

A Survey of the Use of the Term *précarité* in French Economics and Sociology

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A Survey of the Use of the Term *précarité* in French Economics and Sociology

Jean-Claude Barbier

Abstract

A survey of a French corpus of the 1980s and 1990s economic and sociological literature demonstrates the gradual emergence of the use of the notion of “*précarité de l’emploi*” in France. This notion first appeared in the field of family policies, with a meaning associated with the risk of “poverty”. Before the notion was extensively disseminated, its usage was debated by economists analysing the strategies of firms to understand labour market developments in the late 1970s. Little by little, the notion of *précarité* has become more common in research and has even emerged as characterising society as a whole. This usage points to specific characteristics of the French debate and its “societal coherence”. *Précarité*, as a notion in the French language, is very much linked to the way French society envisages the question of “status”. Achieving a “scientific” definition of *précarité* is all the more difficult, than it belongs to the political discourse.

Keywords: precariousness, employment precariousness, flexibility of work, employment flexibility.

Une étude de l’usage de la notion de précarité dans l’économie et la sociologie françaises des années 1980 et 1990

Résumé

Un examen des travaux économiques et sociologiques français des années 1980 et 1990 montre la lente émergence de l’utilisation de la notion de « précarité » de l’emploi. Celle-ci, au demeurant, est apparue dans le champ des politiques familiales en tant que « pauvreté-précarité ». L’usage, avant de s’étendre, a été contesté à l’origine par les économistes analysant les stratégies des firmes pour comprendre les évolutions du marché du travail. Petit à petit, la notion de précarité tout court a eu tendance à se banaliser dans les travaux, et même à s’étendre dans une notion très englobante de précarité de la société toute entière. Cet usage est très particulier aux travaux français et à la société française. La précarité à la française est aussi très liée à la question des « statuts ». Une définition « scientifique » de la précarité est particulièrement difficile, car la notion appartient d’abord au discours politique.

Mots-clefs : *précarité, précarité de l’emploi, flexibilité du travail et de l’emploi.*

THE CONTEXT OF THE PRESENT WORKING PAPER

The present paper was conceived of as part of a contribution to a common, “cross-national” understanding of the possible use of the notion of “employment precariousness” across the European Union. Precisely, it is part of the Esope (European Study of Precarious Employment) project funded by the European Commission (5th Framework programme), including national teams from the UK, Spain, Germany and Italy.

Within the 1980s and 1990s French corpus of economic and sociological literature, its purpose was basically to try and trace how the notion of *précarité*, and associated specific usages (*précarité de l’emploi, familles précaires, etc.*), was used and has been used since. After the paper had been discussed with Spanish, British, Italian and German colleagues, we concluded that *précarité*, as a notion in the French language, pointed to specific characteristics of the French debate and “societal coherence”, when put into the European comparative context. We assumed that, in return, this would also yield interesting insight in the French context¹.

This paper obviously does not propose systematic research into how and when the emergence of the social phenomenon(s) related to “employment precariousness” occurred in French society (its “social construction”) as well as into how its “policy” definition developed into a fairly – however fuzzy – administrative category. In the case of France and maybe in other countries, this social process involving various actors (associations acting in the field of social policy, experts, administrations, statisticians², unions as well as academics) could certainly be studied in-depth in a manner comparable to classical French research about the emergence of the notion of “unemployment” at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (Topalov, 1994, 1999; Salais and *al.*, 1986; Zimmerman, 2001).

This paper only intends to present *important milestones*³ in the social sciences literature for the period covering the 1970s to today and particularly focussed on the last decade (the 1990s); hence, it only marginally addresses one of the key questions, i.e. what sort of social actors with many different and sometimes diverging agendas have participated in the remarkable collective consensus in French society for a common use of the notion of *précarité*.

Nevertheless, the scientific debate has fed the process of social construction of *précarité* in general and *précarité de l’emploi* in particular, in France. We thus show aspects pertaining to a possible “French specificity” in a debate which has corresponding – if not equivalents – in

¹ Purposely, most quotations from the research surveyed have been kept in French, and especially in the footnotes.

² Insee, the French national statistical office, currently uses the notion of “*situations précaires*” (precarious employment situations) in tables and comments. Schnapper’s 1989 (pp. 27-28) article has an appendix where M. Villac of Insee explains that the French labour force survey has followed up the “*statuts précaires*” from 1982. These “*statuts précaires*” were registered as the following: temporary agency work, “*aides familiaux*” [family members working for a self-employed person] or homework, apprentices and various participants of “*stages*” [training schemes], seasonal work and fixed-term contracts. Its first systematic use dates back to 1985. Although the categories were not available, statisticians were nevertheless aware of the question of a possible modification of employment statuses (Eymard-Duvernay, 1981, p. 68, writes “ la question d’une modification profonde à plus long terme du statut de la main-d’oeuvre reste ouverte. Cette question ne doit pas être seulement abordée suivant l’opposition emplois précaires-emplois stables (...) une mobilité importante peut être acquise sans qu’il y ait ‘précarisation’, si l’espace de valorisation est assez vaste ».

³ The outline of the working paper also obviously shows limitations because of the presentation adopted following different disciplines and their somehow arbitrary mode of classification.

other European countries. Probably this French “bias” explains why both notions (and more the former than the latter) have been controversial to a certain extent since their first usage. *Précarité* and *précarité de l'emploi* are undoubtedly political notions which will remain very difficult to define in scientific terms.

These observations should of course be put into the broader context of interactions between political discourses, various patterns of citizenship and nationhood, as well as political cultures cutting across party ideology (see Silver, 1996, p. 108; Barbier, 2001b). We would assume that one of the reasons why “exclusion”, underclass and other categories are not comparable across countries is – *inter alia* – the French idiosyncrasy to “*statut*”, one of the keys to understanding the French approach and debate about *précarité*.

1. A SHORT OVERALL HISTORY OF THE NOTION : FOUR “DISTINCT” MEANINGS FOR “PRÉCARITÉ”?

All countries surveyed in the Esope project have a word for the adjective “precarious”, which comes from Latin, although not all have a word for “precariousness”⁴. However what is important is the *particular* usage of the notion, as related to other notions concerning employment and social protection, in the contemporary debate, which are important to us. Precariousness is part of human life in a very broad sense⁵.

As a *specific notion* used in the definition of social problems, “*précarité*” first appeared in France in the late 1970s. It was first applied to the life of families (see Pitrou, 1978a and b) and was closely connected to the discourse on “new poverty” (*nouvelle pauvreté*) (see Paugam, 1993). A. Pitrou, a sociologist who specialised in studying families from the 1970s, was among the first to use the term systematically and on purpose. In this regard, *précarité* was, from the beginning, used as an “absolute” term, with no complements, very much like the usage of *pauvreté* (poverty). This is so true that a part of literature forged the notion of “*pauvreté-précarité*”, joining both words together (see section on sociology). *Précarité* in French was, at first, a *social condition, a situation, a state of families/households, and also a process potentially leading to poverty [meaning n°1]*. This first usage implied no reference to social “*statut*” (*social status*)⁶ nor to precarious employment as such.

⁴ In all our national languages [German is a particular case, which has the adjective “*prekär*”, but only uses *Prekarität*, as a specialised word in some areas of social science research, to contrast it with *Normal Arbeitsverhältnis*], *precariousness* has been used for a long time, in a way not specific to welfare or employment matters. For instance in France, “*précaire*” has been used from the 14th century onwards. Applied to the human condition and its various aspects, the word “*précarité*” seems to have been used from the beginning of the 18th in France. There is a famous essay by Malraux, published in 1977, *L'homme précaire et la littérature*. For instance in English, *precariousness* has been used from the 17th onwards and it probably came from old French. All these uses derive from the same Latin root: *precor* (pray)/*precarius* (obtained on condition of praying for).

⁵ See for instance this uncommon context, concerning the situation of asylum seekers in France, as told by *Le Monde*, December, 11th, 2001: « À Roissy, des dizaines d'étrangers, privés de droits, sont maintenus dans la précarité (...) ils restent parfois plusieurs jours sans manger, n'ont pas toujours accès aux toilettes, et beaucoup ne parviennent pas à obtenir les formulaires administratifs » (p. 12).

⁶ It is difficult to translate the French “*statut*” adequately. In fact, “*statut*” in common language refers in French to two different meanings: (i) the employee's (or rather, the *salariné*, i.e. the wage earner) standing or position with regard to his/her *legal* rights and limitations including social protection and employment protection; (ii) in a broader sense, the position or standing in society. In a comparative view French society is certainly very marked by legal status as conferred by the State. *Statut* in this current usage combines aspects of the sociological notion of “status” and the legal meaning (see Schnapper, 1989).

Because employment was subsequently identified as a key factor of this “*précarité*” in general, the term was used in a wider context corresponding to the growing importance of emerging new *employment forms* (“atypical jobs”) [*emerging meaning n°2*]. From the late 1970s and in particular, in statistical surveys, these forms were gradually categorised as “*formes particulières d’emploi – FPEs*” (special forms of employment) (see Michon, Germe, 1979, for the first systematic use and definition – see section on Economics), to contrast them from full time “*contrats à durée indéterminée*” (open-ended contracts) which were considered the norm. A qualified use then ensued later for “*emploi précaire*” (precarious employment/job). “*Emploi précaire*”, as a part of FPEs, was linked to precariousness as a *social status primarily related to employment* [*meaning n°2*].

From the early 1980s “*précarité*” was not only currently used in the political discourse, but had turned into a category commonly used in legislation as well as by all social administrations. *Précarité* was thus firmly cast into a “State” category, as is obvious from a 1988 leaflet⁷. The first official report, which explicitly mentioned “*précarité*” is the 1981 Oheix report⁸. The first administrative instruction listed in this leaflet dates from 1982⁹. An important legislative turn is obviously taken with the December 1988 RMI (revenu minimum d’insertion) Act, revised in 1992. “*Précarité*” was also used later in the “*Code du travail*”¹⁰, then precisely referring to *precarious employment contracts* [*meaning n°3*].

Altogether and especially from the early 1990s, “*précarité*” has been very commonly and prevalently used in French without additional qualification, as pointing to the risk and uncertainty associated with employment situations, after having been used only to indicate situations similar to poverty. One of the latest instances is the 2000 Commissariat général du Plan report (see Belorgey, 2000). Because the word is loosely used, it *now* tends to apply to society in general, and for many observers, the French society is in the grip of a *précarisation* process (precariousness as a social background present everywhere in society) [*meaning n°4*].

Notions close to “*précarité*” used in the social policy have also been “vulnerability” and “fragility” (see Paugam and *al.*, 1993). *Précarité* appeared as somewhat controversial both on the “employment side” (Nicole-Drancourt, 1992) and on the “poverty side” (Milano, 1988). And indeed the controversy arose from the confusions between the four main meanings listed here.

“*Précarité*” in the 1990s was also “naturally” used in close connection to “*exclusion*” or “*exclusion sociale*”. “*Exclusion*” gained social visibility in Lenoir’s book (1974)¹¹ and did not point to the “socially excluded” of nowadays but rather to categories deemed to remain at the margins of society for diverse reasons (the disabled, the immigrants, and so on). In that

⁷ In 1988, listing all important pieces of legislation and regulations from 1974 to 1988 (77 pieces), S. Milano, an economist expert on poverty, head of research in one of the key departments of the ministry of social Affairs, prefaced a leaflet under the common seal of the ministry of employment and the ministry of social Affairs (Ministère, 1988).

⁸ « *Contre la précarité et la pauvreté : 60 propositions* », ministère du Travail et de la Participation, 1981.

⁹ *Circulaire relative à l’intensification de la lutte contre la pauvreté et la précarité dans le cadre de l’opération chômeurs de longue durée*, n° 82-33, December 13, 1982.

¹⁰ See for instance, article L 124-4-4 Labour Law Code (July 1990 Act), which applies to temporary agency work: « Lorsque, à l’issue d’une mission, le salarié sous contrat de travail temporaire ne bénéficie pas immédiatement d’un contrat de travail à durée indéterminée avec l’utilisateur, il a droit, à titre de complément de salaire, à une indemnité destinée à compenser la précarité de sa situation ».

¹¹ Its first use in social research dates from earlier times and refers to “marginal” categories of the population living in persisting poverty (Paugam, 2000a, p. 156). See for instance early studies by the charity ATD-Quart Monde.

regard, in the French political discourse – and also in some academic research in a political context, Bourdieu, 2001 – a very loose and fuzzy usage joins *précarité*, unemployment and exclusion together.

Précarité is closely connected to one of its antonyms, “*insertion*”, used at the beginning (from 1975) to designate the integration in the labour market (or, through work activities) of certain categories (the disabled, the young). Subsequently, the notion of *insertion* became very polysemic (see box) and gave birth to all sorts of “*insertion*” (*sociale, par l'économique*, etc.). “*Exclusion*” was one of the key items in the 1995 French general election political discourse [as well as “*fracture sociale*” (social divide)]. The “target group” of *insertion* policies has gradually been extended to most of the unemployed, so that the frontier has come to be blurred between “exclusion”, unemployment, “*précarité*”, sometimes leading to what Nicole-Drancourt (1992) rightly termed an “alarmist (*catastrophiste*) view” of the opportunities to access the labour market for certain groups.

The French meaning of “insertion”

“Insertion” in the French context has come to mean:

- (i) a rather distinct professional sphere of practices of social workers and their institutions directed towards specific target groups (roughly the “socially excluded” or those who are threatened of being so, and not only those excluded from the labour market); services are delivered in order to “insérer” (“integrate”) these groups through mediation of various types of services (helping them to use their social rights, socializing them through health and housing counselling, access to benefits and so on, but also counselling, training and employment schemes explicitly linked to the labour market, and devising individualized “pathways” to it);
- (ii) “insertion professionnelle” (or “insertion économique”) is but one segment of a broader “insertion” domain, namely the segment of the latter specifically linked to the labour market. In the 1960’s¹² “insertion professionnelle” was also used in a more limited meaning to name the transition process from school to work;
- (iii) far from being an example of a universal tendency to restrict entitlement to benefits to those recipients that engage in compulsory work or training, French “politiques d’insertion” are based on the principle that “insertion” is also an individual and global process. This process, it is contended, should be tailored to the individual’s needs whether they be needs for socialization, needs for better housing, better access to civil rights, health, etc.; in that third respect “insertion” is a complex social process eventually leading to social integration. It is the State’s duty to interfere when necessary in this process, as is stated in the 1988 RMI legislation¹³ (Extract from Barbier, Théret (2001).

Insertion strategies affect people in *précarité*, even if these are employed, because of the quality of their employment. In that sense, qualifying people both in employment and poverty as “working poor” (*travailleurs pauvres*) is very new in France. The acknowledgement that there were more and more “*travailleurs pauvres*” in France was

¹² *Insertion professionnelle* is used by Vernières (1997, pp. 1-21) for instance when referring only to the transition from school to work of young people. Castel (1995, p. 422) notes that *insertion*, in the broader sense, has been used in its present meaning since the 1980s, although previous mentions date back to 1972 and 1975 in social law.

¹³ Article 2 of the Act reads as follows: “Every person residing in France whose income (...) does not reach the amount of the minimum income (...) and who is at least 25 or is in charge of one or several child(ren) (...) and who accepts participation in the activities, determined with he/her, that are necessary for his/her social or professional insertion, is entitled to a right to the RMI” (1988, 1992 revised Acts).

linked to research conducted by ex-Cerc¹⁴ members, among whom, Concialdi and Ponthieux (2000). Insee, by the way of one of its departments (Crest) organized a special workshop in 2000 where US and UK experts were invited and a panel was chaired by Jacques Delors, acting as the current president of the new Cerc (see previous note). The first official comprehensive statistical estimate of the “working poor” phenomenon in France dates back from this time (see Lagarenne, Legendre, 2000).

Inclusion [or *inclusion sociale*] is a word not heard of, the use of which is limited to international “European” English (Eurospeak) [for instance: the official title of the 2001 French plan is “*Plan national d’action contre la pauvreté et l’exclusion sociale*” (“national action plan against poverty and social exclusion”)].

We turn now to the two main academic disciplines that have addressed the question of precariousness (meanings 1, 2 and 3), sociology and economics; some brief elements will deal with social psychology/psychopathology.

2. SOCIOLOGY

In French sociological research it is only at the end of the 1970s and well into the 1980s that the notion of “precariousness” as such entered the academic vocabulary and at first with a connection with *poverty* and not predominantly with *employment*.

Before the late 1970s there was no question of “precariousness of employment” even among the young. It was very common to start work early and to change jobs very often¹⁵. A series of sociological studies discussed the young’s “allergy to work” (see Rousselet, 1974; also Barbier, 1982; Barbier, Nadel, 2000). In the late 1970s labour market studies¹⁶, we find mentions of “precarious” positions within firms as opposed to “stable positions”, but the individuals are never named as “precarious” and the term used for them is “vulnerable”¹⁷. Roughly at the same time, poverty linked problems appeared as “new” as against “traditional poverty”. This resulted in new categories, among which “*nouvelle pauvreté*” and “*précarité*” acquired significant usage in the 1980s.

For the sake of practicality, we will review the sociological debate in three steps, and come back to more global overviews in chapter 2, common to all disciplines.

These steps will adapt to existing sub-domains in the French sociology community (of course, boundaries are not so clear-cut). For presentation reasons, we will discuss (i) sociologists “specialising” in *welfare, social policy, assistance, poverty, family* policies questions; (ii) *sociologie du travail* [literally, work sociology or labour sociology] researchers dealing with industrial relations, work organisation, working situations within firms and (iii) more *general sociology* in the last group.

¹⁴ Cerc (*Centre d’études des revenus et des coûts*) was the public institution where, on the basis of Insee data, surveys were made in the 1980s about inequalities and the redistributive performance of the tax and benefit systems. Cerc also actively participated in the 1988 RMI evaluation. The 1995 Balladur government abolished it and replaced it by another institution. A new “Cerc” was born again under the 1997 socialist government.

¹⁵ See for instance, « Les jeunes et l’emploi », *Cahiers du CEE*, PUF, Paris, n° 7, 1975.

¹⁶ See for instance, Destefanis M., Foucher L., Goutermanoff B., « Le fonctionnement du marché du travail local », *Cahiers du CEE*, 13, 1977, p. 162, PUF, Paris.

¹⁷ Interestingly and « ex-post » Faguer (1999) reinterprets his former research (1970 surveys) in terms of precariousness but the word was not used at the time of the surveys.

2.1. Sociologists of poverty, family, unemployment, and social policy

In this domain, A. Pitrou (1978a; 1978b) appears as a pioneer for the usage of the term “*précarité*”. The term subsequently emerged as controversial and led to sharp criticism of “*paupérologie*” (Milano, 1988).

Pitrou (1978a) analyses the developments of family life in the 1970s and documents the fact that whatever their constraints, families generally act as networks of solidarity. By contrast, she focuses on certain families, called *familles précaires* (precarious families), within which precisely lack of family support leads to vulnerability in society. In families where “socio-economic conditions are precarious” (p. 71) indeed intra family financial support is essential¹⁸. When families are in instable situations and when at the same time networks are damaged, they really are “*précaires*”¹⁹. Such families (or households) are vulnerable to any sort of “incidents”. Precariousness is particularly linked to points of “*rupture*” (disruption). That is the reason why, says Pitrou, lower class or working class families (*familles populaires*) are so keen about family solidarity²⁰. In a certain way, resorting to family solidarity is a “sign of a precarious social integration” (1978a, p. 223). When isolated, families of the “popular” classes are barely able to cope. They risk being obliged to resort to assistance.

An essential point established by Pitrou is that traditional assistance (*aide sociale*), notably delivered through the *caisses d’allocations familiales*, is relatively ignorant of this *précarité*, because it generally targets families whose situations have already deteriorated completely and then are considered “*cas sociaux*”²¹ (welfare cases) or are already “marginalized”. Precarious families are not standard clients of *aide sociale*, they constitute a significant part of the lower classes²². This question is particularly explored in Pitrou (1978b), where she lists a host of dimensions leading to precariousness, observed in the families surveyed, which were neither middle class nor standard assistance recipients. Seven characteristics were observed (1978b, p. 51-64): “precariousness or absence of labour market skills” (which entails difficult working conditions and low wages, as well as absence of any career prospects); “scarce as well as irregular financial resources”; “instable or unsatisfactory housing conditions”; “health problems”; “uncertainty about the future number of children”; “relative lack of social links” and a “rather precarious balance in terms of the life of the couple”.

¹⁸ « Lorsque le soutien familial vient à manquer dans ces mêmes milieux, le maintien d’une autonomie minimale de la famille dans son mode de vie est ses initiatives est gravement menacé » (1978a, p. 113).

¹⁹ « Ce sont donc au total des ménages vulnérables à tout incident, non pas seulement parce qu’ils disposent de moyens précaires, mais parce que, privés du réseau familial, ils n’ont pas de recours : le moindre imprévu dans le travail, la santé, le logement, l’équipement, le budget... devient alors difficile ou impossible à surmonter et peut amorcer un processus de dérive bien connu : sortie des normes socialement reconnues comme celles de la ‘bonne famille’, impossibilité de faire face aux ‘devoirs’ que la société assigne aux parents » (1978a, pp. 114-115).

²⁰ « Une micro-institution comme la famille (...) semble surtout servir de protection contre la précarité des conditions de vie, l’isolement, l’aliénation » (1978a, p. 219).

²¹ « Les familles que nous avons étudiées ne font pourtant pas partie des « exclus » recensés dans un ouvrage célèbre, et qui constituent la majeure partie de la clientèle de l’aide sociale. Ce sont des familles régulièrement constituées, où le père et la mère parfois ont un travail régulier, où les handicaps graves n’apparaissent généralement pas encore, et qui constituent près de 30% de la population active urbaine. Leur exclusion se manifeste pourtant au niveau économique, mais plus encore au niveau des pouvoirs et des savoirs de notre société, et elle est directement issue de l’organisation socio-économique » (1978b, p. 133).

²² « La large frange des classes populaires, ouvriers ou petits employés (...) [dont] la situation ne présente à l’extérieur aucune carence remarquable » (1978b, p. 22).

Concerning employment, Pitrou insists on the bad quality of jobs of the couples rather than on their instability: this is related to the fact that her research was conducted in times of quasi-full employment. She also stressed the consequences of bad working conditions in terms of family life²³. In short, work being relatively stable but employment being of bad quality and resources scarce, those among the lower (or working) classes exposed to these situations (which, to her, stem from the “socio-economic organisation” of society) were in a precarious situation and were likely to turn up from potential to actual clients of assistance.

The subsequent debate linked together *poverty* and *précarité*, forging the (ephemeral) notion of “*pauvreté-précarité*”. *Précarité* was actually systematically discussed along with poverty. Just before the 1988 RMI vote, Klebaner, Martin and Offredi published an article in *Futuribles*. To these authors, poverty and *précarité* were “alarm cries”²⁴. Because it was close to poverty and it was at the same time a process and a condition, *précarité* was difficult to define and measure²⁵. Offredi (1988) addressed the social phenomenon of the eighties²⁶. She explained why poverty and *précarité* were at the same time close and different²⁷ and why it was difficult to establish clear relationships with employment or unemployment situations²⁸ because individual trajectories were destabilised²⁹. To her, *Précarité* amounted to “fluctuations (*oscillation*)” between “two poles”, the “integration pole” and the “poverty pole” (*ibid.*, p 24). People in *précarité*, different from the marginal and the poor, experience a problematic identity³⁰. Altogether *précarité* had at that time emerged as a defining feature of society in general³¹.

The entire French debate about all shades of precariousness has been coloured by this origin of this first meaning of *précarité*, rooted in poverty studies.

Schnapper, although not specialised in poverty and unemployment, published her research on unemployment in 1981. Analysing three different collective experiences of unemployment in

²³ « Si continuent de se développer des formes de travail qui sont particulièrement préjudiciables à l'équilibre du couple et des enfants, il faudra de plus en plus en payer les effets sociaux » (1978b, p. 246).

²⁴ « La pauvreté, c'est le cri d'alerte, l'état d'urgence (...), la précarité c'est cet autre cri d'alerte, plus ténu, dont on ne sait pas vraiment à quoi il se réfère dans les représentations institutionnelles et politiques, sinon qu'il apparaît en arrière-plan, en filigrane, d'un discours sur la pauvreté » (1988, p. 3).

²⁵ « La précarité apparaît *avant tout* comme un 'processus' dont les signes sont divers, polymorphes, réels ou imaginaires, c'est-à-dire n'étant pas totalement *mesurables* selon les critères habituels de l'économie et/ou du social » (*ibid.*, p. 4).

²⁶ « Les formes de pauvreté-précarité apparues depuis le début de la décennie 1980 » (1988, p. 23).

²⁷ « La notion de précarité nous semble devoir être approchée dans ses rapports limites avec la pauvreté, dont elle se distingue et à laquelle elle est fusionnée tout à la fois » (*ibid.*, p. 23).

²⁸ « Il est difficile sinon erroné sur le plan méthodologique, d'établir la relation « précarité égale travail précaire », ou bien « travail déqualifié », ou bien encore « précarité égale impayés de loyer » ou chômage. Par contre, une des références communes à ces différents termes (...) est l'idée de déstabilisation » (*ibid.*, p. 23).

²⁹ « Fragilisation d'itinéraires en équilibre à l'occasion d'une crise ou d'une mutation de la société, elle évoque alors des ruptures » (1988, p. 25).

³⁰ « À l'espace du pauvre (...) peut correspondre une identité (...) collective et individuelle, univers de stigmates, de symboles (...) à l'espace du précaire, mobile et discontinu, semble correspondre le paradoxe d'une identité construite sur du 'provisoire' (.) le précaire est seul, différent, éradiqué dans son rapport à l'espace » (1988, p. 28).

³¹ « La société contemporaine, société de la précarité, est une société en mutation (...) qui perd de sa permanence, de sa stabilité, de son sens » (p. 28).

detail, she never used the word “precariousness”. Eight years later, she theorised the importance of *statut* (both social and legal, see note in the previous section) as a key factor to distinguish between types of employment/jobs – one of which is precarious employment. With hindsight, this approach proved determining for subsequent sociological literature, especially Paugam’s research³² (see further).

For Schnapper, two aspects of the status of jobs should be distinguished: the legal, pertaining to rights attached to the labour contract, and the sociological, pertaining to social status (1989, p. 3)³³. To some employment situations, rights are attached, in terms of social protection and labour laws: these “*emplois à statut*” (jobs with legal/statutory rights) include public jobs and private open-ended contracts. Positions in society are thus linked to “relationship to employment and social protection”³⁴. Other categories of the active population³⁵ are in jobs “without status” (*emplois sans statuts*) or in a “status derived from employment” (*statuts dérivés de l’emploi* – mainly the unemployed and pensioners). The former account for the bulk of the “*emplois précaires*”, although these also include “more or less fictive jobs” in the latter category (she mainly refers here to employment or labour market programmes for the young) (*ibid.*, p. 11)³⁶. The common characteristic of “*emplois précaires*” is to be “without *statut*”, which entails that their holders lack at the same time short term security and career prospects. In this category she included fixed-term contracts, temporary agency jobs and various employment programmes. Schnapper insisted on the fact that this divide between the “with” and the “without” was not the same as the divide analysed by economists dealing with segmentation (*ibid.*, p. 12).

The hierarchical pattern of statuses existing in the French population was presented as the outcome of two concurring rationales of Welfare State dynamics: the extension of public employment – which acted as a “universal model” on one hand, and the increasing State intervention for solidarity’s sake on the other (*ibid.*, p. 23). Schnapper argued that it was no wonder that these developments were especially visible in France, because of the traditional role of the State. The increasing variety of statuses had both an actual function and a symbolic effect: it was intended to reduce the effects of the deteriorating conditions on the labour market³⁷. So the State kept creating new statuses and gave life to a “second labour market whose rationale was not economic but social on the first place” (*ibid.*, p. 26). The outcome was a “short term positive action”³⁸ in the management of the economic crisis,

³² D. Schnapper was Paugam’s director for his thesis at the École des hautes études, in June 1988.

³³ Schnapper explains the hierarchy of statuses in French society, where “legal” status determines “social” status. For a discussion of the notion of “statut/status” see Boudon, Bourricaud (1982, pp. 511- 524).

³⁴ « Le rapport à l’emploi et à la protection sociale » (1989, p. 5). Paugam later used a very similar notion and extended its meaning (2000b).

³⁵ Schnapper classifies the remaining population (those with no relationship with employment) in two other categories, namely the assisted (assistance recipients, *statuts nés de la solidarité*) and those outside formal employment – the marginal, those working illegally, etc. (the « *sans-statut* », p. 22).

³⁶ « Tous ces emplois plus ou moins fictifs ».

³⁷ « Cette multiplication des statuts sociaux a pour fonction de réduire dans les faits et de masquer dans les représentations les effets sociaux des conditions dégradées du marché de l’emploi, d’atténuer les conséquences de ce que l’on appelle les ‘restructurations économiques’, c’est-à-dire les différentes formes de licenciements économiques ou de nonaccès à l’emploi (...) l’invention des préretraités ou des stagiaires de toutes obédiences pour éviter l’augmentation du nombre des chômeurs, dont la condition anomique constitue un risque social, est à cet égard idéal-typique » (p. 26).

³⁸ « L’élaboration et la manipulation de la hiérarchie des statuts intermédiaires entre l’emploi, l’assistance et le chômage, rendant ambigu le sens des expériences vécues et des perceptions sociales, amortissent les conséquences immédiates de la modernisation économique, socialement coûteuse, sur les populations écartées provisoirement ou définitivement du marché de l’emploi ; elles assurent, à court terme, une action positive dans le fonctionnement et la gestion proprement

which might later appear as contradictory to the “strict logic of economic effectiveness” (*ibid.*, p. 26).

For his part, Paugam (1993) considered “lines of disruption” (*lignes de fracture*) that led to new forms of poverty (pp. 51-77). To him, these derived from “structural evolutions of society”. The first one was the deterioration of the labour market, which led to the increase of long-term unemployment. The second was the weakening of social relationships (within families as well as within classes). To him, these evolutions have affected “popular groups”³⁹ [which appear close to the groups among which Pitrou (1978) described the increasing precariousness of family life] but he stressed much more prominently the role of employment destabilisation.

A “new form” of unemployment emerged as “exclusion unemployment” and at the same time, “peripheral jobs” appeared. From his early work Paugam has consistently stuck to the definition of “precarious” as the addition of all the atypical forms of employment: in 1993, for instance, he did not discuss whether part time was “precarious”, he took it more or less for granted⁴⁰. He has shared in 1989 Schnapper’s general assessment that all subsidized contracts had the common characteristic of downgrading the substance of social rights attached (1993, p. 24). Although he envisaged the fact that “*les emplois précaires*”, so defined, could lead to stable integration, he stressed the fact that they feed a category of precariousness and instability on the labour market⁴¹.

In his latest book (2000b), he stuck to the same list of statistical categories as constituting the most important understanding of “precariousness”, although he added other dimensions (see further). Again he attributed the expansion of “peripheral employment” situations to the 1970 and 1980 economic crisis (2000, p. 63), as well as the downgrading of labour standards corresponding to the firms’ (and the State’s) flexibilisation strategies. To him, there were four forms of precarious employment (*ib.*, p. 65): “*le CDD, l’interim, les stages et contrats aidés et l’apprentissage*”. This definition strictly fits in with Insee’s survey classifications.

Paugam and *alii* (1993) assessed the number of persons in precarious situations in France. This research started a public row, because its authors used many associated terms like « *fragilité* » (fragility) and « *vulnérabilité* » (vulnerability). In this study, only 53% of the French active population appeared as not being in risk of any « fragility ». Three populations were grouped in terms of “exclusion risks”. The socially and economically integrated (*population intégrée économiquement et socialement*) was the first category and represented 80% of the French population; 53% had no risks of any “fragility” and 27% had one. The second population was the “fragile population” (*population fragile*), at 14,5%. The third

sociale et politique de la ‘crise’ par l’État providence (...) [On peut se demander si] à long terme, cette logique de la protection sociale n’est pas contradictoire avec la logique de la stricte efficacité économique » (1989, p. 26).

³⁹ « Personnes issues le plus souvent des catégories populaires, mais qui n’ont pas toutes été socialisées, contrairement au sous-prolétariat des taudis et des bidonvilles, dans des conditions d’existence misérables » (1993, p. 51). Indeed, this contrasts them sharply from the American style “underclass” (on this point, see Silver, 1996).

⁴⁰ « La reprise économique a contribué aussi à augmenter le nombre des embauches à durée déterminée. Les contrats de ce type ont doublé depuis 1982. On assiste en réalité depuis quelques années à une diversification des formes d’emploi précaire – travail à temps partiel, petits boulots – qui s’inscrivent dans le cadre de la stratégie de ‘flexibilité’ des entreprises (...) à ces emplois précaires, il faut ajouter tous les stages et les quasi-emplois correspondant à l’ensemble des dispositifs créés par les pouvoirs publics pour faciliter l’insertion professionnelle des jeunes et des chômeurs de longue durée » (1993, p. 54).

⁴¹ « Les emplois précaires et les stages peuvent conduire à des emplois durables, mais ils sont souvent une parenthèse entre deux périodes de chômage et entretiennent par conséquent une zone de précarité et d’instabilité sur le marché du travail » (1993, p. 55).

population, at 5,2% was the *population en retrait du marché de l'emploi* (population having left the labour market) (Paugam and *al.*, 1993, pp. IV-V).

Again, the debate is polarized by the question of social and legal status: those who are neither “fragile” nor “vulnerable” are those who enjoy a *statut*.

More recently, Paugam (2000a) has regarded “exclusion” as a “social paradigm” (p. 155) [which he also deems extendable in international comparison – which remains to be vindicated]. Despite its many meanings, exclusion is visibly more encompassing for him than “precariousness”. In its early use, “exclusion” did not point to the deterioration of the labour market opportunities and the weakening of social bonds and it remained “marginal” (p. 156). But then unemployment became the central question and “precariousness was somehow the notion that allowed to draw attention to what was later termed “*nouvelle pauvreté*”. Precariousness then affected social groups considered as perfectly integrated in society, and “victims of the economic downturn and the employment crisis” (p. 158). For Paugam, precariousness of employment is thus a consequence of the economic crisis. Moreover, “*situations précaires*” (precarious situations) constitute a “threat that affects larger and larger groups in the population” (p. 161). This phenomenon subsequently draws attention to a “crisis of the social nexus” (p. 159). Exclusion, as well as “precariousness” shares in a common “structural mechanism” (p. 163): in modern and rich societies⁴², processes produce this exclusion of certain groups, which constitutes “the new figure of previous forms of relegation⁴³”.

In his latest book (2000b), Paugam considerably extended the notion of “*précarité*” and proposed that it should be studied along two lines: (i) the relationship to employment – or to one’s job – and here he pursues Schnapper’s previous line (1989) and (ii) the relationship to work. In this second dimension of his new definition of *précarité*, Paugam includes a much wider conception. “The employee is precarious inasmuch as his employment appears to him without interest, badly paid and of little value to the firm” (p. 356)⁴⁴. *Précarité du travail* (work precariousness) is thus distinguished from *précarité de l'emploi* (employment precariousness). This amounts to a considerable extension of the scope of precariousness, in a manner independent from employment status, although there is of course overlap between both types of *précarité*.

We will see further in the survey that maybe this is also a specificity of the French debate to proceed to constant reassessment of the scope of *précarité* [and probably marked by the origins of the use of the term *précarité* (close to poverty, related to some holistic approach of the life of working (or lower) classes)].

⁴² « Il existe dans les sociétés modernes, quels que soient leur niveau de développement, des processus qui aboutissent à l'exclusion d'une partie de la population » (2000a, p. 163).

⁴³ « Le phénomène de l'exclusion tel que nous l'entendons en cette fin de siècle n'est en réalité que le renouvellement de formes anciennes de relégation ou de mise à distance des groupes sociaux discrédités ou jugés menaçants pour l'ordre social » (2000a, p. 163).

⁴⁴ « Le salarié est précaire lorsque son travail lui semble sans intérêt, mal rétribué et faiblement reconnu dans l'entreprise. Puisque sa contribution à l'activité productive n'est pas valorisée, il éprouve le sentiment d'être plus ou moins inutile. On peut parler d'une *précarité de travail* » (2000, p. 356).

On the employment side, although he concedes that the type of contracts provides a useful indicator, it has limits, he nevertheless reinstates that “employment insecurity has taken more and more importance for the last fifteen years” and this phenomenon not only affects a minority of employees, but “numerous ‘fringes’ [*franges*] of the active population⁴⁵” (2000a, p. 83). One of the questions left to further investigation (as it formerly was with Schnapper, is the exact meaning and measure of these ‘fringes’⁴⁶.

Castel’s book (1995) fits well into this general framework, but with important distinctive tones. Leaving aside its impressive and very rich historical perspective, which probably constitutes the most original part of it, *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale* delivers a message for assessing the present state of French society. *Précarité* is not an entry in its index, but *travail précaire* is one of the longest. Castel explicitly draws from Regulationist literature (1995, pp. 324-326): a new form of society, *la société salariale* (the wage earner’s society, literally) emerged in the times of Fordism. This society has been (was?) structured by the *rappor salarial* (wage earner relationship)⁴⁷. There are no easy equivalents for the French notion of « *salarial* » with its multiple meanings⁴⁸ so we could think of using the notion of “employment relationship”. However for Regulationists the notion of “wage earner relationship” [or, in some translations, “wage-labour nexus”] (Boyer) or “wage relation” (Jessop) points to a *global social relationship*, institutionalized in the “wage earning society” and it not only describes the individual contractual relation of the employee to the firm. The employment relationship is either seen as a private contract or as a private contract determined by the juridical and institutional framework (institutions)⁴⁹.

What we have been confronted with for the last twenty years is, for Castel “*l’effritement de la condition salariale*” (*ibid.*, p. 385) (the erosion of the wage earner condition), so that there is but one *question sociale* (social question), i.e. “the question of the wage earner status, because this status has come to almost define the whole society” (*ib.*)⁵⁰. *Travail précaire* (and neither *précarité* or *précarité de l’emploi*) is one of (if not *the*) most important features of the erosion. It has gradually led to the formation of a group of “*surnuméraires*” (supernumerary) which include the unemployed (the most visible manifestation) but also the FPE (*formes particulières d’emploi*) jobholders (*ib.*, p. 400). FPEs should be considered as testimony to

⁴⁵ « Au total, après avoir analysé l’évolution des emplois à statut précaire, du sous-emploi et du risque de licenciement, on peut conclure que l’insécurité de l’emploi a pris des proportions de plus en plus importantes au cours des quinze dernières années et que ce phénomène touche désormais, sous des formes différentes, non plus une minorité de salariés, mais des franges nombreuses de la population active » (p. 83).

⁴⁶ By construction, fringes are difficult to define and they are fuzzy.

⁴⁷ Boyer defines the *rappor salarial* : « on appellera formes du rapport salarial l’ensemble des conditions juridiques et institutionnelles qui régissent l’usage du travail salarié ainsi que la reproduction et l’existence des travailleurs. Ces deux termes définissent donc le type d’insertion du salariat dans la société et le circuit économique. *A priori*, donc les différentes formes du rapport salarial résultent de la combinaison d’un type d’organisation du travail, et plus généralement des normes de production, et d’un mode de vie défini par l’équivalent d’un ensemble de normes de consommation » (Boyer, 1986, p. 18).

⁴⁸ [(i) The social group (class) composed of all the wage earners, as opposed to the social group of employers (*patronat*); (ii) an individual’s social status/condition as a wage earner].

⁴⁹ In English the notion of “paid work” (also: the notion of employee) also sometimes tends to understate the importance of the social relationship embedded in the “wage earner society”.

⁵⁰ « La question du statut du salariat, parce que le salariat en est venu à structurer notre formation sociale presque tout entière » (1995, p. 385).

the downgrading of the *condition salariale* (*ib.*). The dynamics of extension of these FPEs appears as “irreversible” and also affects “the core labour force”⁵¹.

For Castel stressing *la précarisation du travail* (labour ‘precarisation’) is a way to understand the process that feed social vulnerability and result eventually in unemployment and ‘dis-affiliation’⁵². Labour ‘precarisation’ and unemployment are embedded in the dynamics of modernisation, as consequences of the new modes of employment structuration and the very fabric of the wage earner relationship risks being jeopardized (p. 403), as well as the role of firms as channels for integration (p. 404). All in all, the question exceeds the problem of the “peripheral precarious” because the present dynamics produces a “destabilisation of the stable” (p. 409). And Castel recalls the process he had described earlier of dis-affiliation, associating dysfunction in terms of integration in the labour market and weak inscription of the individual in sociability networks⁵³.

Precariousness here exceeds the question of employment, and also the question of status to designate more a way of life.

To end up with this survey, we will finally mention that some radical sociologists (challenging the legitimacy of social policy) use an even wider notion of precariousness. To them it is obvious that “precariousness affects all employees” (for instance, Madec, Murard, 1995, p. 7) and there is a sub-category, which they call “great precariousness”⁵⁴.

2.2. Sociologists specializing in “work” (*sociologie du travail*)

Nicole-Drancourt is one of a few sociologists “of work” to pay consistent attention to the precariousness of employment regarding the young and women. She acknowledged the fuzziness of the use of the term⁵⁵ (1992, p. 57), for the case of the young, but more generally, because it was at the same time commonly used but not defined, as if it were a common or ‘natural’ notion⁵⁶. She intended to clarify the notion and its constitutive ambiguities systematically associating “special forms of employment” and “precariousness”⁵⁷ as a

⁵¹ « Mais le phénomène touche également ce que l’on pourrait appeler le noyau dur de la force de travail, les hommes de trente à quarante-neuf ans » (1995, p. 401).

⁵² « Mettre l’accent sur cette précarisation du travail permet de comprendre les processus qui *alimentent* la vulnérabilité sociale et produisent, en fin de parcours, le chômage et la désaffiliation » (1995, p. 401). Castel introduced the notion of ‘dis-affiliation’ in his former research.

⁵³ Castel’s conception also recalls Pitrou’s whom he quotes.

⁵⁴ « Ceux qui sont à la rue et ceux qui vivent dans les quartiers touchés par la pauvreté sont, pour reprendre l’expression de Robert Castel, les « surnuméraires » du marché du travail, les victimes les plus visibles de la précarité qui touche l’ensemble des salariés » (Madec, Murard, 1995, p. 7). « Pendant ce temps, malgré le grande précarité, parents et enfants se rendent régulièrement à la maison de quartiers » (*ibid.*, p. 38).

⁵⁵ « Parfois il s’agit d’un sous-ensemble d’emplois hors norme (emploi à durée déterminée, intérim, stages, etc.); parfois c’est l’ensemble des emplois hors norme ; parfois encore c’est l’emploi hors norme plus le chômage ; parfois enfin, la précarité désigne l’ensemble du système d’emploi considéré comme déstabilisé par la diffusion rapide des nouvelles formes d’emploi : la précarité désigne ici des caractéristiques de situation d’emploi : dans ces cas, la précarité désigne des caractéristiques du vécu individuel » (p. 57).

⁵⁶ Used « toujours au détour d’une phrase, en utilisation banalisée » (p. 58).

⁵⁷ [Note that this was written thirteen years after the first qualifications stressed by Michon and Germe (1979)]. « Toutes ces ambiguïtés ne sont pas sans conséquences. Lorsqu’on évoque aujourd’hui les « nouvelles formes d’emploi, on y associe systématiquement la notion « d’emploi précaire » avec un cadre – « la précarité » et un spectre à terme – le

“framework”. She also intended to break away with an “alarmist conception” of the “*insertion*” of the young.

She explained that one should consider the question of a “precarious” entry of the young on the labour market in a very long-term perspective (thirty being the age of “stabilisation”) and that “precariousness” for them could take many figures which did not all lead to an absence of integration. Moreover, this process was gender-specific and involved strategies of the young within their life and career perspective, where employment was not uniformly central. To her, precariousness (as an absolute term) should be distinguished from “precarious employment”, because for instance “*CDD*”⁵⁸ or “*intérim*” jobs could function as trial jobs or sequences of intended mobility. Secondly, holding a “precarious job” did not deterministically mean that the young experienced it as being “precarious”. Thirdly, even being unemployed does not systematically fit with being “*précaire*”. This entailed that although all the young she surveyed had experienced unemployment or precarious jobs at some particular time in their integration process, only some of them experienced “precariousness” (as an absolute status). Precariousness should then be understood differently according to the young’s “*engagement professionnel*” (investment in work life), which leads to the divide into two sorts of precariousness (*précarité d’intégration* and *précarité d’exclusion*” (p. 66). *Précarité d’exclusion*, not specific of the young, can be explained by the lack of labour demand on the market, whereas *précarité d’intégration* is very specific of the young and gender-specific on top of this⁵⁹.

In a previous article (1990) she analyzed the labour market segmentation according to gender, downplaying “alarming statements forecasting the marginalization of stable employment” (1990, p. 174). To her although the employment systems were resilient, the “*norme d’emploi*” (employment norm) was “attacked stealthily from within” through various firms’ practices of flexibilisation. Women were prominent targets of this process, which was to be put in the longer perspective of the specific use of female labour force in industrial societies (p. 179), notably through part time employment and working time arrangements or reduction. Female flexibility was dominantly a strategy of firms obliging women to accept under-employment⁶⁰. This amounted to the general conclusion that precariousness and certain markets are more and more specific to certain sectors and categories of the workforce⁶¹, without the overall employment system being destabilised nor the “typical employment relationship” being endangered (p. 192). Basic dynamics however were ominous of future

chômage et l’exclusion. En amalgamant l’ensemble de ces phénomènes (emplois précaires, chômage, exclusion), on construit des catégories d’individus (les précaires, les chômeurs, les exclus, etc.) pris dans un piège social (la précarité). Entretien par une actualité préoccupante qui voit la stagnation du chômage à haut niveau et sa composante fortement juvénile, une conception catastrophiste de l’insertion des nouvelles générations s’impose et l’expression « jeunes précaires » devient un pléonasme » (1992, p. 58).

⁵⁸ *Contrat à durée déterminée* (fixed-term contract).

⁵⁹ « Dés lors des phénomènes d’individuation des itinéraires d’insertion se développent en réponse à une nouvelle donne sociétale avare en prescriptions et modèles de conduite. La précarité est une de ces stratégies d’adaptation qui, pour être subie, n’en est pas moins productrice d’intégration et de stabilité pour la plupart, à terme » (p. 70).

⁶⁰ « Les femmes sont la première cible de ce fer de lance de la précarité (...) comme les femmes sont proportionnellement les plus nombreuses dans les emplois les moins avantageux, la précarité est plus forte pour elles que pour les hommes (les chiffres du chômage en attestent) » (p. 189). « Soutenue par des formules d’aménagement ou de réduction du temps de travail sans compensation, la flexibilité, au mieux, dégrade les conditions d’emploi des femmes, au pire, les élimine du marché du travail (1990, p. 191).

⁶¹ « À une logique de précarisation d’ensemble du marché de l’emploi, semble se substituer une logique de segmentation des marchés avec affectation différenciée de la main-d’œuvre : on fréquente de moins en moins les mêmes espaces d’emploi quand on est jeune, quand on est femme ou quand on est homme adulte » (1990, p. 192).

adjustments concerning the entire labour force, of which female labour force utilization was an ominous anticipation. This would eventually lead to a transformation of all social relationships, continuously hindering progress towards more equality between men and women.

Maruani and Reynaud (1993) were probably the first sociologists to systematically articulate a research programme in terms of “sociology of employment” as distinct from the French traditional “sociology of work”⁶² and laying a bridge between labour economics and sociology of work. To them, from the beginning of the 1980s, two major transformations have occurred: the profound evolution of the structure of the labour force and the “employment crisis” (massive unemployment as well as the multiplication of FPEs, see Economics section). These transformations obliged to study societies where work is rationed and all (the unemployed as well as the active) are “destabilised” (p. 5). They addressed this question in their sections “*statuts et formes d’emploi*” (statuses and forms of employment) and “*de la segmentation à la flexibilité*” (from segmentation to flexibility) [pp. 54-70], where they shared the same observation as many others: expansion both of the share of employees and of women in the labour force, multiplication of the FPEs. They analyzed FPEs along two characteristics: their instability and their *précarité*, which made them close to unemployment (p. 59). FPEs function as entry jobs but also as sequences of employment before being unemployed.

This extension process can be explained in terms of segmentation and inequality. Maruani and Raynaud think that the core approach of research has shifted now from the previous focus on *precarité* and unemployment, to a new interest on “flexibility” practices and their consequences (p. 69)⁶³.

Lallement (2000) only uses the term “precariousness” cursorily. Surveying forty years of research in *sociologie du travail* (Lallement, 2001), he demonstrates that the interest in employment and, consequently the interest in employment precariousness for this sub-sector of the sociology community, has only been recent. However in his survey he signals a shift in the objects sociologists study with the emergence of “sociology of employment”⁶⁴ which tends to focus on “interactions between social status and conditions of employment” (2000, p. 152).

The various contributors (Dubet, Lallement, Maruani, mainly) to the collective book (Pouchet, 2001) illustrate this common consensus, in terms of segmentation of the labour market and fragmentation of the corresponding statuses. Maruani (2001, pp. 191-200) goes further in describing the present French society as a “full-unemployment” society as opposed

⁶² « À l’intersection de la sociologie du travail et de l’économie du travail, la sociologie de l’emploi traite des rapports sociaux de l’emploi. Ses objets centraux : les mouvements de recomposition de la population active, les mécanismes sociaux de répartition de l’emploi et de production du chômage. (...) Elle déplace l’épicentre du *travail* (compris comme l’activité de production de biens et de services et l’ensemble des conditions d’exercice de cette activité) vers l’*emploi* (entendu comme l’ensemble des modalités d’accès et de retrait du marché du travail ainsi que la traduction de l’activité laborieuse en termes de statuts sociaux » (1993, p. 4).

⁶³ « L’épicentre semble s’être déplacé de l’étude de la *précarité*, comme phénomène social, à l’analyse de la flexibilité, comme mode de gestion de la main-d’œuvre, d’une réflexion sur la segmentation du marché du travail à une interrogation sur les mécanismes de production du chômage » (1993, p. 69).

⁶⁴ See our distinction, section on terminology (employment/work) and Maruani and Reynaud (1993).

to the former “full-employment” one. The “full-unemployment” society is one where unemployment bears on the whole society and where employment is “*précarisé*” as a result⁶⁵.

2.3. “*Sociologie générale*” sociologists

Many sociologists neither specialising in *sociologie du travail* nor in social policy and family life have addressed the question of precariousness and employment precariousness as a feature of society in general. We will only select some of them.

Caillé (1994) is interesting as one of the most consistent proponents of an anti-utilitarian perspective in French sociology. He is also typical of a group of sociologists who – whatever their differences – have united around a sort of political programme (including promoting a basic income, the development of services neither public or private, but “solidaristic”, the reduction of the working time, more or less linked to an “end of work” perspective, etc.). Caillé’s analysis starts from the observation of a societal “crisis of work”, which is “the question among questions” and of the “collapsing” of the world we have known for the last fifteen years (1994, p. 7). In this obsolete world, everyone could expect a “*statut professionnel*” (a status linked to an occupation) to integrate in society (p. 9). But this society disappeared or is disappearing quickly. Growth will not yield sufficient employment any more and all the new jobs are marked by their precariousness⁶⁶. A “social catastrophe is looming” (*ibid.*, p. 11) [a society of workers to whom even work is refused, after Arendt, p. 15] unless some other ways are undertaken, including a basic income policy and a promotion of individual choice for working time.

In a certain way, there is a wide ranging consensus that a crisis of work/employment manifests itself through the “impossible” access to the previous *statut*, and that precariousness constitutes an overwhelming and general *social background* [which can be seen as a **meaning n°4**]. This social background appears as the result of dissemination across society of a context only limited, for instance in Pitrou’s sense, to the lower classes. This context acts as a process of *précarisation*, not this time of certain lower class families, but of society as a whole.

Boltanski and Chiappello (1999) though less alarmist, share the view that society as a whole has become precarious. They intend to scrutinize a “new spirit” for contemporary capitalism, drawing on previous research on “conventions” and “principles of justice”. “*Le monde du travail*” (the working strata in society) occupies a key position in their analysis and it is supposed to be “deconstructed” by the current dynamic of capitalism (*ibid.*, pp. 291-343) so that resistance capacities of the workers have been jeopardized, not only because unionism is dwindling or attacked by management, but because social classes have also been shattered (pp. 345-419). Despite sophisticated theorization, their analysis of employment precariousness’s causes, like Castel’s, draws heavily on economic literature. *Précarité* for

⁶⁵ « Le chômage est un moyen de pression sur les conditions de travail et d’emploi de tous ceux qui travaillent. C’est au nom du chômage que l’on précarise l’emploi et que l’on rejette certaines catégories de salariés vers l’inactivité, que l’on cherche à diminuer les salaires et que l’on redéfinit les rythmes et les temps de travail » (2001, p. 193).

⁶⁶ « Dans les trois dernières années, moins de dix pour cent des nouveaux salariés ont été embauchés dans le cadre de contrats de travail à durée indéterminée. Tous les nouveaux emplois se caractérisent par leur plus ou moins grande précarité » (1994, p. 9).

them is one of the consequences of flexibility, and notably “external” flexibility⁶⁷, linked both to changes in work organisation and industrial strategies. Contrary to Michon and Germe (1979), and very much like Paugam, they equate all FPE with *précarité de l’emploi*⁶⁸, a situation that befits new firms’ strategies seeking to avoid labour regulations (p. 303) although the phenomenon cannot be considered as planned and mastered in order to evict stable employment (p. 314). It is also consistent with the State’s implementation of new employment programmes.

For Boltanski and Chiappello, *précarisation* results in a dualization of the labour force (p. 308) and twenty years of a selection process among the potential labour force that has selected the fittest and rejected the less employable (p. 326). This selection process is underpinned by a general reduction of social protection for all, even the protected employees (p. 327) and the actual targets of this *précarisation* encompasses the unemployed as well as the excluded and the *emplois précaires* [they extensively quote Paugam and *alii* (1993)’s Cerc publication and seem to side with his interpretation that more than 50% of the French active population are in a fragile situation (p. 431)]. But they have a separate interpretation of the dynamics of exclusion, which is in fact the product of a “network” logic (p. 437)⁶⁹. Twenty years after, moreover, their interpretation of *précarisation* seems to meet with the first sociological surveys that establish the first meaning of *précarité* in contemporary France, although applied differently (Pitrou, 1978): *précarisation* appears as a general tendency of society that makes the individuals more fragile although also more free from certain social limitations (p. 526).

In the famous *La misère du monde* (1993), edited by Bourdieu, two chapters are particularly significant of contemporary forms of employment precariousness; they are presented by Beaud (about a temporary agency worker working for Peugeot) and by Pialoux and Beaud (dealing with the particularly precarious position of young temporary workers at Peugeot, during a strike, embodying a new generation when contrasted with the older unskilled workers).

Bourdieu’s more recent analysis, contrary to Boltanski and Chiappello’s, is phrased in explicitly normative language, even sometimes recalling the radical Marxist tone, when he writes and talks at his most political position⁷⁰. The text where he directly addresses “precariousness” was published in a book collecting various oral political interventions he made in the intent – clearly stated in the introduction to the book – of resisting the “scourge of neo-liberalism” (*le fléau du néo-libéralisme*, 1998, p. 7)⁷¹. To him “precariousness” is

⁶⁷ La flexibilité] « qui permet notamment de reporter sur les salariés, mais aussi sur les sous-traitants et autres prestataires de services, le poids de l’incertitude marchande » (p. 292).

⁶⁸ « Les déplacements destinés à donner plus de flexibilité externe aux firmes ont eu en effet pour conséquence le développement pour toute une frange de la population d’une précarité liée soit à la nature de l’emploi (intérim, CDD, temps partiel ou variable), soit à sa position dans des entreprises sous-traitantes » (p. 301).

⁶⁹ « La notion d’exclusion est surtout pertinente par référence à une forme d’exploitation qui se développe dans un monde connexionniste, c’est-à-dire dans un monde où la réalisation du profit passe par la mise en réseau des activités » (*ibid.*, p. 437).

⁷⁰ It is interesting to record that Bourdieu was interested in « *précarité* » as a notion to account for the situation of workers in Algeria in the 1960s (Bourdieu, 1963 p. 353) [I would like to thank J.-P. Faguer for his drawing my attention on this early reference].

⁷¹ « Je ne me serais donc pas engagé dans des prises de position publiques si je n’avais pas eu, chaque fois, le sentiment, peut-être illusoire, d’y être contraint par une sorte de fureur légitime, proche parfois de quelque chose comme un sentiment de devoir » (1998, p. 7).

everywhere⁷² and results in common effects that are most observable in the case of the unemployed. Like unemployment, common features mark it⁷³. Because “precariousness” profoundly affects those who are submitted to it, it prevents them from anticipating the future as well as from rebellion, “especially collective” (p. 96). But precariousness also affects those who are apparently spared by its influence⁷⁴. *Précarité* then appears as one of the aspects of a dominated condition in society, close to unemployment and exclusion. And these situations are the product of a new “mode of domination” which is underpinned by a generalised state of insecurity⁷⁵.

In his introduction to a survey of passed studies of integration of the young on the labour market, Faguer (1999) notes that a determining factor of unequal opportunities is the existence of a dual labour market linked to the employers’ use of individual characteristics. This is testimony of the “invariants” of the domination of the lower class young, both in the education system and on the labour market⁷⁶.

Bourdieu’s today’s position provides an interesting echo to Sennett’s 1999 book, who never used the term “precariousness”. It is at total odds with Reich’s over-optimistic view (2001). Neither Reich nor Sennett use the term: they write in terms of flexibility, poverty and risks.

3. ECONOMICS

Drawing on American segmentation theory, Germe and Michon (1979) were the first French labour economists to call for a clarification of the new forms of employment emerging in the 1970s. They started from the differentiation processes at work within firms. That firms discriminate among different categories of their workforce entails various impacts on the resulting aggregated problems of employment and unemployment (vol. 1, p. 1). In order to construct an object for research out of the many empirical manifestations of atypical

⁷² « La précarité est aujourd’hui partout. Dans le secteur privé, mais aussi dans le secteur public, qui a multiplié les positions temporaires et intérimaires » (*ibid.*, p. 95).

⁷³ « La déstructuration de l’existence, privée entre autres choses de ses structures temporelles et la dégradation de tout le rapport au monde, au temps, à l’espace, qui s’ensuit » (*ibid.*, p. 96).

⁷⁴ « Elle ne se laisse jamais oublier ; elle est présente à tout moment, dans tous les cerveaux (sauf sans doute ceux des économistes libéraux (...)) elle hante les consciences et les inconscients. L’existence d’une importante armée de réserve, que l’on ne trouve pas seulement (...) aux niveaux les plus bas de la compétence (...) contribue à donner à chaque travailleur le sentiment qu’il n’a rien d’irremplaçable et que son travail, son emploi est en quelque sorte un privilège fragile et menacé (...) L’insécurité objective fonde une insécurité subjective généralisée qui affecte (...) l’ensemble des travailleurs » (*ibid.*, pp. 96-97).

⁷⁵ « La précarité s’inscrit dans un *mode de domination* d’un type nouveau, fondé sur l’institution d’un état généralisé et permanent d’insécurité visant à contraindre les travailleurs à la soumission, à l’acceptation de l’exploitation » (1998, p. 99). « La précarité est le produit non d’une *fatalité économique*, identifiée à la fameuse « mondialisation », mais d’une *volonté politique*. L’entreprise « flexible » exploite en quelque sorte délibérément une situation d’insécurité qu’elle contribue à renforcer » (*ibid.*, p. 98). « Il me semble que ce qui est présenté comme un régime économique régi par les lois inflexibles d’une sorte de nature sociale est en réalité un *régime politique* qui ne peut s’instaurer qu’avec la complicité active ou passive des pouvoirs proprement politiques » (*ibid.*, p. 100).

⁷⁶ « Par quel paradoxe expliquer qu’après plus de trente ans de ‘démocratisation’ du système d’enseignement les formes d’exploitation qui pouvaient être observées, dans les années soixante (...) soient visibles aujourd’hui pour l’ensemble des débutants, qu’ils soient ou non diplômés ? Une hypothèse s’impose qui, à partir d’une analyse des transformations des enjeux scolaires et des formes de domination dans le travail, met l’accent sur les invariants d’un mode de domination de la jeunesse populaire (...). Il faut poser comme facteur déterminant de l’inégalité des chances de valorisation des diplômes, la constitution d’un double marché du travail qui s’appuie sur la prise en compte différente par les employeurs des caractéristiques d’âge, de sexe et d’appartenance de classe » (1999, pp. 1-2).

employment they forged the notion of “*formes particulières d’emploi (FPEs)*”⁷⁷ (p. 2), which has enjoyed till now a very wide acceptance. For them, the key to differentiation was embedded within firms’ strategies.

FPEs referred to what was “abnormal” since the usual norm was the open-ended full time contract. Because status is a key characteristic, “*forme d’emploi*”⁷⁸ is linked to a “wage earner relationship” (including the constraints linked to labour standards and laws, as well as social protection, and not only the legal relationship but also the “actual” relationship). Michon and Germe explicitly rejected the term “*précarité de l’emploi*” for all FPEs because it was both too restrictive and inadequate⁷⁹ with regard to the logic of firms’ strategies.

Excluding neo-classical explanations in terms of preferences, Michon and Germe agreed “with segmentation theses that consider that productive systems, *via* their consequences on the modes of utilization of the labour force, explain differentiations of the employment relationship” (p. 20). To them, however segmentation theories should be used with serious qualifications (the too simple divide between large and small firms; the necessity to take into account productive processes, but also the specific history of the firm, etc.).

From their firms’ survey and their synthesising the literature, Michon and Germe nevertheless concluded that two distinct phenomena were at stake (vol. 2, p. 384). Either FPEs were the outcome of a strategy devised so as to transform the employment relationship, the relationship between employers and employees. FPEs could then be the instrument that would lead to giving all employment relationships “a precarious form” which thus would gradually emerge as the norm. Or FPEs emerged only as a means of adjustment in a period of rapid structural changes. They then could function as a facilitating device, allowing for the externalisation of some jobs and could remain focused on certain categories of the labour force. When the structural adjustments are completed, FPEs could then disappear. They considered three scenarios, given the fact that the “social struggle” would inevitably shape the eventual outcomes. A scenario of the unions’ defeat would permit the dissolution of the employment relationship into all encompassing precarious relationships; a second scenario of the victory of the union movement, which would result in the return to the former situation and dispense with FPEs altogether; only in the case of an employer-employee social

⁷⁷ Which they define as « modalités particulières de la relation concrète entre employeurs et salariés, i.e. de l’achat et de la mise en œuvre des forces de travail » (*ibid.*, p. 2).

⁷⁸ « Un ensemble de dispositions légales et conventionnelles et de pratiques plus ou moins réglementées donnant forme à la relation entre le salarié et l’employeur » (pp. 8-9). « Est forme particulière tout ce qui n’est pas forme ‘normale’, i. e. tout ce qui n’est pas emploi : à temps plein ; et à durée indéterminée ; et relation du travailleur à un employeur-utilisateur de main-d’œuvre unique et clairement identifié » (p. 13). Only some FPEs are defined by a specific contractual relationship according to labour standards (p. 13).

⁷⁹ « La notion de précarité de l’emploi, de formes précaires de l’emploi, paraît plus satisfaisante. Elle souligne la moindre protection de certains, face aux suppressions ou pertes d’emploi, l’instabilité de l’emploi à laquelle serait contrainte une fraction de la main-d’œuvre. Sans doute veut-elle désigner ainsi l’aspect le plus essentiel des différenciations de la main-d’œuvre. Mais ce n’est là qu’un aspect des différenciations opérant sur la forme de l’emploi telle que nous l’avons définie. La notion de précarité de l’emploi par exemple exclut de son champ le prêt de main-d’œuvre. Elle ne traite pas de toutes les dimensions de la forme de l’emploi. Elle se limite sinon au seul statut légal, en tout cas à un seul élément du statut, la garantie de l’emploi, légale ou réelle. Elle oublie ainsi tout ce qui concerne plus directement l’usage de la main-d’œuvre, l’encadrement et la discipline, la détention de l’autorité sur le lieu de travail, etc. (...) La notion de forme de l’emploi n’autorise pas des raccourcis aussi rapides, interdit de confondre différenciations de la forme de l’emploi, divisions de la main-d’œuvre, segmentation du marché du travail. Le critère de la précarité ne spécifie donc que certaines des modalités d’emploi qui nous préoccupent (contrats à durée déterminée, contrats saisonniers). D’autres lui échappent (prêts de main-d’œuvre, travail en régie) dans la mesure où elles relèvent plus de ce que l’on appelle fréquemment « extériorisation » de la force de travail. L’intérim, emploi précaire par certains de ses aspects, extériorisation de la force de travail par d’autres, n’est jamais bien spécifié. La notion de forme particulière d’emploi cherche à englober simultanément précarité de l’emploi et extériorisation de la force de travail » (pp. 10-11).

compromise, it would result in recurrent segmentation, where social fragmentation would disseminate [on both counts, externalisation and precariousness].

Michon (1987) surveyed labour economics “fifteen years after segmentation” and concluded that fragmentation strategies (on the part both of the State and of firms) produced at the same time an extension of FPEs, a breaking up of working teams and differentiation in the conditions of work (1987, p. 7). Despite the 1982 Acts (*ordonnances*) edicted by the new Left government, a continuous extension of FPEs was the result of flexibility strategies.

If the consensus seemed large over the firms’ strategies, controversy existed in poverty studies. This controversy was presented by Milano (1988⁸⁰) when he contrasted “relative poverty” and “absolute poverty” and criticised the inconsistencies of sociological research on “relative poverty”, which could to him result in “all sorts of constructions” (p. 11)⁸¹. Nevertheless he acknowledged (p. 178) the reality of “*processus de précarisation*” or “*emplois précaires*”. This process has to him resulted in a growing inadequacy of social policy. Up to 1983 (pp. 168-178) existing social protection programmes (*aide sociale à l’enfance, aide aux parents isolés*, etc.) were used to compensate poverty, although it was not their original objectives⁸². He argued that 1983 was a turning point in France; unemployment rising massively; poverty re-emerging, in the political discourse, as the social dimension of the crisis, and for the first time a link was noted between unemployment and poverty (*id.*)⁸³ in studies and research. But there was no deterministic link between new employment forms and employment precariousness⁸⁴. Several special “urgency” programmes were implemented by successive governments [1983: first governmental plan against poverty⁸⁵; 1984-85: a new programme: “poverty is at the end acknowledged” “*via* the ‘*nouveaux pauvres*’ figure” (p. 172). Its beneficiaries were young people (25-49), young couples as well as lone women with children; the programme was again implemented during the winters 1985-86 and 1986-87].

All these factors concurred to highlight the fact that the French social protection system lacked an encompassing benefit system for the poorest, who were not covered by existing schemes⁸⁶ and this led to the enacting of the minimum income benefit in December 1988.

In the late 1980s, the adjunction of the new benefit nevertheless did not cater for all forms of precariousness and economic literature regularly addressed these developments. We will not

⁸⁰ Milano wrote before the passing of the RMI Act in Parliament in December that same year.

⁸¹ « La définition relative de la pauvreté conduit à l’expertise et à la paupérotologie. La pauvreté laborieuse se distingue de la pauvreté intégrée, mais elles s’opposent ensemble à la pauvreté marginalisation, distincte de la pauvreté exclusion qu’on ne saurait confondre avec la précarité ni la pauvreté-précarité, ni avec la grande pauvreté, ni avec la nouvelle pauvreté, ni avec la pauvreté traditionnelle, ni avec la pauvreté persistante » (1988, p. 31).

⁸² « Ils ont été détournés de leur sens » (*ibid.*, p. 178).

⁸³ « L’affaiblissement des réseaux traditionnels de solidarité (...) conduit les chômeurs à se retrouver (...) parmi les pauvres traditionnels » (1988, p.170) ; « l’expression ‘nouveaux pauvres’ traduit cette réalité complexe de pauvres supplémentaires, mais aussi nouveaux par leurs caractéristiques et par les processus qui les engendrent » (*ibid.*).

⁸⁴ « Du côté de l’emploi, l’accent est mis sur la précarisation du statut de salarié du fait du développement des formes nouvelles de travail, atypiques : travail temporaire, travail intérimaire, travail à durée déterminée, sans que l’on puisse établir un lien univoque entre pauvreté, précarité de l’emploi et mise en œuvre de ces techniques de gestion de la main-d’œuvre » (*ibid.*, p. 171).

⁸⁵ « Programme de lutte contre la pauvreté et la précarité », adopted by the cabinet, January, 26th, 1983.

⁸⁶ « Aujourd’hui de plus en plus de personnes sont vulnérables dans un plus grand nombre de domaines et ne désigner comme pauvres que ceux qui, à un moment donné, ont basculé dans l’indigence, serait une vision réductrice des processus de paupérisation à l’œuvre dans notre société (...). Il ne faut pas oublier la pauvreté potentielle (...) celle liée aux processus de précarisation, de fragilisation qui sont à l’œuvre au sein même de l’abondance » (1988, p. 178).

deal here with orthodox economists, given that their research is not, *a priori*, distinguished by any specific national characteristics and can be summed up in the synthesis report. We will concentrate on the ‘non-orthodox’ economists.

Some, like Outin (1993) have kept insisting on the role of employment and unemployment programmes, as a cause to the dissemination of precarious status (p. 146) and their “naturalisation”. And this is certainly a specific French feature (Barbier, Théret, 2002, 2001). Others have tried to characterize the structural transformation of FPE jobs over a long period of time (Fourcade, 1992). Globally this line of literature, which in quantitative terms is probably the largest, has stuck to two main arguments: the classical employment norm is jeopardised by the constant increase of atypical employment; the labour market is more and more segmented and this situation fits in with the diverging strategies of firms (on this, see also Gazier, 1993).

J.-P. Fitoussi is the most prominent among Neo-Keynesian economists in France. In his 1995 book, rejecting labour market flexibility strategies⁸⁷, he attributed the extension of employment precariousness in France (*la précarisation du travail*) to two main problems: the role of stock markets and the restrictive fiscal policies (p. 150). It was not only a question of employment precariousness but more than that, of the *social depreciation* of the value of work⁸⁸, which had many facets and was linked to an overvaluation of interest rates and price stability unheard of in the post war period. Structural adjustment has been implemented to the detriment of the less endowed (1995, p. 129) and resulted in unemployment at both ends of the active life. But it also has changed the social contract⁸⁹ and the employees’ relationship to work and behaviour, leading to polarization between the insiders and the rest of the demotivated labour force, as well as to an important increase in inequality⁹⁰. A *sentiment* of precariousness and resignation was dominant among the labour force (p. 132), which contributed to the deterioration of social life⁹¹ including a lower fighting spirit and the decreasing power of the unions. This led to an excessive widening of inequality, detrimental not only to social cohesion, but also to efficiency (p. 171).

The crisis of work – including its precariousness dimension – is thus mainly explained by errors in the past economic policies. A different macro economic management, within the framework of reformed European fiscal and monetary policies, could reverse these tendencies to the depreciation of work and the increasing inequality.

The Regulationist school has a different approach (Boyer, 1986; Petit, 1986). The key text here is Boyer’s *La flexibilité du travail en Europe*. Fordism’s crisis [and French Fordism is marked by a tendency to institutionalize social relationships (1986, p. 25), which again points to the question of *statut*] leads to national-specific forms of employment adjustment, within the general drive towards more flexibility (*ibid.*, pp. 225-227)⁹². This dynamics produces

⁸⁷ « L’exclusion est un processus qui commence par la précarisation du travail, il y a donc quelque hypocrisie à vouloir combattre l’exclusion par la flexibilité c’est-à-dire précisément par la précarisation » (1995, p. 151).

⁸⁸ « C’est le concept même de travail qui se trouve dévalorisé et fragilisé » (1995, p. 130).

⁸⁹ « Un nouveau contrat social, moins solidaire que l’ancien, plus individualiste aussi, fait que nos sociétés s’accommodent plus facilement de l’exclusion et de la marginalité » (1995, p. 129).

⁹⁰ « Cette relation nouvelle plus précaire, plus cynique, va être à l’origine d’une tendance lourde à la croissance des inégalités (p. 130). [Elle] « transforme par contagion le comportement des salariés eux-mêmes » (*ibid.*).

⁹¹ « À l’atomisation et au désenchantement de la société » (1995, p. 132).

⁹² « Le détail des évolutions institutionnelles et la réalité des évolutions économiques démentent l’hypothèse d’une homogénéité totale des transformations en cours du rapport salarial » (1986, p. 225). « La notion de flexibilité est trop souvent employée sans que l’on définisse avec précision les *formes exactes qu’elle revêt* : relèvement de la vitesse

national-specific forms of inequality, but very often certain groups are at the fore (the young, the part timers, immigrants, women). This lead to *formes nouvelles de différenciation du rapport salarial* (new forms of differentiation of the wage earner relationship) (p. 231). Evolutions in labour contracts are not unilaterally negative (p. 274) although there are many negative aspects, including a *multiplication des formes précaires d'emploi* (multiplication of the precarious forms of employment) (*id.*). France, for the future ends up hesitating between two scenarios: (i) a “re-segmentation” scenario with a multiple-tier wage earner relationship based on a “myriad of statuses” (p. 285) and (ii) a general internalisation of flexibility obtained through negotiations and an upholding of the previous model.

Beffa, Boyer and Touffut (1999) and Barbier and Nadel (2000) updated this analysis about fifteen years later. The change in employment contracts is determined by the perception of labour market rigidities and financial markets in the 1990s seem to replace the State as coordinators of economic activity (Beffa and *al.*, 1999, pp. 14-15). Three main types of wage earner relationships emerge from a survey of large firms (p. 17-18: (i) the previous Fordist relation is transformed in a new one characterized with both stable employment and versatility (*stabilité polyvalente*, versatile stability); (ii) the second type groups the employees who are submitted to *la flexibilité du marché* (market flexibility) and (iii) the third is reserved to a limited group of highly skilled people (*la profession*). Beffa and *al.* do not assess the spread of these three main models in quantitative terms but they stress that these new types of employment relationship transform previous configurations of the markets, internal markets as well as the markets for professionals and the secondary market (pp. 22-25). Both internal and professional markets appear less institutionalised and market flexibility spreads in more and more sectors, better describing the situation than the previous analysis in terms of secondary market. Barbier and Nadel (2000) note that the balance between these three ideal-types cannot be taken as an universal pattern across countries and they insist both on the inequality of the risk to be submitted to labour market flexibility, and on the deteriorating effects of flexibility (notably in terms of collective social protection). But they also stress the positive aspects of flexibility in terms of the content and the characteristics of jobs.

The *Conventionnalist* group of economists has not written extensively on the subject of precariousness for the last decade, with the notable exception of the contribution by Eymard-Duvernay on the question of recruitment policies of firms. Eymard-Duvernay and Marchal (2000) question the common uni-dimensional conception of market rationality for hire and fire practice in firms. In the context of the market flexibility debate, they point to the important role of experts that govern the rules and practices of recruitment. The experts' rationality is ordinarily based on assessments of the individuals' personal skills, which makes the judgement bear only on them. The strengthening of requirements by recruiters can be seen as playing in the same direction as the reinforcement of internal markets and increase *la précarisation du travail*⁹³. This analysis is also put into the context of a comparison of French and UK labour markets (Bessy and *al.*, 2001).

d'ajustement de *l'emploi*, adaptabilité de la durée du travail à la conjoncture, sensibilité des *taux d'activité* aux perspectives du marché du travail, essor du travail à *temps partiel*, des contrats à *durée déterminée* et de l'intérim constituent *a priori* autant de moyens pour ajuster l'activité à l'évolution de la production » (*ibid.*, p. 227).

⁹³ « L'accent mis sur la *précarisation* du travail prend tout son sens dans cette perspective : la perte encourue par le salarié serait beaucoup moins grave si le passage par le marché n'induisait pas une fragilisation de son statut » (2000, p. 428).

Interestingly, Caire, who was the French contributor to the 1989 ILO⁹⁴ book, returned to the notion of *précarisation* in one of his latest books (Caire, 2001). He defined *précarisation* of jobs as a functional process in firms, linked to flexibility and to the firms' strategies in dividing the labour force⁹⁵.

Before closing the Economics review, let us mention an important study by Lefevre, Michon and Viprey (2001) which results from a survey of temporary agency high executives. This study illustrates an *emerging* tendency of the agencies' strategies for the future: there is not only a traditional "ordinary" temping practice (with relatively low skilled and low paid employees) but also a "quality" human resource management service emerging.

4. PSYCHOLOGY/PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

It is a moot point whether the unquestionable tendency to a constant increase in cognitive requirements for employees – as shown by most surveys – can be adequately conceived of in terms of employment precariousness. The question is even more difficult when we turn to psychic suffering.

Obviously Paugam (2000b) with his extended notion of *précarité du travail*, has no hesitation to include "stress" and other psychological sufferings in the realm of precariousness. Indeed he does it in terms of "*angoisse*" (anxiety)⁹⁶ deriving from quality norms, or in terms of "stress"⁹⁷ (pp. 142-147; 219-220). With respect to measure, he refers to the ministry of employment surveys that have never defined stress precisely – except as a category built-in by the answers to some questions about "mental" or "cognitive" work requirements.

But here the question is twofold: one is that sociologists sometimes use fuzzy terms when addressing the question of the cognitive or psychic dimensions of work; the other one is of course how one explains that the term "employment precariousness" can adequately contain a "relationship to work" (*relation au travail*) which is marked by "stress" or "anxiety".

Only psychological (or psychoanalytical) literature can adequately address the question of scientific definitions in this domain. Two main references emerge here conspicuously: Mendel (1992, among many books) and Dejours (1993).

Although Mendel's theory is of great interest and provides bridges between different disciplines, we will only comment Dejours, who has analysed the question of the sources of suffering in the experience of work in actual contexts of many work situations⁹⁸. Dejours does not use the term "stress" in this theorization of "psychodynamics". He defines and analyses what *suffering* (*la souffrance*) is, dismissing the stress model as behaviourist and

⁹⁴ International Labour Organisation.

⁹⁵ « Dans une perspective limitée, on dira que la précarisation réintroduit la flexibilité interne ou externe en permettant à l'entreprise de faire face à l'incertitude de la demande. Dans une optique plus large, on analysera la précarisation comme une extériorisation des rapports qui se nouent d'habitude entre les salariés et leur employeur, complétée par une extériorisation organisationnelle par laquelle l'entreprise divise le collectif de travail, évitant ainsi l'apparition de rapports de force qui pourraient lui être défavorables. La précarisation se présente ainsi comme un processus à double fonctionnalité » (2001, pp. 221-222).

⁹⁶ « [Ces normes] deviennent une source d'angoisse pour les salariés tant ils craignent les sanctions en cas de défaillance » (2000b, p. 357).

⁹⁷ A notion that he never defines in his book, taking it for granted.

⁹⁸ Contrary to more recent publications and one best-seller, in which he took a rather controversial stance.

pertaining to *agressologie* (“aggresso-logy”). He of course does not either use the fuzzy and somewhat obsolete notions coming from old ergonomics, like that of *charge mentale* (“mental charge”), notions which are still often used by French statisticians with no clear definition.

The key question is the relation between both *pleasure* and *suffering* derived from individual and *collective* work experience. It is important here to remain Freud’s remark in a very short note in his major work⁹⁹, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1929), which says that no other significant activity relates man to reality more than work. To Dejours, work is always an “enigma” and there is always an experience of suffering in work; only when fed on collective recognition of the individual’s value by his/her colleagues, can a psychic dynamics be established that is conducive to the transmogrification of suffering into pleasure.

Such a theoretical framework allows for understanding why certain work situations and certain occupations or professions are particularly prone to suffering and in some cases to an impossible (or hugely costly) individual psychic adaptation. However, the material involved here is *clinical* and it never corresponds with the *items* of statistical surveys. So that findings of such surveys may only point to possible symptoms of *suffering situations*, which however collective, are always individually experienced in the first place, and do not result in identifiable types of psychopathologies/illness (contrary to industrial illness and accidents).

5. DEFINING PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT: A PRELIMINARY APPROACH

The brief survey of main research tendencies in the 1990s in France – put into the context of the 1970s and 1980s uses of terms related to precariousness – has a certain bearing on the Esope debate on defining employment precariousness.

5.1. All encompassing or catch-all precariousness: precariousness of life?

The French debate about employment precariousness is closely intertwined with an assessment of a much wider “precariousness”. In 1984, when the first manifestations of changing employment relationships emerged, F. Sellier, a labour economist, remarked that the contemporary discourse on social and economic precariousness was paradoxical. The more extensive wage labour was, the more unbearable exceptions to wage labour stability appeared¹⁰⁰. Life in general is precarious, as well as social life and this certainly explains at least part of the very large scope of questions that are treated in France under the heading of “*précarité*”.

Many analysts forget to recall the fact that the standard employment contract (full time open-ended along with a *monthly* paid wage, at least the minimum monthly wage) has been only prevalent for a short time in history in France. Some also forget to recall that the so-called

⁹⁹ Note 1, second part, French edition (PUF), p. 23, *Le malaise dans la culture*, Paris.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Fourcade « de ce point de vue, le discours contemporain sur la précarité peut étonner : il manifeste en réalité que plus le salariat s’institutionnalise, devient une activité sociale réglée et stable, plus il se généralise à toute la population (85% de la population active), plus les exceptions à la stabilité deviennent difficilement supportables : la violence du discours sur la précarité est inversement proportionnelle à l’importance du phénomène » (1992, p. 5).

“*Trente Glorieuses*” (the glorious thirty years) from 1945, if they were effectively the glorious years of the Fordist “virtuous” *regulation*, also were the years when working conditions and industrial accidents reached their worst for the majority of workers and even administration employees.

What is probably observable in the French case is that, due to totally different economic conditions and political reforms from the 1980s, public awareness to the deteriorating legal and social protection, as well as income conditions of a growing number of jobs have resulted in a very widely disseminated social sentiment that the general conditions of life, or working life have worsened.

In this, phenomena as diverse as “social exclusion”, unemployment and risks of losing one’s job and one’s income, have converged. And it is in that perspective that the great majority of sociological literature we have reviewed here presents contemporary developments as endangering the whole of society, including the stable among the employed.

This also explains why the scope covered by the term *précarité*, in a sociological perspective, has come to be constantly extended. With all their differences, in their respective domains and approaches, Bourdieu as well as Paugam, Boltanski, Chiappello and Castel exemplify this tendency, mirroring to a certain extent Reich’s optimistic view and Sennett’s pessimistic one. This is a precariousness of the “spirit” of society.

However, if the Esope perspective is to be of some help, it is not in repeating these now well known analyses that consider precariousness in general as very much akin to a “*fait social total*”; nor to side with the small minority in French social science who implicitly thinks that the only answer to *précarité* and to *précarité de l’emploi* in particular is to transform all employees into civil servants (*fonctionnaires*).

5.2. Four meanings: fuzziness rather than controversy

We identified four meanings for precariousness in the French debate and showed that they applied to (i) the living conditions of lower class households and families; (ii) the social and legal status of individuals, as related to employment; (iii) employment precariousness in terms of pay, types of contracts and career prospects and, finally (iv) precariousness and *précarisation* of society as a whole. These meanings did not appear all at the same time and the tables below show the distinctions between the different decades under review. A very important feature of the French debate has proved to lie within the difference and at the same time similarity of *précarité* in general and *précarité de l’emploi*, in particular.

In France, it is significant indeed that the question of precariousness was in the first place raised in a context of risk of poverty for certain groups, and social vulnerability in general. Although the notion of *précarité* was transferred from poverty studies to employment matters and, although it faded away as such on the social assistance scene, it is easy to see that its former “poverty” content still colours the present debate, but, now on the question of employment, which has been for most of the years 1980 to the recent recovering period, marred by high unemployment and low creation of jobs.

The result of the existing different meanings is a very loose debate linked to a general consensus about precariousness based on a limited number of indicators, the most important of which being the ratio of FPEs to the active population, part time and the percentage of hiring in limited duration contracts in the private sector. A general (and increasing) precariousness of society is very often inferred from these indicators, whatever their inherent limitations.

Precariousness: the 1970s

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Usage and social construction of various notions of <i>précarité</i> in France | “Precariousness” as a state, a social condition, a process undergone by certain categories of the population, different but also close from/to poverty | “Precariousness” as a social status (or an absence of legal status) prevalently determined by the relationship of individuals to employment | Precariousness of employment (instability, insecurity, poor career prospects and pay) |
| | The phenomenon has not emerged yet | The phenomenon has not emerged yet | |
| The 1970s | | | End of the 1970s, labour economists deal with “atypical” contracts including precarious contracts or situations and begin to address firms’ labour force/HRM ¹⁰¹ strategies |

¹⁰¹ “Human resources management” was only introduced as a standard designation from the late eighties in firms. The word and notion are still very controversial, both in French economics and sociology.

Precariousness: the 1980s

| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p>Usage and social construction of various notions of <i>précarité</i> in France</p> | <p>Precariousness as a state, a social condition, a process undergone by certain categories of the population, different but also close from/to poverty</p> | <p>Precariousness as a social status (or an absence of legal status) prevalently determined by the relationship of individuals to employment</p> | <p>Precariousness of employment (instability, insecurity, poor career prospects and pay)</p> |
| <p>The 1980s</p> | <p>From the beginning of the 1980s, precariousness turns up as a “State category”</p> | | <p>For a majority of economists, atypically precariousness of employment is a consequence of flexibility strategies of firms</p> <p>For Regulationists, this question is part of an emerging new “wage relationship” with very contrasted national models</p> |
| | <p>End of the 1980s, precariousness of families’ lives is a sociological question</p> | <p>End of the 1980s, precariousness is gradually thought of as an absence of status in sociology</p> | <p>End of the 1980s</p> <p>Pioneer research stresses the heterogeneity of employment situations considered precarious</p> |

Precariousness: the 1990s

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| <p>Usage and social construction of various notions of <i>précarité</i> in France</p> | <p>Precariousness as a state, a social condition, a process undergone by certain categories of the population, different but also close from/to poverty</p> | <p>Precariousness as a social status (or an absence of legal status) prevalently determined by the relationship of individuals to employment</p> | <p>Precariousness of employment (instability, insecurity, poor career prospects and pay)</p> | <p>Precariousness as a social background present everywhere (<i>précarisation de la société</i>)</p> |
| <p>The 1990s to nowadays</p> | <p>An understanding of precariousness independent of employment questions has not survived, although "<i>précarité</i>" is still a State category, close to poverty</p> <p>Social policy is more concerned with "<i>minima sociaux</i>" (as well as family policy)</p> | <p>Precariousness (associated with other notions like <i>insertion</i>, <i>exclusion</i>) has now formed the general background notion referring both in sociology and economics to a relative status (with rights and other characteristics attached)</p> <p>There is extensive consensus on the fact that society is destabilised because of the dissemination of precariousness statuses and their consequences on stable statuses</p> | <p>Precariousness of employment is a very common political issue in society</p> <p>It is also a State category and an object of policy to regulate it</p> <p>Scientific literature tends to discriminate between employment situations, and dominantly refers to segmentation and, in some cases, inequalities</p> <p><i>Précarisation</i> of jobs as a strategy of firms</p> | <p>Because of the lack of demand for work, the entire labour force and, consequently, the whole society are destabilised and precariousness forms a general background to all activities. Society is in a process of '<i>précarisation</i>'</p> <p>Precariousness of employment and precariousness of work</p> |

5.3. Precariousness as a State category: risk of poverty, employment risks, legal status

In France, since the early 1980s (and corresponding to the first phase of the expansion of unemployment and mass long term unemployment), *précarité* has been a State category, which means that it is used in labour law, social protection and public social policy (including in the successive NAPEs – National Action Plans for Employment).

From the early 1990s, the French debate (public as well as scientific) but also State intervention has been aware of the problems in terms of “*statuts sociaux*”. It is not only a question of an employment relationship, it is a question of access to stable income and the reproduction of living conditions for one’s family – as well as the 18th century “sacred debt” of society. The public/private divide is very important, as have shown many social controversies and upheavals, one of the most recent being the revolt over public pensions in 1995 and the unemployed’ movements in 1997, all movements which had a prominent “status” substance.

Consequently much is expected from the State in terms of protective legislation and intervention¹⁰². This helps to explain why the focus on atypical employment and the so-called FPEs (*formes particulières d’emploi*) is so great.

Historically from the 1980s, the first question the State was challenged with was the lack of comprehensive social protection for the potentially poor. Then it was unemployment and then again the development of specific forms of labour contracts. In doing its bit to fight unemployment the State also contributed to the extension of FPEs as well as flexibilisation by stealth. When the 1998 “*emplois-jeunes*” (five years contracts in the public and non-profit sectors) were first implemented, the State was self-critical of previous practice. The justification for their creation was that at least these were to be “real jobs”.

In a comparative perspective, it seems that this French “status” and “State” bias has to be taken into consideration as a distinctive feature.

5.4. Subjective versus objective: insuperable questions and normative assumptions

There is a key question, which remains very difficult to answer and is linked to the question of *subjective* as against *objective* potential definitions of employment precariousness.

Obviously not all jobholders of atypical – or even of precarious – job positions *feel* in a precarious position. On the other hand, stable jobholders may feel precarious in their positions. There is a wide gap between the tendencies shown by for instance the latest ILO (2000, Auer) study and the public perceptions, as for instance illustrated by OECD (1997).

At the same time, indicators are particularly difficult to use: for instance indicators measuring length of tenure, average job tenure, but also job retention rates, or personnel rotation can be interpreted either in terms of voluntary *labour mobility*¹⁰³ or involuntary. As Gautié and

¹⁰² See for instance the recurring legal work in progress over the legal conditions of dismissal, the latest episode being the « *Loi sur la modernisation sociale* » just passed in Parliament in January 2002 and presently (November 2002) put into question by the new conservative government.

¹⁰³ Unless one has statistical evidence of voluntary mobility as against involuntary, an indicator for *mobility* can be interpreted either in terms of precariousness or not.

Gazier remarked in Belorgey (2000, p. 382), short contracts are not always imposed on employees, but some of them choose them, including in France for the reason that special premiums are paid (*indemnité de précarité*) for fixed-term contracts and temporary agency jobs.

Normative assumptions – which, for a great part of them are consistent with the particular contemporary set of consensual values in a national context (as Vivian Schmid has extensively shown) – are very often, if not always, present in the appreciation of precariousness situations. It is difficult to devise a satisfactory level of “stability” or “security” for a job for all, except in the opposite dreams of communism and of an ultra-liberalism of the type studied by Polanyi. Precisely society has to resort to “social protection”, in his sense to define the legitimate levels of security.

One of the key arguments raised by those who assess the extension of precariousness in general in France is that the relatively minor amounts of unstable or insecure jobs in terms of stocks affects the entire labour force. There goes the argument of larger and larger “fringes” of society being affected (Paugam, Boltanski and Chiappello, for instance), but the question remains how to measure the precise size of these “fringes”.

5.5. Economics and sociology: the main distinction

Economics and Sociology do not stress the same dimensions of employment precariousness.

- *For economists*, precariousness of employment is essentially linked to economic flexibility. Only rarely and recently employment flexibility and flexibility of work have been systematically dissociated (Barbier, Nadel, 2000). Firms’ strategies are here prominent. The legitimacy of a degree of flexibility on the labour market is rarely challenged altogether, and it is enhanced by the consequences of international competition [the balance to be struck between flexibility and security is common reference]. For economists, not all special forms of employment are precarious. Economists tend to focus much more on the question of *inequalities* in terms of income, access to social protection for the long term, and the distribution of flexibility constraints. As we will see in chapter 3 and the following, the issue is then one of identifying precisely *segmentation*. The other fundamental question is of course how macro-economic policy on one side (and employment protection on the other) respectively affect job creation and the characteristics of these jobs.

- *For sociologists*, leaving aside the broad assessments – yet difficult to argue precisely, on the spread of an “objective” precariousness in general in society – employment precariousness is more often seen in terms of access to social and legal status, than in terms of *trajectories* of integration (social and labour market integration). Rather exceptionally sociologists tend to separate different types of precariousness, some of them leading to integration. Another point also remains to be clarified for the common definition of employment precariousness, again in the perspective of social trajectories, namely the different conditions and statuses experienced, by people in unemployment, precarious employment and in “social exclusion” during their life cycles. An important part of French sociological literature tends to blur these differences and to verge on the “alarmist” side.

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