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## **PRESCRIPTIONS OF DOMESTIC WORK PLATFORMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN BRAZIL AND THE UNITED STATES**

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### **Introduction**

The topic of care work and domestic work linked to digital platforms is still little studied and discussed, whether in countries of the global South or North (Blanchard, 2022).

The empirical research on the platforms of care work in the USA by authors Julia Ticona and Alexandra Matescuu (2018) pioneered. Since then, other investigations have been carried out in several countries, but they are still scarce and bring few primary empirical data even in the US territory. In Brazil, this theme is highlighted in the research by Cardoso and Pereira (2023) and Andrada et al. (2023). However, the topic still needs to be further studied and discussed.

The little attention paid to care and domestic work in the context of digital platforms, whether by academia or governments, is surprising, considering the large number of care and domestic work platforms. Data from the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2024) show that the number of care work platforms (also considering those exclusive to domestic work) exceeded the number of passenger transport platforms worldwide in 2023.

Taking advantage of Brazil's historical social, gender, race, and class inequalities (Pinheiro et al., 2021; Dieese, 2022) and the USA (Hunter, 1988; Nilliasca, 2011), platform companies are expanding widely in both countries and intensively exploiting the care work of people and households carried out, mainly, by millions of women (Fairwork, 2023).

Within this context, it is important to consider that the historicity of domestic work demonstrates that women's work is devalued in the capitalist system, both in the material and symbolic aspects, due to the sexual division of labor (Kergoat, 2009; Hirata, 2017). Domestic work is an activity of social reproduction that is fundamental to

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the sphere of production, to the existence of salaried workers, to the accumulation of surplus value, and, therefore, to the development of capitalism (Fraser, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2013). Domestic work intermediated by digital platforms must be understood within this social and historical context that characterizes the societies of capitalist countries in the Global South and the Global North, such as Brazil and the USA.

In addition, digital domestic work platforms cannot be framed in just a single typology, considering that they can be distinguished from each other through the following aspects: business models, types of services, types of hiring, modalities of hiring, modes of service provision and types of tasks performed by workers (Ustek-Spilda et al., 2022; Poblete et al., 2024)

At the same time, our ongoing research has observed that platform companies (Woodcock; Graham, 2020), whether in Brazil or the USA, mobilize various communication uses in support of their logic of management and organization of domestic work. One of these uses refers to the prescriptions of domestic work identified in the discourses disseminated by platform companies.

Specifically, we propose dealing with the guidelines workers receive from platform companies in Brazil and the USA to carry out their work.

### **Methodological approach**

This study involves a theoretical-methodological path that includes bibliographic, and documentary research based on Brazilian and American data, whose results show similarities and differences between domestic work in the platform economy in different territories of the Global South and the Global North.

We consider that communication relations between platform companies and domestic workers are marked by the monopoly of information and these organizations' power over the work process, causing what Rosenblat and Stark (2016) conceptualize as "information asymmetry" in algorithmic work management.

In addition, we assume that issues of class, gender, and race constitute work in the platform economy, especially about working women, considering that they are made invisible in the context of the platformization of work (Blanchard, 2022; Fairwork, 2023).

Therefore, we consider that the communication relations between platform companies and domestic workers have characteristics related to the aspects of the sexual division of labor and social reproduction.

Based on exploratory research that enabled mapping of care and domestic work platforms that operate in Brazil and the USA, two of them were chosen for our discussion: the Brazilian Parafuzo (2024), created in 2014, and the American Taskrabbit

(2024), founded in 2008.

These platform companies' websites and social media were investigated to identify prescriptions and to interpret by discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003).

### **Preliminary findings**

Considering the context of the platform economy (Lehdonvirta et al., 2019), communication and its uses are mobilized in the world of work in different ways and with different purposes. In the case of platform companies, their management uses Information and Communications Technology, develops digital practices, creates communication strategies, and produces and disseminates narratives and discourses to organize and manage work, intending to meet their own needs and interests amid the contradictions between capital and labor.

With this in mind, we propose to present partial findings of ongoing research (with Brazilian funding from the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, CNPq) on the uses of communication by domestic work companies in their relationship with workers.

Based on the study carried out with the Parafuzo and TaskRabbit platforms, we observed that these organizations create and disseminate prescriptions that reinforce aspects of domestic work already recognized as constitutive of this activity. At the same time, they share prescriptions requiring new skills from workers, using digital technological resources to deal with the platform's application (*app*), and communication skills in their relationship with customers.

Both the Parafuzo and TaskRabbit platforms guide the performance of domestic work tasks that, although they are already mobilized in the work of cleaning professionals, these organizations reinforce. In their communication materials aimed at workers, the platforms present a set of instructions on how, for example, to clean homes efficiently.

However, we observed that the prescriptions of platform companies require going beyond what this professional activity commonly requires.

More than knowing how to clean and tidy the house, the worker needs to know how to operate the app well, write a good personal profile, choose a good personal photo, develop strategies to have visibility on the platform's interface, and get more work and know how to communicate well through the app's chat with the customer.

In addition, the worker must be friendly with the customer when she meets him at home to have a chance of receiving a good evaluation of the work done and thus achieve a score sufficient to remain active on the platform.

These are some prescriptions on domestic work that Parafuzo and TaskRabbit, Brazilian and North American platforms, respectively, disseminate in their discourse on domestic work.

Paid domestic work in Brazil (Pinheiro et al., 2021; Dieese, 2022) and in the United States (Hunter, 1988; Nilliasca, 2011) has distinct historicities, but both are marked by legacies of slavery and are configured by gender, race, and class relations. With this in mind, studying the configuration and performance of domestic work platforms under a comparative approach involving these two countries presents the challenge of critically reflecting on the implications that this new agent of intermediation of care work brings to workers regarding the performance of their concrete work.

At the same time, it is an investigation that can contribute to the debate and a better understanding of the development of domestic work at the macro-social level, considering aspects that intersect in the histories of capitalist countries in the global South and North.

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