

Digital Platforms Practices of Exclusion – What Citizenship is Possible?

Práticas de exclusão de plataformas digitais - Qual cidadania possível?

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Abstract: Digital technologies of information and communication are the source of multiples human advancements, in work optimization, in medicine, sciences and other dimensions of our daily lives. Capitalism use these technologies to implement a new business model, that of platforms, based on data exploration and manipulation to offer services that are executed by digital labor to maximize platform's gains. The set of systems and practices are a new form of colonialism, and they structure the digital work in the relations between the Global North and Global South. The general objective of this essay is to study the predatory and colonialist practices of platforms as related to citizenship exclusion. The methodology was based on bibliographical and documental research, articulated with empirical evidences and experiences of digital labor. Platforms are structures that offer limited agency while curtailing attempts to change their status quo. Digital colonialism is the main theoretical reference. Analysis revealed a trove of relational qualities (i.e. those that occur during the use of the platforms) that support the main proposal that they impede citizenship. Platforms explore digital labor (i.e. that executed according to colonizing practices). That is to say, low-income people who already live in precarious conditions). The offer no sufficient income, no labor protections, terrible working conditions. Information asymmetry is used to surveillance and punishment. They are opaque and are not accountable. Their practices deepen inequalities, widen exclusion and preclude citizenship.

Keywords: Digital work. Data colonialism. Digital colonialism.

Resumo: As tecnologias digitais de informação e comunicação propiciam múltiplos e benefícios para a humanidade, como otimizações, avanços na medicina, nas ciências, nas artes, entre outras dimensões. Em seu mais recente modelo de negócios, o capitalismo vale-se destas tecnologias para criar plataformas de serviços, que são conjuntos de sistemas e práticas que estruturam o trabalho digital nas relações entre o Norte Global e o Sul Global. Plataformas coletam e manipulam de dados, os novos recursos a serem

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explorados, para ganhos de capital. Este ensaio tem por objetivo geral estudar as práticas colonizadoras de plataformas digitais no que tange aos impactos na cidadania. O estudo baseia-se em pesquisa bibliográfica e documental, articulada à análise de evidências empíricas e experiências situadas no campo do trabalho digital. As plataformas são estruturas que oferecem margens limitadas de agência, sobretudo as que ameaçam seu *status quo*. O Colonialismo Digital é o principal quadro teórico. As análises determinaram qualidades relacionais: aquelas que ocorrem durante o uso, conexões, interações e consequências do uso da plataforma. No modelo de plataformas, o trabalho digital é a forma de exploração. Usuários e trabalhadores, pessoas de baixa-renda e já precarizadas, têm seus dados coletados e manipulados para ganhos. As plataformas agem de maneira predatória, não são fonte de trabalho digno nem de renda suficiente. A relação de trabalho vende parceria e age colonizando. As plataformas não oferecem garantias laborais, não são transparentes nem assumem responsabilidades. As práticas colonialistas aprofundam as desigualdades, ampliam a exclusão e privam as pessoas de cidadania.

Palavras chaves: Trabalho digital. Colonialismo de dados. Colonialismo digital.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital information and communication technologies (DICT) permeate multiple dimensions of human lives, such as cultural, social, economic and others, and it is undeniable the progress they entail. DICT optimize work, maximize production, allow for global supply chains. In medicine, they provide data base as corpus for research, for drug development, for sophisticated imagery (e.g. X ray, tomography, ultra sound, magnetic resonance etc.), they monitor vital signs that support surgeries, among others. The arts, education, communications and others are in a flux of constant innovation, saving lives, improving quality of live, eliminating diseases etc.

All human activities are considered to have been improved, if not greatly modified by technological advancements (Booth, 2015; Cagle, 2015; Cohen, 2017; Hathaway; Muro, 2016; Flew et al., 2023; HU et al., 2024). Humanity embraces multiple ways of performing human activities by incorporating, innovating and creating knowledge via the use of DICT (Santaella, 2003; Yates et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2022; Akbarjonovna, 2024). The advantages human society can harness from the DICT are numerous (Hu et al. 2024). Becker (2008, p. 50) tells us of technological promises of "more information and knowledge", "more and better education", "more democracy". It is important to know that those goals are desirable and achievable.

However, and unfortunately, these promises do not occur simultaneously nor fairly distributed. Central economies, usually associated with the Global North, create these tools and use them as an opportunity to implement a new form of colonialism on the Global South.

Exploitative by nature, these particular uses of technologies deny access to citizenship, for they are used to transform labor into digital data to collect and manipulate (Becker, 2008; Ramízo, 2022).

Digital colonialism (Mumford, 2021) prey on situations that are already precarious, and where there is little to no intervention from government and society (Santos; Silva, 2018). This paper concentrates on a ride-sharing platform, Uber, which offers on-demand ride services.

Citizenship refers to the social, political, economic rights a person has within her state (Marshall, 1967; Giddens, 2008; Mossberger, 2008). Most recent understanding of citizenship advances the concept by adding new dimensions of equity, equality, universality, participation, and belonging. The advent of the DICT expand on those requirements for inclusion: access to computers, Internet, applications aka Apps, sites; digital literacy, job, housing, privacy, culture, private personal data etc. (Silva; França,]2019).

This is a position paper whose research method is based on bibliographical and documental research from sources such as papers, news, conversations, among others, to look under the hood of colonialist practices used by platforms to secure and expand their exploitative nature. The research question that guide this paper pertains to the study of the colonial practices of digital platforms as being detrimental to citizenship.

It is a goal of this research to shine light on the disenfranchised workers in order to understand how digital colonialism is a new version of colonialism, in which the resources to be explored are data, collected from workers who are treated akin to slaves. It is important to bring consciousness to these conditions, so that workers can be brought into an information service environment where they are valued and are able to make a dignified living. It is also paramount to avoid the consequences of colonialism. It is important to know and understand these practices in order to be able to advance alter/native ways of regulating job relations, reduce dependency, avoid the exploitative nature of capitalism, of which the technologies are a major supporting mechanism.

First, this paper will address the ways in which digital platforms constitute the infrastructure that ushered in a new cultural era, the digital colonial culture. Then, focus will be geared towards understanding the impacts of the digital platforms mediating the new financial capitalism of the neoliberal agenda. Segura and Waisbord (2019, p. 412) argue “[...] that ratification and the opposition in the South does not develop exactly as in the North, given huge political, economic, social and technological differences in the context of the expansion of digital capitalism”.

Emphasis will then be on presenting relational qualities that emerge from platforms’ pervasiveness in our day-to-day lives (Cipolla; Manzini, 2009). Relational qualities are not a feature of the platforms (e.g. easy to use, efficiency, aesthetics etc.), neither a feature of users’ information behavior. Rather, they emerge during the multiple interactions among the actors related to the platform, that make explicit colonial qualities. The relational qualities of the use of platforms are bleak, and they magnify inconsistencies, contradictions, power struggles etc. to undermine citizenship.

There follows a discussion on how the technologies work to further disempower the low-income service workers of these platforms (Ehn, 2008; Escobar, 2020), to help researchers devise a research agenda to counter attempts of hegemonic regime to maintain its status quo. Hegemonic economies work with the premise that the future of developing economies is akin to the current state of affairs in their central society. Thus, they offer solutions that consist of imposing their current way of life mandated by their technologies.

This imperialistic and capitalistic way of thinking has its purpose to maintain the regime ahead of technological advancements and tries to guarantee technology dependency of developing countries. In order to create a future that incorporates local knowledges, beliefs and norms is to break away from this thinking and create futures that are free from such technical imposition (Abílio, 2020; Aguirre; Lisboa, 2021; Aloisi, 2016; Becker, 2008; Booth, 2024; Calzatti, 2021). Álvaro Viera Pinto (2005) tells us about the importance of keeping in mind the dialectic mediation between the individual and the world, without which there is no understanding of technology as a solution to a contradiction that opposes mankind and the environment. Neither a continuation of the present, nor a determined and inescapable fatality, future is an ongoing construction based on our choices and actions to inform a desired citizenship - human rights, housing, health, work, privacy etc.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method used bibliographical and documental research from sources such as papers, news, study groups, among others, to look under the hood of colonialist practices used by platforms. The research followed Kitchenham and Charters (2007) with specific questions: What are the relational qualities of the colonial practices of digital platforms? Which relational qualities are detrimental to citizenship? How do they contribute to create a sub-citizenship (Santos and Silva, 2018)? How do workers relate to these relational qualities regarding their right to exercise full citizenship?

Based on the research questions, a database search on digital colonialism and citizenship was performed. Criteria for exclusion: no access to full paper; tutorials; inaccessible books. The research question were: “digital colonialism”, “data colonialism”, “data colonialism citizenship”, “digital colonialism citizenship”.

Most of the research was conducted on ScienceDirect e Scopus. Additional queries were made on Google Scholar and the journals *Information, Communication & Society* (13 results) and *New Media & Society* (8 results).

Few papers dealt directly with citizenship (Vaz, 2002; Becker, 2008; Mossberger, 2008; Aloisi, 2016; Malin: Chandler, 2017; Santos; Silva, 2018; Ricaurte, 2019; Segura, 2019; Abílio, 2020; Cardoso; Artur; Oliveira, 2020; Aguirre; Lisboa, 2021).

Most papers focused on few aspects of colonialism and variables that would affect citizenship (informal work, low-income work, precarious work conditions, governance, digital labor, worker invisibility, platform algorithm, freedom, among others), but not making a direct connection to lack of citizenship) such as Flew et al. (2023), Gruszka and Böhm (2022), Hatton (2017).

PLATFORMS AND ALGORITHMS: DID I SIGN FOR THIS?

DICT are used by the Global North to create Platforms to colonize the data, information and labor of the Global South (Stiphas, 2015). Uber offers a hegemonic narrative in which car-sharing and ride services are convenient and economical for the rider and lucrative for the driver. However, the reality is that both have their data manipulated to maximize the platform's gains (Booth, 2015; Van Doorn, 2017; Hu *et al.*, 2024).

Hoang, Blank and Quan-Haase (2020) tells us that motivation for workers depends on the type of platforms: ride-share workers tend to do it out of necessity. That is to say that most platform workers are already excluded from the formal economy.

The Algorithm became the new structure of human relations, one that both allows for human agency (Upham *et al.* 2018; Hu *et al.*, 2024) and circumscribes it only to the agency that is allowed. Platforms implement their business models using algorithms, which are presented as an ethereal, ungraspable, not understandable entity that is invisible, not to be questioned. The algorithm dictates all actions and takes no responsibility for any action. People are left with little to no say in their lack of choice.

This shift to a new power relation, which redefines concepts of time, space, communication, rights, law and other human dimensions became a defining factor of our time, changing a person's sense of citizenship (Hill, 2015; Zuboff, 2019).

Platforms are ever expanding their reach to other sectors, as seen in Hind, Kanderske and Van Der Vlist (2022, p.1) who tell us that platforms are driving the automobile industry, creating cars designed "[...] according to platform logics concerning programmability, modularity, connectivity, data collection, and developmental partnerships".

Hill (2015) tells us of the fallacies surrounding these systems by showing us how they thrive on the inequalities and desperation of the oppressed by claiming to provide self-employment and means to livelihood when in fact their use of an algorithm is predatory (WALDKIRCH *et al.*, 2021). Drivers are sold on the illusion that they are entrepreneurs (AGUIRRE; LISBOA, 2021). Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) discuss the ways in which workers are willing to take the risk of insecure work and low pay in hopes of bettering their current situation.

Pettica-Harris, DeGama and Ravishankar (2020, p. 36) tell us that Uber workers:

simultaneously acknowledges and rejects their own precarious employment by distancing techniques such as minimizing the risks and accentuating the advantages of the driver role. We relate these findings to a broader discussion about how driving for Uber fuels the traditional capitalist narrative that working hard and having a dream will lead to advancement, security and success. (Pettica-Harris; DeGama; Ravishankar (2020, p. 36).

PLATFORMS - YOU DON'T HAVE THIS APP?

Deleuze (1992) and Santos (2020) tell us that, in the control society, successor of the disciplinary society, the financial capitalism arising from the neoliberalism ideals is that of constant flux and fast networks, that connects body and subjectivity, sells services, build marketing brands and thrive on crisis.

The current trend of rapidly increasing technological development is lauded with creating new possibilities for human activities that are now automated: bank transactions, remote work, online classes, digital news outlets, among other digital services (Dantas *et al.*, 2022). Ritzer (2011) discuss the McDonaldization of society; Davies and Sinha (2021) discuss uberization and the changes to organizations; Casilli and Posada (2019) discuss the role of platforms in shaping society, technology and economy as a way to create a digital labor relationship; Athique and Parthasarathi (2020) see platformization as an opportunity; Stehlin, Hudson and McMeekin (2020) see platforms as creating urban spaces in which to live.

What is clear is that platforms and their colonialist aspects persist, and the platform capitalistic structure marches on, undeterred. Few voices elucidate that contemporary society experiences today the consequences of decades of the neoliberal policies. Policies that broke ground for the financial capitalism, which exacerbated inequalities, excluded low-income service

workers from the formal economy, increased pay disparities and worsened the already precarious conditions embraced by those who welcomed new ways to market their labor power (Mahmud, 2012; Calzati, 2021). According to Van Doorn (2017, p. 900):

The workforce-as-a-service model that currently dominates corporate 'future of work' imaginaries promotes a technocratic ideal of flexible labor market optimization organized and managed by platforms, which are thereby becoming increasingly important institutional actors in the exceedingly privatized spheres of policy and governance. (Van Doorn, 2017, p. 900).

According to Santaella (2003), digital culture is a concept that embraces multiple dimensions of use, innovation and knowledge advancements brought forth by the DICT, which allows for new kinds of interaction, communication, storage and retrieval, sharing and information agency in social arrangements. However, there are ubiquitous technologies and applications designed to appropriate new, digital resources. This new era relies on digital infrastructures that not only shape the thoughts, meaning attribution, ways of thinking, human beliefs and behavior, but that are mostly responsible to structure (i.e. regulate agency of) new social and cultural environments in multiple dimensions: work, leisure, education, policies, user consume strategies, communications, identity, intellectual and cultural production, among others. All these affordances make the technology a vector of possibilities whilst a tool to further exclusion.

As they comprise the new structure, the technologies create different references. According to Giddens (2009), structures rely on contradictions and crisis to remain as the regime (i.e. to maintain the status quo): the crisis is not to be solved. Instead, crisis justify resource allocation, for example: money from education is funneled, justifiably so by the crisis, to security measures, according to Santos (2020).

Platforms as structures create a world to project us and our trajectories in life (Escobar, 2020). They regard information users as mere cyborg beings (Forlano; Glabau, 2024); they see the world as a coded world (Flusser, 2018), they substitute the natural world in the social production of reality (Pinto, 2005). Grohmann (2020) and Scholz and Schneider (2016) tells us they are not worker-owned, they are not cooperative, not participative and not egalitarian (Scholz; Schneider, 2016). Van Doorn (2017, p. 904) tells us that, to transform such characteristics, it is important that:

Such an investment in technical and organizational infrastructures needs to be carefully embedded in local environments and their affective, moral, and political infrastructures, all of which are deeply gendered and racialized. While platform cooperativism operates in tandem with local organizers and activists, its proponents have a tendency to assume the universal applicability of its solution, which posits collaborative software and cooperative ownership as technologies that have the capacity to move us beyond the antagonisms and inequalities that historically shape particular social settings. This tendency risks a perverse reproduction of Silicon Valley's own vision of the good life, which equates frictionlessness with social justice. (Van Doorn, 2017, p. 904).

DIGITAL COLONIALISM - AM I A GLOBAL CITIZEN?

Giddens (2009) tells us that our agency in the world is increasingly dependent on existential structures. These structures are now composed of platforms. They are virtual, they disregard locality, spatiality, territory, local practices. They are ubiquitous, mobile, and global. They bring information from the most remote parts of the planet, they connect entities over distance and time. They have changed the way people relate to knowledge - confusing access to data with knowledge (Lévy, 2003).

Platforms tells us how to be in the world that is informed by past structures and by the promise of technical evolution that would free users from menial tasks in order to better interact in the human and constructed world, increasingly relying on information. However, the interaction with platforms limits human activities by dehumanization, alienation, submission, dominance etc (Harvey, 2017).

According to Schmidt (2016, p. 5), platforms are "commercial providers of an on-demand workforce that consists mainly of private individuals trying to generate an additional income". Abílio (2020) reinforces that the platform business model is that of a gigantic data extraction, processing and use of mass workers' data which is centralized and monopolized. Platforms act as the Ágora infrastructure that allows supply and demand to be more efficient.

The pace in which platforms adapt to change for their gain is vertiginous, and no single theoretical or practical framework is capable to capture their complexities (Dagar; Tate; Johnstone, 2024; McComb, 2024).

Platforms turn informal work into information, thus making it easy to control and explore. Gillespie (2010, p. 349) tells of the strong discursive positioning behind the use of the term platform, thus indicating a hegemonic narrative to justify their mechanisms of exploitation (Cockayne, 2016). Van Dijck (2021, p. 2802) argues that platforms are so powerful and complex:

[...] because they collectively operate an exclusive set of competing-cum-coordinating platforms that reign the core of the world's digital information systems from which they leverage unprecedented economic, societal, and (geo-)political control. In recent years, tech companies have turned products into data services where customers pay mostly with their personal information and attention. (Van Dijck, 2021, p. 2802).

Cherry (2016) studies how platforms make workers invisible, imperceptible and bodiless in their disposable status: the worker who is going to attend the customers request is a nobody who just happened to be close by. This is a power relation that is conspicuously in favor of the DICT. Another attempt to grasp the reaches of colonialist patterns comes from Zuboff (2018), who says that platforms create new ways of subordination, in which the working force is seen as a mass to explore, and the individual belonging to this mass is easily manipulated, disposable and have no agency to exert their humanity and citizenship.

Platforms have an excess of new workers and consumers (Hathaway; Muro, 2016), aggravated by the fact that all is controlled via a system of rules and quality or performance evaluation - we all want to be a 5-stars! (Ferreira, 2023). Platforms hide their origin, objective, strategies, complexities, relations and infrastructures into invisible, unknown, ethereal, simple, easy to use interaction applications to mediate services in general, thus, seemingly, making their use for

transactions and relations a mere action of pressing a button. They consist of algorithms and features devised to affect users' behavior (Chan; Kwok, 2021).

The platforms and the algorithm are to be maintained at all costs by their creators (Suoheimo, 2019). Susie Cagle (2015) has shown that the payment one receives from their entrepreneurial work for platforms barely cover their working and living expenses, resulting in a vicious cycle of sacrifices just to make ends meet.

Recent research on digital platforms, such as that of Faustino and Lippold (2023) e Soares (2024), Gillespie (2010), Coudry e Mejias (2019), Grohmann (2020), Lippold e Faustino (2022), Mumford (2022), Tello (2023) discuss their impacts in the production, consumption and work relation processes; and the ways in which the use of technologies transformed work into data work. Algorithm mediation is not neutral or random, given that they are social production and implement ideologies, goals, worldview of their creators.

Cassino, Souza e Silveira (2021) tells us that colonialism is present in the social sciences research agenda because it is the cause of many of the problems peripheral societies face today, mostly due to exploitation actions from central societies. The authors say that we are now subject to a different type of colonialism - that of the 'algorithm'.

Couldry and Mejías (2019) termed data colonialism for this new dependency system that intertwines with the capitalism of the digital culture. Digital colonialism is a reality, not a mere metaphor for the seizure of land, resources and labor of historic colonialism (Mumford, 2021, p. 1512).

The current resources that are plundered are data relations and social digital life data made available for extraction by the capital. The algorithms are efficient because they have total access to our data while little to nothing is known about how they capture, store, analyze and use said data.

Žižek (2023) tells us of what he sees as a strange paradox: if modernity was based on the idea that the development and domain of the technique was a path to be followed by humanity to control natural, built and social things, for the philosopher it is quite the opposite that is actually happening - the author observes that, increasingly, society is transferring all sorts of choices (e.g. what and where to eat; which movie to watch; financial transactions etc.) to the algorithm.

We have our agency reduced and submitted to automated processes. Iasi (2023) warns us that as the lack of understanding of the social dimensions of technologies humanizes it whilst automates what is human, thus making it harder to distinguish the contradictions and power relations that structure our autonomy. Automation is taken to be autonomy, and social and subjective relations hinders our agency (Dantas et al., 2022).

PLATFORMS - THE HEGEMONIC NARRATIVE AND THE COLONIALISM REALITY

Hoang, Blank and Quan-Háase (2020, p. 681) argue what some researchers think about platforms:

Optimists argue platform work functions as a social equalizer, opening opportunities for additional earnings for those who need it most. Pessimists suggest that the platform economy widens earning disparities by providing additional income to people who already have good jobs. [...] participation in some platform work, such as rideshare driving and house/laundry cleaning, is motivated out of necessity, while other platform work, such as selling used

goods and performing online tasks, is generally used to supplement incomes. Quan-Háase. 2020, p. 681).

Gillespie (2010, p. 348) alerts that platforms present themselves as ‘progressive egalitarian arrangements’, where anyone has a voice. Cohen (2017, p. 200) presents yet another challenge to deal with platforms: the authors suggest that they have sovereignty, which gives them their own governance and immunity from local and international laws:

Platform territories are not contiguous physical spaces but rather are defined using protocols, data flows, and algorithms. Both technically and experientially, however, they are clearly demarcated spaces with virtual borders that platforms guard vigilantly. [...] they develop and share policy guidelines and construct regulatory institutions and practices. (Cohen, 2017, p. 200).

Inequitable labor conditions, along with their global sovereignty make platform governance almost immune to international and local laws (Sadin, 2015; Cohen, 2017; Bannerman, 2022).

Shen and He (2022, p. 2363) tells us of the uncontrollable way in which they grow:

[...] discusses Alibaba, one of the most prominent Chinese Internet giants, as an infrastructuralized platform, and highlights its geopolitical struggles. Often perceived as an e-commerce company, Alibaba has become ‘infrastructuralized’: its now-massive digital empire has moved beyond e-commerce, expanding into almost every aspect of China’s and global digital economy such as logistics, finance, offline retailing, and cloud computing. (Shen; He, 2022, p. 2363).

Flew, Iosifidis, Meese and Stepnik (2023, p. 2047) question whether the effort to regulate the interchange among platforms and news organizations would be enough to "yield necessary safeguards required to sustain public interest journalism, promote reliable information, and stabilize democratic societies". Westermeier (2020) shows how platforms access financial infrastructures which leads to new structure in which the value of money depends on DICT’s transactional data and dependency on the infrastructures thus provided. This allows for personal, sensitive data to be obtained, making it prone to invasive and abusive behavior by the regime.

Hutchinson (2021, p. 35) argues that, by closely adhering to the platform's logic and strategies, digital activism can become visible and engage public narratives "on civic matters and public affairs". To use the platforms’ algorithm to serve the activists’ own purposes. Ramírez (2022) warns us against the malpractices to which one is subject when using platforms.

Up to this section, this paper has shown the mechanisms that entail relational qualities that are detrimental to the exercise of full citizenship, and how the colonial mechanisms contribute to worsen the already existing sub-citizenship.

EVIDENCING ASPECTS OF PLATFORMS THAT ARE DETRIMENTAL TO CITIZENSHIP

What is prominent in most papers is the power struggles between platforms and society in general. They are relational qualities: those qualities that emerge, not from the platform itself, or the workers or users, but during the intricacies of the relations among all actors (Cipolla; Manzini, 2009).

Digital labor is synonymous with risk and precarious work conditions (Peticca-Harris; de Gama; Ravishankar, 2020). Aguirre and Lisboa (2021) report some of these risks: risk of being

bullied by police or by taxi drivers, by the client or on the destination. Risk of losing the platform account mainly due to lack of legal obligation for the platforms, according to Cohen (2017), Huws (2014) and Bannerman (2022).

Literature tells of workers who are registered on competing platforms as a way to maximize their working hours, which means that they are always on call regardless of the platform they use at a given time (Casilli; Posada, 2019). This strategy takes away the freedom of choice and affects income (Hill, 2015; Hesmondhalgh, 2011; Hoang; Blank; Quan-Háase, 2020) and crushes the concept of partnership (Tomassetti, 2016).

Usually, drivers have to work long hours, with no office, no place for repose, no lunch or bathroom breaks. These conditions make digital labor far from decent work (Hill, 2015; Oliveira; Carelli; Silva, 2020).

Another very common occurrence regards the opaque way a job request is given to a certain driver. Most of the time farther destination is assigned, to a place with almost no possibility of a return fare. The worker has the option of refusing the request, but the algorithm will punish her (Hathaway; Muro, 2016).

The price is differently fixed for the client and the worker. Workers compete to accept or not the requested ride. During peak hours, the platform will increase the price for the client without increasing it for the worker. Additionally, clients have an option to tip the worker; but the platform will charge the worker on the tip received (personal report). One perverse practice is when the user requests a ride during peak hour, and her cell phone is low on battery, thus making her prone to accept a higher rate ride.

Platforms sell ideas of opportunities of self-employment, flexible hours and other amenities of being a "partner" in the business. However, Cardoso, Artur and Oliveira (2020) tells us that this is an illusion, and the correct narrative is that of subordination and dependency (Cherry, 2016; Abílio, 2020; Davis; Sinha, 2021; Cassino; Souza, Silveira, 2021; AkberjonovnaK, 2024).

Taxis were subject to government control, with regulations to guarantee insurance, good conditions of the car, safe driving practices of drivers, central operations for conflict resolution, among other measures to safeguard the worker, the user and the service. Platforms will register most anyone without much vetting, follow-up, training among other precautions (Davis; Sinha, 2021; Van Dijck, 2021).

There is no training for workers on how to provide a service, how to deal with clients etc. Similarly, clients act along a vast array of possible behaviors: from extremely nice to extremely rude. Some clients fail to say hi or bye. Others are drunk or drugged. Some puke inside the car or even at the worker. Some are too conversational. Some are prone to political or religious indoctrination (Waldkirch et al., 2021).

Other ways in which platforms control all aspects of the service are: Lack of accountability: workers are treated not as employees, but as independent contractors (Tomas massetti, 2016; Casilli; Posada, 2019). What would it take for the platform to be workers-owned (Booth, 2015; Cassino; Souza; Silveira, 2021; Chan; Kwok, 2021; Ferreira, 2023).

Lack of transparency - asymmetry of information skew power relations in favor of the platform, while passengers and drivers are left on their own. Neither workers or users receive any information about the platform (Rosenblat; Stark, 2016). Mackenzie (2018) says that platforms' algorithms have increased their opacity.

This lack of transparency plays right into the colonialist mechanisms (Cassiano; Souza; Silveira, 2021; NGUYEN; Beijnon, 2024). Dantas et al. (2022) talk about the value of information: with little to no information, drivers and clients have to make unsupported decisions. Ramízo jr (2022) discuss attempts by citizens against algorithmic control, trying to use tactics to bypass rules - but to minimal and pontual results.

Just-in-time workers - workers will be requested if and only needed. This means that the worker is at disposal, but will only receive any sort of payment when needed, according to Abílio (2020). Workers are no more than a production nuisance with no recognition of her human condition and all its implications (e.g. identity, rights, workload, adequate pay etc.), which is detrimental to their full exercise of citizenship (Cagle, 2015; Cherry, 2016; Dagar; Tate; Johnstone, 2024).

Logic of control - platform controls workers and users with an evaluation system and with multiple performance metrics. (Rosenblat; Stark, 2016). Gruszka and Böhm (2022, p. 1854) say that this practice may increase "individual visibility of the workers toward potential clients", an occurrence that is operationalized, for example, via review and rating systems and online profiles of the workers. Each can rate the other, and the understanding, or lack of there of, is that a worker or a driver with few stars, that is, low evaluation, will be banned. This evaluation process is not error proof: one can just forget to evaluate, or, for whatever reason, give a poor evaluation (personal report). Both passenger and driver think that this evaluation system is a proxy for quality assurance and platform trust building tools, when, in fact they are for surveillance and punishment.

Disparity in Service offer - platform offers one type of service for users and another one for workers (Van Doorn, 2017, p. 904). The author warns that by enforcing this strategy, platforms hides workers from customers and from other workers and from themselves, which, in practice, renders them invisible. This is a blatant contradiction, when invisibility is akin to render users and drivers valueless (Cherry, 2016; Gruszka; Böhm, 2020).

Invisibility is an important tool for understanding the mechanism of rendering platform workers obscure, and exposes who the platform really values and recognizes as a worker, what is recognized as work, and how these questions are negotiated in a platform-mediated digital space.

Lack of information regarding the service requested - users and workers usually choose a service provider for a request without adequate information about it (Guyer, 2010). This hides the parties involved from one another, thus making the service prone to misunderstandings, fights between users and workers that are disregarded by the platform, that is to say, the platform will not intervene in case of altercations. The information asymmetry is a blatant form to impede full exercise of citizenship (Rosenblat; Stark, 2016; Shapiro, et al., 2024).

Lack of contact both with users and other workers - Cherry (2016) analyzes invisibilities as being devaluation tools. Hatton (2017) defines invisible work as valueless due to three main mechanisms: they replicate Global North thinking about class, gender, race etc. Issues of trust and security: platforms do not properly test their workers. People register and easily become workers almost immediately (Peticca-Harris; de Gama; Ravishankar, 2020). As long as workers are driving and clients are paying, all is well. That is to say that platforms do not get involved in whatever contradiction happens during or not a ride.

Exploitation of low-income jobs/workers - heavy, undesirable jobs presented as jobs that pay well and offer flexible hours. Soriano and Cabañes (2020) tells us that workers are caught between opposing narratives of precocity and opportunity. Dehumanizing working conditions:

no social security net, no reasonable hours, no insurance, no real boss, no rights, in other words, no work dignity. To the knowledge of this paper, try as we had, no study was found that shares these concerns.

De-platforming - Van Dijck, de Winkel and Schäfer (2023, 3440) talks about a mechanism through which platforms exclude a worker for breaking rules. Although the term is mostly used for the removal of an individual on social media, on demand platforms also use this strategy. The authors critically ask: "who or what is de platformed, according to which and whose rules, for what type of violation, and to what effect?". Workers are simply dropped from the platform without realizing and without feedback of their supposed fault.

Data relations - our virtual lives are mined for data for profit - data that we provide free and willingly. On a personal account, asking for a ride on a rainy day, at the end of a work shift, with the celular battery running low will increase passenger's rate.

False sense of freedom - Users and workers mindlessly use the platforms for their perceived convenience, oblivious to the consequences. Therefore, they can have no real freedom of choice. Freire (1974) tells us that, although not intuitive, the relation oppressor/oppressed is not that of freedom: the former relies on exploiting the latter in order to create her own freedom; the latter wants to become the former.

Lack of reciprocity - Shapiro, Pippert, Smith and Taylor (2024, p.1) talk about power asymmetry: Asymmetrical reciprocities are collectively held beliefs that authority figures should give or receive more than is normally acceptable. We argue that platforms style themselves as patrons to legitimize their asymmetric power – they cultivate a perception of giving more than they take so that, in practice, they can take more than they give.

This section listed some of the relational qualities and the manner in which workers relate to them regarding their right to exercise full citizenship.

PLATFORMS AND CITIZENSHIP - SOME THOUGHTS

Hegemonic narratives from the Global North tell us that the design of information systems, namely service platforms, hide their true meaning: colonize the Global South. These narratives tell of optimization, progress, functionalities etc. are, in fact, structures used to structure human agency to maximize gains in the form of digital colonialism. Platforms are a product of neoliberal financial capitalism in the form of an existencial world inescapability. In order to maintain the regime, platforms are presented as immutable, unescapable, unquestionable and, most perversely, they are deemed as the only possible solution for human problems.

They do provide a limited set of agency, but only that chosen set is allowed, whilst they block attempts of contraposition. Such oppositions have slowly gaining traction, with actions that prioritize solidarity, collaboration, dignity, way of living, alternative choices and citizenship. Digital work for platforms is synonym with risk and precariousness: there are no legal protections, no partnership, no adequate remuneration, no accountability, no transparency. There are data collection and manipulation, among other practices, that ignore citizenship.

Hidden in the hegemonic narrative of opportunities and sure-fire solutions, platforms resemble colonialism in the way workers and their information resources can be disenfranchised, manipulated, reallocated, exploited and used as disposable labor that is constantly used for profit (HARAWAY, 2006). An argument can be made of such practices that take away conditions for citizenship.

Grohmann (2020), for example, reports three main movements trying to create alternative solutions: the regulation of work; the collective organization of workers and the use of new logics of work organization, such as cooperatives of platforms. But the author agrees that these are mere attempts to minimize the conditions of workers facing the capitalism logic of platforms. The author calls for a bigger confrontation, with local movements on global scales.

This paper focus on presenting the negative relational qualities of platforms as a Social Science object, in order to understand the establishment of the current regime to inform future, more desirable information systems.

To focus solely on the platform's features only plays into the regime's aim of preserving colonialism because it doesn't consider platforms as part of the structure and disregards their mode of geopolitical and cultural production and consumerism.

Anticolonial is used here to counter the term de colonial (Escobar, 2020), which is centered on western political thought, in order to emphasize a more robust, militant research tradition (Fanon, 2022) that has a reconstructive agenda, mainly to diagnose and undo the psychological dynamics of colonialism through which the colonized identify with and accept the hierarchy of values established by the dominating power (Getachew; Mantena, 2021, p. 363). As Huws (2014) points out, new forms of work control demand new forms of organization and resistance.

CONCLUSION

This paper advances the issues of Digital Colonialism Culture with a call to researchers to include existential structural systems, particularly platform systems, as an object of user's information and behavior studies.

This paper showed the mechanisms with which the platforms exploit digital labor. Such mechanisms prey on low-income, underemployed or unemployed workers, who already are in a dire situation regarding their standing in the formal economy. How do they contribute to create a sub-citizenship? They use predatory mechanisms to maximize their profit and to maintain the workers in a constant state of precarious work conditions, low-income, long working hours and no decent income, at least not enough to allow them to better their conditions.

Platforms have anchored their new colonialist practices on technological, financial and political bases supported by the datafication of power relations and the myth of the algorithm and its aura of infallibility, which allows for control without questions. Some of the most perverse relational qualities that platforms use are: asymmetry of information, opacity regarding service request, illusion of worker autonomy and partnership, collection and manipulation of private data to maximize gains, evaluation system used for punishment (rather than to improve service), lack of training, price fixing, disregard for accountability, dehumanizing of working conditions, among others.

As the concept of citizenship evolves beyond the traditional rights, such as political, economical and political rights, into more inclusive belonging to the society, dignity of work, living, health, happiness, among others, this paper considers that all colonial practices used by platforms are detrimental to the full exercise of citizenship, they require that upon which attention be focused.

Workers usually try to bypass the practices and controls sometimes in contradictory ways, such as knowing and ignoring their precarious employment. They cling to the narrative

that hard work, even at the expense of health, is a path to success. This aspect of platform users behavior requires additional studies.

Focus should be geared from the features of the platforms themselves towards their impacts on information users' lives, in order to expose colonialist mechanisms to be opposed, and to inform the design of alter/native local systems.

This paper also provides a new opportunity to introduce a broader definition of the object of study and of new epistemologies as a research tool for studies that exposes the *status quo* and inform the project of new, desirable, human-centered information systems, where real human beings exist in a healthier manner, valuing human relations.

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