideal-typical manifestation of *homo oeconomicus*, but as an individual socialized to certain consumption practices through discourses and market devices (Arnould et Thompson 2005; Gottschalk et Berger 2002). Saying that, we defend a pragmatic conception of commodity which is performed by actors believing in the reality of the market and their laws (Muniesa, Millo, et Callon 2007). This way of thinking commodity-hood emphasizes the role of commercial objects, artefacts and technologies in framing markets (Cochoy 2007), especially to confirm the saleable nature of one particular thing made desirable for consumption (Pettinger 2006). One object or service is thus commodified by marking it materially and discursively as belonging to the class of consumption goods, which provide a desirable social identity to the middle-class. Jean Baudrillard identified two characteristics of the social organization of objects in a consumer society:

profusion and packages or collections of goods, the drugstore being “the synthesis of profusion and calculation” (Baudrillard 2012: 27).

The work of market professionals is thus to reproduce for each object to be sold the representation of profusion and collection in order to signify to the community the belonging of the thing to the sphere of commodities. Therefore, we propose to direct research towards what the organization of the labor market owes to the “work of market professionals” (Cochoy et Dubuisson-Quellier 2000) and “market practices” (Kjellberg et Helgesson 2016), in particular advertisers and marketers who develop selling techniques either discursive or material. We argue that the consumer culture colonized the labor market when private employment agencies imported techniques, codes and normative expectations specific to the market of consumption goods into the world of labor. We witnessed in Brazil a historical process of commodification of job vacancies, i.e., the institutional and symbolic arrangement of a commodity situation for the vacant job in which the latter appears to be exchangeable for a certain sum of money sacrificed by the job seeker.

This article deals with the different aspects of the commodity-hood of job vacancies that characterizes the treatment of job intermediation in the 1950s and 1960s. As job matching appeared to be a free market in the 1950s, real “market practices” were developed, and in particular “exchange practices” as identified by Kjellberg and Helgesson: activities of advertisement, pricing, which “all contribute to temporarily stabilize certain conditions (the parties to the exchange, exchange object, price, terms of exchange) so that an economic exchange becomes possible.” (Kjellberg et Helgesson 2016). The commercial work had to involve employers to convince them to entrust their job offers to agencies. However, this work is less observable by the researcher than the intense activity of seduction deployed by the professionals of the market relationship to capture job seekers.

The article relies on the exploitation of the classified pages of the archives of the *Jornal do Brasil*. (JB). We justify the choice of this newspaper by the accessibility of its digital archives, available free of charge on the national library website bndigital.br, by the longevity of this daily newspaper, whose

first edition dates back to 1891 and which has not been interrupted since, as well as by its centrality in the life of the Carioca bourgeoisie. We have constituted a sample of job offers by taking all the job offers of each September 5 (or nearest when it happens to be on weekends) of each year ending with 5 between 1905 and 1975, a total of 3556 ads. In addition, we collected all the advertisements for employment agencies between 1945 and 1975 from the entry of the keywords “agência de emprego” (“employment agency”), and all the names of agencies identified on September 6, 1955 (which represents a peak in the publication of job offers and advertisements for agencies): ATA, Pitman, TED de serviços, Link de serviços, and Utilex.

First, we will analyze the use of classified ads by the new commercial actors of intermediation by resituating it in a general economy of labor market information in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Then we will analyze the discursive and technical means by which these private actors commodified employment and reclassify the worker as a mass consumer of job vacancies and as a customer of the employment service.

1. Newspapers, employment agencies and Labour Market Information in Rio de Janeiro

Despite the high level of informality on the labour market and the weight of individual relationships for the job search (Guimarães 2009), newspapers has been a common media for labour market information in Rio de Janeiro since the 19th century, especially in the domestic labour (Souza 2017). Job ads can not be used for describing the structure of employment in the city since the media, its cost and its function, selected a certain kind of actors overrepresented in the newspaper pages. However, the comparison of job ads overtime gives an insight into the evolution of job information producers, the ones who publicized job information together with the newspaper. Private intermediation services appeared in the 1950ies in a quite fuzzy form that the job seeker could hardly distinguish from other services as short courses.

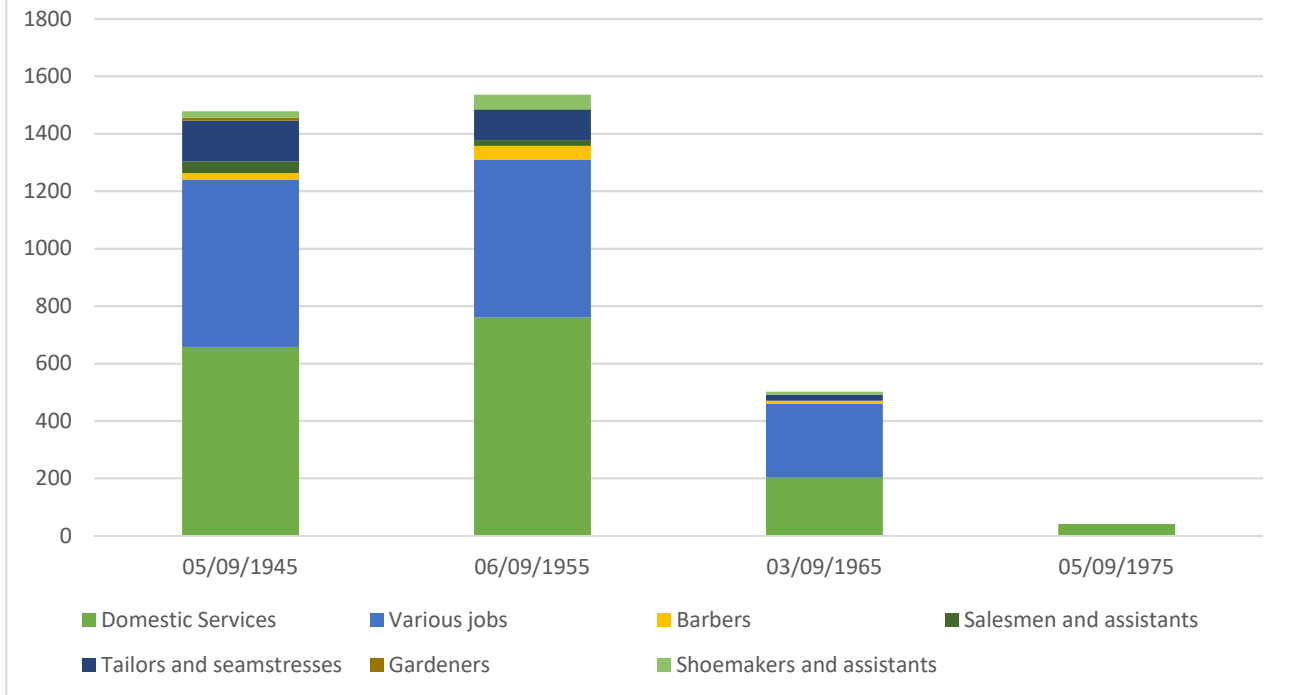
1.1. Job ads: staging the labor market and the information economy

In the JB, the job advertisement section became autonomous in the 1900s. Between 1915 and 1965, the job ads even served as a loss leader for the purchase of the newspaper, spreading on the front page. The newspaper invested in a way that it could cover the city of Rio with its registration offices dedicated to classified ads, which constituted an important part of its revenue.

At the end of the 1900s, the JB introduced the purchase of single issues, which allowed a significant democratization of the readership. The workers who could already read it in the spaces traditionally dedicated to the circulation of economic information on jobs, such as cafés, could punctually buy an issue to consult the job advertisements. Thus, it was the *bourgeoisie* that spread its needs in the newspapers by encouraging candidates to present themselves to the newspaper, or on the job place and then, from 1955 onwards and more rarely, by calling the company's headquarters.

Job advertisements slightly increased between 1955 and 1955 and dropped dramatically between 1955 and 1965 (-790 ads, equivalent to a drop of more than 53%) and then between 1965 and 1975 (- 460 ads, equivalent to a drop of 93.8%). So much so that in its September 5, 1975 edition, the JB contained only about 40 ads focusing exclusively on servant jobs [Chart 1]

Chart 1. Diary Number and Type of Job Ads in the Jornal do Brasil (1945-1975)



.Source: JB, statistics by the author.

Ads for house servant jobs still accounted for the majority in 1945 and 1955, but the “various jobs” category, which in fact included many office jobs, represented more than half of the ads in 1965. The number of ads for office jobs declined between 1955 and 1965, but not as rapidly as the number of ads for domestic services.

Actually, there was a growing need for small administrative staff in the industry or service companies (secretaries, accountants, reception staff...). The 50ies is well known as a decade of the modernization of the Brazilian production system through public and international private investments (Leopoldi 1994; Draibe 1985). The bureaucratization of the companies and the economy accompanied this industrialization process. The growing division of administrative labor encountered social aspirations of a white urban lower middle-class to maintain its status in a highly hierarchized society by acceding non-manual occupations. On the basis of the 1950 census, the journal *Desenvolvimento e Conjuntura* cited by Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira counted 792 000 office workers and shop assistants with low qualification in Brazil, i.e. 4,8% of the labor force (Pereira 1986, 87). While the whole population of

Rio de Janeiro increased by 50% between the census of 1950 and 1960, the number of small administrative staff¹ jumped by 100%. The number of dactylographer almost tripled in the city of Rio de Janeiro between the census of 1950 and 1960. Then it doubled again until 1970 whereas the growth rate of the employees was 53%². Given the probable high turnover on those jobs, we assume that the hiring activity on this kind of occupation must have been very intense, offering good market opportunities to intermediaries, although still dealing with a specific segment of the labor market.

Meanwhile, the incomplete democratization of high school education led generations of young people with strong basic skills in literacy and numeracy to seek office jobs. Jayme Abreu showed that high school enrollment increased by 490% between 1933 and 1954, while the increase was only 90% and 80% for elementary and higher education (Abreu 1961). But only 20% of the entrants into the secondary schools (selected by a difficult exam) completed the degree until the exit exam (the “vestibular”), which can be interpreted as the result of precarious life conditions of the lower middle class (Nunes 2000). These vast cohorts of young people excluded from the university, fighting against their proletarianization, represented a reservoir of labor force for large companies and public administration, while appearing as very good clients of fee employment agencies.

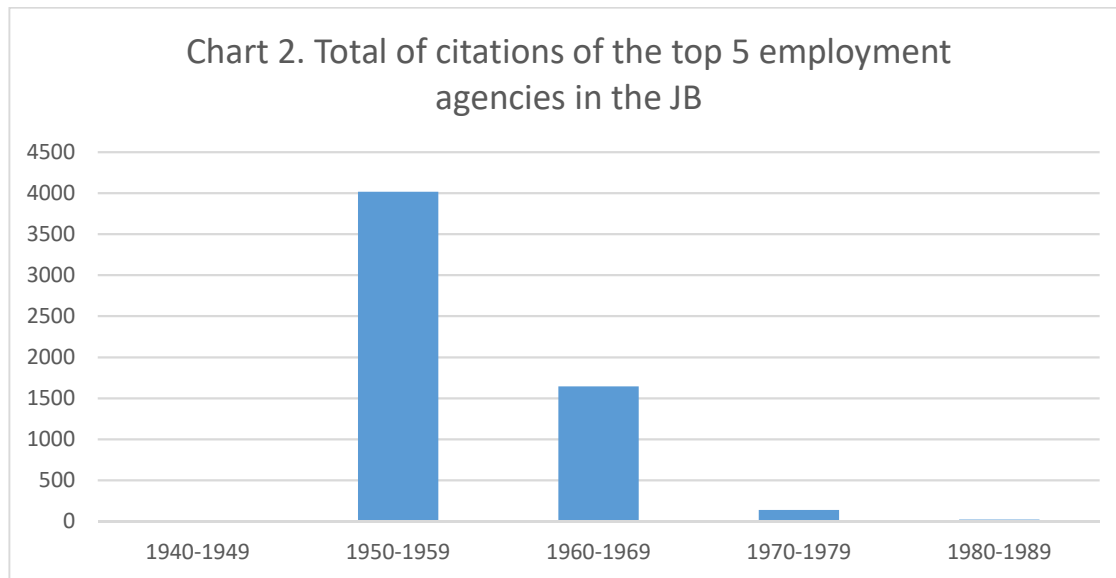
Still invisible in 1945, the agencies that appeared as such in the classified ads for the recruitment of workers, were all dedicated to the administration and business services. Indeed, employment agencies published 22.9% of the job advertisements in the “various job” category in 1955, representing 8% of all job advertisements, and this proportion dropped to 15% in 1965, still accounting for 7.5% of all advertisements.

The indicators of the evolution of the hits of the top 5 employment agencies (Agencia Link de empregos, ATA, Snelling e Snelling, TED de serviços, Utilex) cited in the JB shows that the 1950s

¹ Referring to the category of the « auxiliares de escritório e de administração em geral » of the Brazilian classification of occupations.

² Source: Censos demográficos de 1950, 1960, 1970.
<https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/?view=detalhes&id=767>.

represent the golden age of employment agencies in the service sector, or at least of their presence on the advertised labor market [See Chart 2].



Source : JB, 1940-1989, treatment by the author

1.2. Composition and recomposition of fee employment services

Actually, in addition to the traditional agencies for the placement of servants, new actors took advantage of the modernization of companies and the division of labor of administrative functions in companies of different sizes, by offering private courses in typing and secretarial skills (Lima 2022). This service to workers often include a placement service that becomes a selling point for their training. For example, in the January 1st, 1950 edition of the JB, Escola Velox, which claims to have been founded in 1911, promises a 30-day typing course and claims that it is “taking care of the placement of its students”¹. Some of these companies use the job posting as a lead-in to the courses, and soon the "various jobs" section brings up advertisements for these courses. Here, the CIT agency, by using the 3 keywords "Aux. escritorio" (Office Assistants), “Aprendizes de escritorio” (Office Apprentices) and “Auxiliar de contabilidade” (Accounting Assistant) positioned in the first ads because of the alphabetical order, ensures maximum visibility to their offer of short courses:

“Office Assistants - Young men and women who wish to start a career in the office world will find this opportunity by taking a 20 or 40-day practical course. More details in person at CIT - Av. Pres. Vargas, 435, 10th floor.

Office Apprentices - Receiving requests from major firms, CIT is able to prepare young women and men in record time (20 or 40 days) with an absolute guarantee of employment. CIT - Jobs and Courses. Pres. Vargas, 435, 10th floor.

Accounting Assistant - In one month CIT prepares and places its students in the most important Companies in Rio. Exclusive preparation system, extra fast and efficient. CIT - Jobs and Courses. Pres. Vargas, 435, 10th floor².”

While some agencies have developed their recruitment service from a training activity, others have experienced the opposite trajectory. The “TÉD de serviços” agency (called also TÉD), the most commercially active, began in 1950 with a recruitment service for companies and a few years later added courses and finally occupied the entire intermediation chain³. In 1962, it introduced correspondence courses⁴. The company then developed a strategy of diversification into business services and integration of the activities that make up the labor intermediation sector. To the point of forming the “TÉD Group” at the turn of the 1980s, made up of seven entities covering recruitment services, training courses, temporary agency, cleaning services, data processing services and advertising agency⁵.

Companies that entered the market a little later usually opened courses at the same time as an employment agency. This is the case of the ATA agency, Serpe (Seleção e Ensino Rápido de Pessoal Especializado - first occurrence on February 10, 1955), or the “Curso Pitman”, which announced the opening of its first typing courses in December 1957 and then the Pitman Agency on January 19, 1958. Few organizations positioned themselves solely as recruitment agencies, such as the “Link de

empregos” agency, which appeared in the pages of the JB for the first time on September 17, 1953, and which did not publish any advertisements for courses until its last appearance on January 1, 1971. In issue #208 of September 6, 1955, Téd appears as particularly active in the office job market. It placed 38 job advertisements on the front page of the newspaper in the section « Various jobs », which gave great visibility to it and two larger inserts for recruitment on the back page. With its 40 ads, which represent a third of the agency job offers, it is in first place in the ranking of job advertisers, far ahead of the cluster made up of CIT, Utilex, ATA and Serpe, which each publish between 15 and 20 classified ads and no inserts.

Téd agency promises students priority in staff placement. Its name appears at least once in 712 pages of the JB through 1959. On August 26, 1953, it shows 628 applicants placed between the months of June, July, and August, many of them before classes had even ended⁶. The managers enhanced the organization of the intermediation: the candidates must present themselves on the spot while the employers in search of workers can order by phone. In May 1953, the Téd office was so crowded that managers had to introduce different opening hours for different types of jobs: in the morning for jobs above 2,000 cruzeiros and in the afternoon for jobs below⁷. By the end of the 1950s, the agency had opened three offices in Rio. In a greeting card published in the JB on December 24, 1961, it boasted that it had trained 70,000 students, and that it had 3,000 in stock, 12,000 client companies⁸. The Snelling e Snelling agency, which set up in Rio in 1968 and boasted a network of 350 agencies worldwide, positioned itself in a wider variety of professions, investing in commercial professions, aiming for a higher range of qualifications such as engineers or managers.

Of the 5 employment agencies in Rio - Téd (Tempo é dinheiro), Utilex, ATA, CIT⁹ and Serpe - that dominated the publication of job offers in the administrative sector in 1955, only two remained in 1965 (ATA and Téd), while the dispersion of recruitment announcements became greater. In fact, the same number of agencies (9) published a much smaller number of job offers (38 instead of 120 in 1955). These famous agencies visible in the Carioca daily newspaper do not account for the

proliferation of these companies, since in 1968 the Ministry of Labor counted between 300¹⁰ and 150¹¹ agencies in the state of Guanabara alone, most of them concentrated in domestic services but also in office jobs.

All of these agencies are very valuable advertisers for the local press, which lives largely on advertising revenues. This economic and commercial interdependence is particularly evident for the most established agencies, with political and economic connections among the business world, the press and the political world supporting the institutionalization of these intermediation actors (Lima 2022). Again, the TÉD agency is a good example of this type of link. The founder and leader of TÉD, Francisco Pinheiro Machado, who comes from a family of notables from the region of Piauí, benefits from a good media coverage in the JB. The journal and the recruitment agency carried out jointly some advertising operations. In 1957, the newspaper and TÉD launched a typing contest; the opening of new branches in the city was the subject of a small article; and in the early 1970s, the executive posed in an advertisement for the newspaper's "classifieds" pages. The JB covered the 25th anniversary of the TÉD group in a four-page supplement and the municipality sent a representative to the inauguration of its new headquarters¹². Francisco Pinheiro also created his own advertising agency, which became a client of the newspaper by posting other advertisements.

2. The Commodification of Job Vacancies and the Clientelization of the Unemployed

Employment agencies are performing a market place for a "job consumer" relies on three types of market practices. First, they redefined the "thing" to be for sale by attaching value to the acquisition of job vacancies rather than to training and job search services. Second, they imported into the sphere of wage employment the culture and techniques of choice (Schwarz 2018) that apply in the sphere of material consumer goods, especially the semiotic fashioning of profusion and collection of job vacancies. Third, they "clientelized" the unemployed person, by requalifying him or her as a privileged customer. These symbolic operations, which aim to change the representations of the job

search situation and enhance the value of the placement service, call upon the emerging culture of consumption.

2.1. From the job search service to the job as a product

Agencies went to great lengths to convince candidates of the true nature of the service they were about to buy. First, many of them wanted to distinguish themselves from the agencies dedicated to courses. They emphasized the matchmaking service to distinguish themselves from training organizations for which intermediation was an accessory service. They therefore isolated access to employment as the real purpose of the service. Gradually these agencies have signified their particularities by displaying the mention "100% employment agency" in their ads. The term "immediate hiring" or "immediate recruitment" suggested the possibility of direct access to an office job without any training obligation. The credibility of private employment agencies also depended on the development of a portfolio of job offers that became the real products to be promoted.

Second, they developed a rhetoric of contractualization of job access using a legal vocabulary. The semantic universe of employment agency advertisements tended to reassure job seekers about the contractual guarantees of the service provided by designating the job as the object of the monetary exchange. The Pitman agency for example advertised vacancies as "existing" in order to distinguish themselves from the "scams" that were apparently legion. In 1955, the ATA agency, in the middle of an advertisement for its courses, published a warning against any forgery to its readers:

“Special Notice (to applicants and employers)

The ATA is a legal entity, guaranteed under law 3.010 of August 1938, and licensed by the P.D.F. Therefore, it has a definite responsibility towards employers, employees and people in general. Its progress and the great development it has been obtaining is due to its judicious and honest action. We do not support people or supposed agencies that in an unfair competition, try to deceive the candidates and employers, pretending to be

dependent of the ATA, saying that it is "the same thing" and other information frequently received to our knowledge.”¹³

Later, it became more insistent, denouncing the « imitators »:

“Beware of imitators - ATA only works at a single address, Avenida Rio Branco n. 151.

If ATA does not hire you, the money will be returned to you to avoid complaints and injustices, despite the work of teaching for free for 30 days. Otherwise, it is not ATA. So do not confuse.”¹⁴

The emphasis on “guaranteed employment” appears as an advertising rhetoric. Agencies presented the candidate as a consumer with rights or at least guarantees about the job. Téd graphically insisted on the fact that it "CAN guarantee employment to trained candidates" [see Image 1]. It could “prove” that it had already placed thousands of candidates.

Image 1. Téd job advertisement in the JB¹⁵

T&D

A MAIS COMPLETA AGÊNCIA DE EMPREGOS DO PAÍS

Pode garantir emprêgo | **Facilita aos empregadores**

repetimos — PODE — garantir emprego imediato aos candidatos com prática, pois há 3 anos selecionamos empregados para mais de 1.000 firmas. Na T&D o candidato tem maiores possibilidades de emprego imediato, pois os empregadores preferem os candidatos selecionados pela T&D. Já empregamos milhares de candidatos, conforme podemos provar a qualquer interessado.

a escolha de pessoal para escritórios e lojas. Mandamos os candidatos no mesmo dia ou no dia seguinte, já rigorosamente selecionados, testados e fichados. Basta pedir por telefone. As 3 letras T&D são as iniciais de "Tempo e Dinheiro" — Time is Money — e significam realmente isso. O nosso serviço poupa aos empregadores tempo que o dinheiro.

Precisa para colocação urgente

CARGOS GRADUADOS

4 Contadores, R/15.000,00 — 2 Faturistas, 2/4.000,00 — 1 Técnico eletrônico, 8.000,00 — 1 Correspondente Ext. (Rapax), 5.000,00 — 1 Correspondente Ext. (Moças), 4/5.000,00 — 1 Concorrências Públicas e Representações (Rapax), falando inglês, 6.000,00 — 1 Moça contrometrista com prática a combinar — 1 Eng. químico para Zona Norte, falando inglês e escrevendo, 15.000,00 — 1 Chefe de Publicidade falando e escrevendo inglês, 15.000,00 — 2 Operadores Front Fred (moça ou rapax), 5/6.000,00 — 1 Ass. Dep. Pessoal (rapax), zona Norte, 4.000,00 — 1 Operador Ruff (rapax ou moça), 4.000,00, Zona Norte — 1 Mecânico de Refrigeração, 4.000,00 — 1 Químico Metalúrgico, a combinar, zona Norte — 1 Desenhista técnico de oficina mecânica, a combinar — 1 Desenhista calculista de refrigeração, 3.000,00 — 1 Secretária inglês-francês, falando e escrevendo, 9.000,00.

ESTENOGRAFAS E SECRETÁRIAS

1 Alemão e Inglês, 15.000,00 — 2 Port.-Inglês, 8/13.000,00 — 2 Alemão, 5/10.000,00 — 17 Português, 5/9.000,00 — 6 Português falando e escrevendo inglês, 7/9.000,00.

AUX. ESCRITÓRIO E CONTABILIDADE

Dactilógrafas, 2.400/5.000,00 — 2 Caixas de Contabilidade, 5.000,00 — 1 Caixa de Contabilidade (rapax), falando e escrevendo alemão — 2 Faturistas, ambos os sexos 4/4.500,00 — 1 Cobrador externo, 3.000,00 — 45 Auxiliares de Escritório (ambos os sexos, maiores e menores), 1.200,00/5.000,00 — 1 Arquivista-Estoquista (rapax ou moça) — 17 Aux. Contabilidade (ambos os sexos), Centro e Norte, 2.500,00/4.500,00 — 1 Telefonista p/Zona Norte, 3.000,00 — 15 Ass. Principantes (ambos os sexos), 2.400,00/3.000,00 — 15 Boys, 1.200,00/1.800,00.

TIME IS MONEY | **Organização T&D de Serviços Ltda.** | **TEMPO É DINHEIRO**

AV. PRESIDENTE VARGAS N. 329 — 18.º ANDAR — TELS.: 23-4374 E 43-8024
(Entre Av. Rio Branco e Rua Uruguaiana)

The CIT agency gives an “ABSOLUTE GUARANTEE OF PLACEMENT”¹⁶ for its part.

In an insert in the Sunday edition of the JB on February 27, 1955, ATA gave time guarantees of the just-in-time job: “We continuously have 80 to 90 offers for all categories. 1500 secure firms. At all times, every moment of every working day, we always have vacancies. We guarantee to employ the good candidates within 30 minutes at the most, after their appearance.”¹⁷

Third, many employment agencies endorsed a pricing strategy attaching the value of the service to the effectiveness of job access and not only to the job search service. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the policy of monetizing applicants was the norm. However, this policy could take several forms that

attached value to the fact of getting a job to varying degrees. Agencies that focused on training tend to charge an enrolment fee, as this was an extension of the practice of payment by the course. Nevertheless, the empowerment of the employment intermediation as a service that could be valued in its own right goes together with the evolution of the pricing policy. It became increasingly oriented towards payment by results, namely a percentage of the first salary. This policy, which aimed to attract the unemployed by guaranteeing the candidate an efficient job, anchors in the mind of agency users the representation of job as a product, i.e., the idea they could acquire jobs through these distributors. Thus, from June 1955, ATA mentions a policy of reimbursing registration fees in the event of a failed placement: “a small fee will be refunded if ATA does not place”. For workers using its placement services, the fee is 15% of the salary.

Some agencies able to connect with large national and foreign-owned companies are in the habit of charging the intermediation service to both sides. The T  D agency in a 1959 large insert details its conditions to employers: “10% on the salary of the candidate admitted after a 30-day trial period. This payment is less than the price of a classified ad”¹⁸ and in the same advertisement, this time aimed at potential candidates, it promotes negotiated fees for its courses: “ Are you a typist? We offer you fast training and you pay us as you can [...]. With practical and efficient teachings and with payment according to your means, T  D assures you COURSES WITH JOB GUARANTEE”.

In a memorandum in defense of the fee employment agencies produced by the professional associations of the sector, the monetization of candidates is presented as an economic necessity. Employment agencies blamed the employers who, for 95% of them, would not use the services of an intermediary if they were paying. According to this memorandum, employers would prefer to give up recruitments in this case. As stated by the labor market intermediaries, employers saw themselves as contributing to the benefit of the agency and the applicant by “*offering jobs*”, which in their minds exempts them from contributing financially¹⁹. Some employers felt as “job producers”, not labor force demanders: “There are also employers who, by offering the job, the vacancy, the position, understand

that this will benefit both the agency and the candidate, which is why they refuse or do not agree in any way to any kind of commission.”²⁰. Job vacancy as a commodity that can be traded to the job seeker has become a convention between actors on this market.

2.2. Performing profusion and collections of job vacancies

From the point of view of the unemployed person who relies on his or her social relations to get a job, job search is like a chronological succession of selection tests in front of employers until a job is found. Job opportunities appears one after the other through meetings with friends, family, or ex-colleagues, or even through the urban peregrination in the door-to-door method. The unemployed person has no real knowledge of alternatives between several jobs at the same time. He or she takes the first job that comes along for which he or she is willing. In the advertising pages of mass circulation newspapers, commercial employment agencies propose a completely different representation of the functioning of the job market. Newspapers first performed the profusion of job opportunities. Working on early personal announcement fold during the *Ancien Regime*, Ulrike Krampfl reminds us that announcements of job offers or demands appeared mixed with all sorts of announcements concerning objects, desires that occupy the *bourgeoisie* ; so that “employment is automatically placed in a logic of consumption, which resembles, if not assimilates it to a good to be exchanged” (Krampfl 2017). In fact, the newspaper and the artefact « ad » determine a certain framing and uniform semiotic codes valid for all kinds of goods for sale in newspaper.

Actually, what strikes the reader looking for a job is the abundance of offers. Plenty of job opportunities are displayed on the full page in 2 or 3 line inserts and arouse the hope in the mind of the unemployed that he or she will be able to find, if not the job of his or her dreams, at least a job. The price of the classified ad probably depended on the number of lines and the way it was highlighted (with the possibility, for example, of making it appear in bold), so that very short job offers predominated, briefly indicating the profession and the address where to go. The concentration of job

advertisements by the employment agencies in the 1950ies made them appear as a place where “good” jobs were concentrated and distributed.

In 1966, the president of the professional association representing the interests of private employment agencies in Sao Paulo (Aeresp) justified charging applicants as follows:

“On this subject, let's just say that Selection Institutes are sought out by candidates who believe they have an advantage, who find it convenient to pay a fee for a service that suits them, because they can choose firms, work locations, conditions, etc.” (Schironi 1967, 16-17)

Indeed, agencies worked hard to appear as places where to “pick up a job” among a large range of opportunities, a very different manner to « get » a job than it traditionally happens with strong or weak ties. The work of advertisers and job intermediation marketers is to make feel the unemployed as a privileged person able to choose his or her job without restriction among a collection of jobs made comparable by a certain scriptural and graphic organization of job information.

At the beginning, the agencies plaid the role of intermediary for the companies looking for candidates by publishing on their behalf ads for specific job offers which are not very different from those published by the companies themselves. These classified ads take up very little space on the page and the agency often do not include its name. ATA, which publishes a very large number of classified ads, regularly adopts this strategy:

“Typist for Itapiru - girl comfortable with the machine/ good looking. Cr\$ 3.500,00. Not for beginners. Rio Branco, 151, s/shop, s/ 209.”²¹

From their first public appearances in the job offers section, they also got into the habit of producing classified ads grouping together the recruitment of several candidates. The “office assistant” function allows concentrating various job offers in the same box and with a maximum saving of space [See Image 2]

Image 2. Grouped jobs ad by SUPREMA LDTA

Auxiliares de escritorio — Precisamos urgente para preencher 56 empregos em escritórios: 4 moças dactilografistas praticas, 1 perfuradora Hollerith, 1 moça aux. de analyses de laboratorio, 2 esteno-português, 3 moças menores dactilografistas, 2 moças aux. de contabilidade, 15 moças menores para industria e 3 moças propagandistas. Otimos empregos e ordenados até 5.000 cruzeiros. Apresentar-se com documentos na SUPREMA LTDA., Rua Alvaro Alvim, 33/37, 6.º and., sala 617 — Cinelandia — Sempre temos bons empregos.

Source: JB, 6/09/1955, p. 1.²²

The advertisement for a job to be filled stems from the service provided to the recruiting company, but it can also serve as a lure for candidates coming to the agency that offers them paid services.

Nevertheless, the commercial agencies are going to publish less and less singular job advertisements to concentrate their means in the advertising inserts that praise the merits of what is gradually becoming a job supermarket. Thus, on the same front page of the JB, the ATA agency publishes 3 copies of this advertisement using different keywords:

“Office jobs for professionals in general - ATA 100% correct, at your service at any time, every moment of the working days, has vacancies for great companies with good salaries. Always prefer ATA, which is a legal, licensed agency. If you are a good professional, ATA will place you in maximum 30 minutes. From the repair person to the accountant. In addition to these advantages, the girl or boy will enjoy the best treatment and a 100% supportive atmosphere. If you need an office job, come to ATA, do as hundreds and hundreds of candidates who trust us to improve their situation.”²³

Finally, in the last pages of the newspaper, the agencies publish larger advertising inserts, as here the TÊD with its logo clearly identified in two places on the page [See Image 3].

Image 3. Two grouped ads by the TÊD agency

JORNAL DO BRASIL — TERÇA-FEIRA, 8 DE SETEMBRO DE 1955

27.º CADEIRÃO

EMPREGOS DIVERSOS

(CONCLUSÃO DA 1.ª PAGINA)

Auxiliar de Escritório

Previsão de boas condições, para boa vida, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Auxiliar de Escritório

Casa de serviços por vários países de sua experiência, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Auxiliar de Escritório

Previsão de boas condições, para boa vida, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

CORTADORES

Precisa-se de cortadores com prática de fábrica. Tratar à R. Pereira Landim, 54-62, Ramos.

CONTADOR AUXILIAR

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Saladeiro - Serralheiro

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

DACTILOGRAFAS

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Encarregado para almoxarifado

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

EMBALADOR

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

EMPREGO

Precisamos de DACTILOGRAFAS e AUXILIARES DE ESCRITÓRIO do sexo feminino, com curso ginasial completo. Apresentar-se diariamente, exceto aos sábados, das 9 às 11,30 horas, à Rua de Candelária, 6, 2.º andar.

ELETRICISTA

Especialidade em automação, com longa prática e experiência em trabalhos de manutenção elétrica. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

EMPREGOS DIVERSOS

Mecânico Industrial — Para manutenção, com grande prática e experiência. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Mecânico de Automóveis — Com grande prática e experiência. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

ELEMENTOS DE BOA CONDIÇÃO SOCIAL, APRESENTAÇÃO E BEM RELACIONADOS NA CAPITAL

Uma das mais importantes empresas de investimentos do País está selecionando pessoas de ambos os sexos que tenham as qualidades acima para serem aproveitadas no seu Departamento de Produção.

Não se exige experiência no ramo, pois a Companhia mantém instrutores especializados no período experimental dos candidatos. Ótima remuneração, comissões e retiradas fixas. A seleção dos candidatos será iniciada a partir do segundo-feira, dia 5, à Rua São José, 90, 4.º andar.

Favor comparecer munido de duas fotos e apto a fornecer dados para "curriculum vitae".

SERRALHEIRO E AJUDANTE

Precisa-se para fábrica de material de construção. Tratar à Rua Gregório de Matos, 40, com documentos.

SERVIÇOS DACTILOGRAFICOS

Estímulo, eficiência, responsabilidade, com salário muito superior ao mercado. Anúncio de trabalho, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

VIAGANTE PARA A ZONA DA MATA

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Moça para escritório

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

MOÇA (Menor)

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Mecânico de Automóveis

Admissão para serviços gerais de manutenção e reparação de automóveis. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Mecânico de Refrigeração

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

MEDICO

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

MARMORITE - EMPREITEIROS

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Probol Comercio e Indústria S/A

Tintas — Lacas — Solventes

3 Técnicos, 1 Encarregado, 3 Vendedores.

PRÁTICOS DE FARMÁCIA

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

PRECISA-SE DE IMPRESSOR

para Off-set, profundo conhecedor da máquina Chief 24. Tratar à Av. Rio Branco, 14 - 15.º andar.

PRECISA-SE DE

2 cortadores a oxí-acetileno

Yavor não se apresentar, quer saber mais condições. Tratar à Av. Brasil, 10, 323, com o Sr. ADRETE.

ATENÇÃO

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

AUXILIAR — CONTABILIDADE

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

MOÇA

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

PASSADORAS

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

PINTOR

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

RAZAP ATIVO E QUE SAIBA DIRIGIR

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Responsável Técnico

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Telefonista

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

CONTADOR

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Contabilistas

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

COMPOSITOR

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

CONTADOR

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

DETALHISTE PARTICULAR

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

ELETRICISTA MECÂNICO

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

SERVENTE

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

IMPRESSOR

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

LAVADOR A SECAR

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

VENDEDOR-VIAJANTE

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

MOÇAS PARA INICIAR EM ESCRITÓRIO

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

INVESTIGAÇÕES Detetive - Particular

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

LIVROS USADOS

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

LOJA DE SABAO DE SABAO

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

INVESTIGAÇÕES Detetive - Particular

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

LIVROS USADOS

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

LOJA DE ESQUINA

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

OFICINA MECANICA

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

PEQUENO GALPÃO

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

PEDRA BRUTA

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Proprietários

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

PETROPOLIS

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

PERGAMINHO

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Prensão e Mecânica

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

QUILINDO

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Roupas usadas

Previsão de um bom salário, com estabilidade e de crescimento. Apresentar-se à Rua de Minas 11, de 10 a 12 horas.

Source: JB, 6/09/1955, 2º cad., p 12.

These agencies then enter into a brand logic: they display their names, logos, and respect the same graphic codes from one edition to the next in order to be recognized at first glance and build the basis for immediate identification. The use of the advertising method marks both a reinforcement of the clientelization of candidates and a change in their recruitment strategy.

In the field of advertising capture techniques, the TED agency was undoubtedly the most creative. As early as 1953, it offered a first free trial course, and then launched a competition to win a month's course, and we have already mentioned its partnerships with the JB, the Olivetti typewriter brand and an advertising agency for the organization of the typing competition.

The link with the commodification of training, as well as the anticipated use of newspapers in the job search, explains why the agencies only advertise to recruit candidates. Addresses to employers are much rarer and do not betray the same search for advertising²⁴. While these agencies undoubtedly invest resources in canvassing recruiting companies, they make little use of advertising techniques and codes to reach them.

Much more than the classified ads for unique jobs that employment agencies continue to place in newspapers with large circulations, the advertisements targeting solely candidates make them appear as places where the candidate, transformed into a client, can choose his or her job from a plethora of diversified vacancies. They are like job supermarkets where young school leavers can come to make their choice. Very soon, TÉD highlights the number of jobs available in its agency with large characters as in the image²⁵. These advertisements list the most diverse categories of functions (as in the advertisement for ATA: “auxiliares de contabilidade, auxiliares de escritório, datilografos (as), auxiliares correspondentes, auditor, Contador”) to access the “best jobs” at the “best salaries”, in the “best companies”. They target a clientele of new entrants into the labor market, as suggested by the systematic use of the word “girls” (“moças”) and “boys” (“rapazes”) to qualify the interested parties, the promise of “magnificent career beginnings”, and the evocation of the level of education (“tendo o ginásio completo”)²⁶ or of the absence of professional experience.

This commodification of job vacancies also involves understating the selection made by employers and recruiters, since employment is not presented as a demand for work on the part of the employer but as an immaterial good for which the agency has exclusive rights. This cognitive reshaping of employment took place in the first years of the agencies' activity. In fact, the first inserts of the TED agency still leaves a lot of room for the employers' requirements. The agency is looking for a “mechanical engineer with good knowledge of English”, “perfect English-Portuguese stenographers”, an “accountant up to 45 years old speaking Italian [...] plus three bachelors who can travel”, “agency inspectors, 24 to 30 years old, bachelors, good presentation, gymnasium level courses, perfect practice of accounting and commercial mathematics”, etc.²⁷. However, by May 1953, the agency had removed the employer requirements from the inserts and focused solely on the job offer. Employment agencies avoided appearing as representatives of employers' interests and they banned the term “selection” from advertisements. It is therefore less as recruiters on behalf of companies than as distributors of jobs that the agencies present themselves.

Through their work, these job retailers organize a space of comparison of jobs a collection, dictated by what they believe to be the drivers of job demand, since the advertising presentation of the job is supposed to attract jobseeker-clients. In this economy of job desire, and because every typo counts, advertisements refocus on two types of information: the occupation and the salary. In most of the inserts, T  D ranks available office jobs in descending order of salary²⁸. The practice of systematically posting salaries in classified ads, even in the smallest nets, is a practice that strongly differentiates employment agencies from employers who post classified ads for their own purpose. The latter prefer to negotiate the salary with the hired candidate and not to disclose their salaries to the competitors. On the contrary, the emphasis on the salary in the advertisements is part of a strategy of labelling the product on the part of actors whose aim is not so much to make a single match as to massively increase the number of applications.

2.3. To be treated as a client, not as an unemployed

The president of the Aeresp gives another argument in her advocacy of fee employment services that puts us on the track of the “clientization process”:

“There are many of them (we are talking about Executives and Technicians) who feel humiliated to "offer" themselves directly. They prefer to entrust, for due study, to Selection Institutes their "Résumé" and to ponder, together with the Selectors, the pros and cons of another placement.” (Schironi 1967, 16-17)

The arguments in favor of the monetization of candidates developed by this representative of the interests of private employment agencies, very symbolically renamed “selection institutes”, refer to the social and distinctive function of the paid services offered to candidates, a function that we propose to call “clientization”. Promoters of fee employment agencies not only stress the efficiency of the service, but also its social quality. Independently of the final goal, to be hired, the symbolic values attached to the services makes it possible for the candidate to distance oneself from the social status of the unemployed by becoming a pampered customer. Only the price and the personalization of the services distinguished fee employment agencies for executives from middle range employment agencies. The distinctive function of paid services remained the same.

We can in fact hypothesize that the practices of private employment agencies were part of an implicit symbolic hierarchy of job search methods. On the one hand, the agencies had to fight the degrading image attached to the domestic “labor rental agencies” that were still in operation in the 1930s, and to which only the unemployed who were least integrated into the urban labor market, immigrants from abroad or from the interior, had recourse. On the other hand, direct door-to-door canvassing is also associated with menial workers.

Employment agencies banned the term “unemployed” (“desempregado”) from advertising inserts, as well as the term “worker” (“trabalhador”), which was used by the union employment offices. From

the 1950s onwards, it was only a question of “candidates” and “professional”. Agencies attached to private courses used the terms « girls » and « boys » to attract young school leavers. A single insert of September 6, 1955, published by the CIT agency for its courses for beginners, refers to the “fight against unemployment”: “CIT fights against unemployment and gives competent employees their just value”²⁹.

The requalification of the unemployed into a customer is achieved by emphasizing the quality of service in the reception (“atendimento”) and the customer relationship. In the war waged by commercial employment agencies, ATA has made the customer relationship a constant selling argument. In its very first advertisements, it praises the “great and unrivalled treatment” given to candidates in its agencies. Appealing to the distinctive imaginary associated with access to the consumer society, the vocabulary used aims to reassure job seekers of a status that should not remind them of being unemployed or even workers. The reference to the treatment with “the greatest courtesy”, the service “without waiting”, “the most pleasant atmosphere”, or the “moral preparation” of the recruiters³⁰, elevates the job seeker to the status of a customer entitled to expect a level of service and to be pampered.

Conclusion

Our article goes back to one significant stage of the development of commercial intermediaries of employment. It unveils different dimension of their performative work aiming at symbolically inscribe employment in the cultural codes of the mass market, that is to say in a space of choice, which amounts to masking the matching function of intermediaries.

In our view, the monetization of job applicants stems from a double work of market labeling carried out by private employment agencies on the immaterial object "job vacancy" on the one hand, and on the subject looking for a job on the other. The symbolic and semiotic work of the private employment agencies that flourished in the 1950s in the large Brazilian metropolises consists in this sense of

commodifying the vacant job and “clientelizing” the job seeker in order to monetize him. Only when elevated to the status of consumer in a space of distribution of jobs “marked” as commodities does the worker accept to pay for work.

In order to sell their job access service, these market actors carry out several cognitive and normative framing actions that concern the definition of the terms of exchange and the “thing” to be exchanged. They have to transform the employers' demand for work into an assortment of jobs from which the unemployed, symbolically relabeled as consumers, can come and help themselves. To do this, they apply to employment all the codes and meanings attached to consumer culture. The first element lies in the possibility of choosing from a rich assortment of comparable jobs under standardized criteria in an instrumental conception of work desired for the resources it offers in the consumer society. The second element of this consumer culture that these agents will transpose to what becomes an immaterial consumer good is the symbolism of the commodity contract that guarantees and determines the terms of the exchange. Finally, the last component of the work of commodification of job vacancies is the attachment to the employment access service of the signs of social distinction. By this way, the lower middle class job seeker tears himself away from his unworthy condition of unemployed and worker in order to access the more enviable social status of customer of a company and citizen of the consumer society.

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Notes

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- ¹ JB, 01/01/1950, p. 27.
- ² JB, 6/09/1955, p. 1.
- ³ On September 7, 1952, it published its first announcement of the opening of a new “extra staff” recruitment service (“pessoal avulso”) looking for more experienced candidates. The text indicated that the agency was already operating in the field of permanent staff recruitment. It also announces the opening of registrations for its new courses for the month of October of the same year. JB, Domingo, 7/09/1952, 3° cad., p. 12.
- ⁴ JB, 2/08/1962, 3°cad., p. 10.
- ⁵ JB, 01/05/1980, 1°cad., p. 6.
- ⁶ JB, 26/08/1953, 2°cad., p. 11.
- ⁷ JB, 31/05/1953, 5°cad., p. 15
- ⁸ JB, 24/12/1961, 3°cad., p. 7.
- ⁹ Launched by two ex-executives of TD. Cf. JB, 10/07/1955, 5° cad., p. 10.
- ¹⁰ “Agências tem prazos para se legalizar [Agencies have deadline to legalize]”, *Correio da Manhã (RJ)*, 7/09/1968, 1° cad. : 8.
- ¹¹ “Agências de empregos ficarão sob controle [Employment agencies will be under control]”, *Correio da Manhã (RJ)*, 10/11/1968, 1° cad. : 9.
- ¹² JB, Suplemento Especial/TED, Domingo, 30/01/1977, 1° Cad.
- ¹³ JB, 24/04/1955, 5° cad. p. 11
- ¹⁴ JB, Domingo 28/08/1955, 5° cad. p. 14.
- ¹⁵ JB, Domingo, 13/05/1956, 5° cad., p. 11.
- ¹⁶ JB, 6/09/1955, 2°caderno, p. 12.
- ¹⁷ JB, 27/02/1955, 5° cad., p.12.
- ¹⁸ JB, 6/09/1959, 6° cad. p. 5.
- ¹⁹ “Agências tem prazo para se legalizar”, *Correio da Manhã (RJ)*, le 7/09/1968, 1° cad. : 8.
- ²⁰ “Agências tem prazo para se legalizar”, *Correio da Manhã (RJ)*, le 7/09/1968, 1° cad. : 8.
- ²¹ JB, 6/09/1955, p. 1.
- ²² “Office Auxiliaries - we urgently need for 50 office jobs: 4 operational typists, 1 Hollerith punch, a girl lab assistant, 2 Portuguese stenographers, 3 minor typists, 2 female accounting assistants, 15 minors for industry, and 3 propagandists. Great jobs and salaries up to 5000 cruzeiros. Present yourself with your identity papers at SUPREMA LTDA, Alvaro Alvim Street, 33/37, 6th floor, room 617 - Cinelandia - We always have good jobs”
- ²³ JB, 6/09/1955, p. 1.
- ²⁴ See an ad by CIT for instance: “We do not ask for exclusivity, but the opportunity to serve, to be useful, to those who struggle with difficulty, not of candidates, BUT OF GOOD EMPLOYEES.” Source : JB, 10/07/1955, 5° Cad., p. 10.
- ²⁵ We found the first ad of this kind in the JB, 31/05/1953, 5° Cad., p. 11.
- ²⁶ Since the organic law of secondary education of 1942, the secondary level of education was divided in two cycles : the first called « ginásial » (4 years) and the second called « colegial » (3 years). Each cycle ended with a selective examination. Having the complete ginásial (« ginásial completo ») meant having followed the four years of the first level of secondary education.
- ²⁷ JB, 9/11/1952, 2° cad., p.12.
- ²⁸ See for instance : JB, 6/09/1955, 2° cad., p. 12.
- ²⁹ JB, 6/09/1955, 2°caderno, p. 12.
- ³⁰ JB, 25/12/1955, 3° cad., p. 6.