Subjectivation and psychosocial risks of the uberization of work in territorial dynamics

Subjetivação e riscos psicossociais da uberização do trabalho nas dinâmicas territoriais

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Abstract

In view of the economic, political, and technological changes in the world of work within the urban territory, nowadays we are facing new informalities that increase the precariousness of work relationships and conditions in a global level. This essay aims to reflect critically on new subjectivations and on psychosocial risks related to the uberization of work, analyzing their impacts on territorial dynamics. We highlight platform companies that offer taxi and delivery services, and we provide a panorama that shifts from the international to the national scenario. Uberized workers face unique episodes of violence committed by platform companies and urban violence, which intensify psychosocial risks and harm workers' dignity, health, and quality of life. The practices of platform companies, as well as their management and contradictions, reveal a deprivation of the right to the city and the capture of workers' subjectivity.

Keywords: precarization and uberization of work; mental health; urban territory; subjectivation; psychosocial risks.

Resumo

Diante das mudanças econômicas, políticas e tecnológicas do mundo do trabalho no território urbano, enfrentamos hoje novas informalidades que precarizam as relações e condições de trabalho de forma global. O objetivo deste ensaio é tecer reflexões críticas sobre os processos de novas subjetivações e riscos psicossociais da uberização do trabalho e seus impactos nas dinâmicas territoriais, destacando as empresas-plataforma que oferecem serviços de táxi e entrega, fazendo um panorama que desloca do cenário internacional para o nacional. Os trabalhadores uberizados enfrentam situações singulares de violências das empresas-plataforma e urbana, agravando os riscos psicossociais, a dignidade, a saúde e a qualidade de vida dos trabalhadores. As práticas, gestão e contradições dessas empresas denotam a privação do direito à cidade e a captura da subjetividade dos trabalhadores.

Palavras-chave: *precarização e uberização do trabalho; saúde mental; território urbano; subjetivação; riscos psicossociais.*

Introduction

Through the discourse on improvements and modernization of the global market, along with new technological and social advances, the capitalist system develops new management strategies and labor modalities that impact territorial dynamics, compel workers to construct new forms of subjectivation, and subject them to psychosocial risks. In alignment with various authors (Pereira et al., 2020; Rodrigues, Faiad and Facas, 2020), this essay adopts the concept of psychosocial risks as physical, psychological, and social factors resulting from adverse work organization and management. These factors aggravate workers' health conditions, potentially triggering mental illness and other negative impacts, both within and outside the workplace.

Pressure from the international financial market encourages the worldwide adoption of other forms of work in neoliberal processes of city production as a state project (Seixas and Bordignon, 2022). In Brazil, this pressure is legitimized through Laws No. 13,429/2017 (Brazil, 2017a) and 13,467/2017 (Brazil, 2017b), which expand labor outsourcing contracts, and Constitutional Amendment No. 103/2019 (Brazil, 2019). Together, these laws make labor contracts more flexible and fragile (Alves, 2011b), and favor and support new forms of informal work, such as those based on digital platforms owned by so-called platform companies. This, in turn, undermines the security of working conditions and relations, while reducing labor social protection and guarantees.

These laws are associated with the phenomenon of platformization, which signifies the emergence of a new digital-era proletariat. This shift is driven by the way capital leverages Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to mediate the relationship between urban services, citizens, and cities. The primary goal, as articulated by companies, is to promote sustainable development and enhance the quality of life for the population, with profit seen as a secondary outcome. The use of these technologies generally requires internet connectivity and the workers owning a smartphone. In Brazil, Uber stands out as possibly the most popular of these platform companies, such that the term Uberization of work is commonly employed when referring to work processes that are mediated by platforms (Abílio, 2019, 2020 and 2021; Antunes, 2020).

This essay will primarily focus on Uberized workers (Abílio, 2020) involved in transporting people and delivering goods for well-known platform companies including 99, Uber, UberEats, iFood, and Rappi, given their significant national and international presence and prominence (Antunes, 2020; Slee, 2019). We will delve into the phenomena of social exclusion, privatization of urban space, and the deprivation of workers' rights as citizens. These outcomes are a consequence of labor flexibilization and superexploitation driven by the neoliberal logic, as articulated through the term 'flexploitation' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 125; Areosa, 2020), as well as the deprivation of the right to the city (Carlos, 2014; Harvey, 2014). We will highlight the missions – a legal-administrative term that designates the identities, the raison d'être (reason for being), and purposes that every company must declare by law (Scorsolini-Comin, 2012) – that 99, Uber, UberEats, iFood, and Rappi advocate for. Through their missions, we aim to reveal contradictions between their narratives and

discourse and their practices of controlling workers' activities in the urban territory (Cardoso, 2022) through the platforms' algorithms.

Thus, we observe changes of both economic and political nature in the world of work, which influence territorial dynamics and have a negative impact on the population's quality of life. Within this scenario, we seek to understand the peculiarities of the processes of subjectivation of workers within Uberized work, as well as the singularities of the psychosocial risks to which such workers are susceptible in their daily lives in urban territories.

Subjectivation, in this context, is understood as the process of forming subjectivity that constitutes the individual (Aita and Facci, 2011; Rey, 2002, and 2007). It is the phenomenon in which individuals construct, reconstruct, organize, and manifest their thoughts, affects, feelings, and emotions in a unique way. This process is socially produced in interaction with others, within a given historical and cultural context, in the various spaces they operate and will operate throughout their lives (Mitjáns Martínez, 2005; Rey, 2002). Therefore, discussing new subjectivations requires acknowledging the constitution of new individuals. Particularly concerning working individuals, our interest lies in examining how the organization and management of labor integrate and modify their process of subjectivation.

The main objective of this essay is to engage in critical reflections on the processes of new subjectivations and psychosocial risks arising from the Uberization of work and their impact on territorial dynamics. The essay seeks to unveil paradoxes and contradictions present in both neoliberal cities and the discourse of platform companies. They involve a narrative that promotes sustainable development and quality of life in urban areas, contrasting with their management and control practices, which reveal a violent and perverse precariousness. Moreover, these practices harm workers psychologically, socially, and politically.

We employed methodological procedures involving the search and consultation of secondary sources, including printed and electronic academic documents. These sources were subjected to the systematic scientific reading method outlined by Cervo and Bervian (2002). This method involves locating sources that align with the study's objectives, comprehending, and conducting a critical-reflective reading of selected materials and their respective networks of meanings and significance. This process ultimately culminates in interpretive reading.

Global capital in the world of work

Looking at the transformations that have occurred in the labor universe over the past forty years, it is clear that companies are concerned with developing strategies to attract and engage workers in order to fuel the constant expansion of profit generation within the economic-financial system through labor exploitation (Silva Resende, Mata, and Paiva Castro, 2015). In this endeavor, they promote a discourse in which there would supposedly be a win-win game. That is, the company, on its part, would be willing to organize itself to attractively meet the worker's demands, desires, and needs. In return, the worker would

do the same for the company, joining in the support of social and environmental projects maintained by it. In principle, both would benefit from this game, resulting in a positive social image of a company that considers the worker's demands, inducing them to take pride in working in an environment where they feel welcomed.

In recent years, the transmutation of these concerns has been equally clear, being replaced, summarized, and significantly reduced to increase corporate profits (Galhardo, 2020; Secco and Kovaleski, 2022; Silva and Neto, 2021). This process is anchored in the deregulation of financial markets, which emphasizes the globalization of capital without state control. Here, the dominant system is, first and foremost, economic. In a dialogical and complex way, the logic of the means of production of various goods and services is based on financial benefits, regulating, dictating, oppressing, challenging, constituting, controlling, and impacting the world of work. That is why it is not only a neoliberal system but a globalizing neoliberal political-economic system, as it affects how the entire network of people's rights is conceived, thus its political dimension, beyond the economic dimension (Alves, 2011a and 2011b).

These aspects were crucial for the consolidation of globalization, allowing financial capital to become the fundamental determinant of the economy. Thus, Gaulejac points out (Braz and Silva, 2020, pp. 3-4), "real economy, that is, the production economy, the territorialized economy, the industrial economy, has been completely transformed by the profitability and productivity demands of shareholder value". The author further argues that in earlier periods, there was at least some concern about balancing capital and labor within organizations, even if, in practice, capital overshadowed concerns about labor. In today's hypermodern world, this concern is weakened to the point of being erased and replaced by financial-capital value.

Thus, the economy of territorialized production makes the market omnipotent, creating management strategies to accelerate productivity and supervise, measure, and evaluate work through quantitative performance and assessment indicators, which can be transformed into financial indicators. The value of human labor becomes the financial value generated without social or sustainability concerns. The meaning of work is shifted to other dimensions, of an economic-financial nature, extinguishing the appreciation and recognition of people's efforts. The management system design aims to establish control mechanisms that guarantee increasing financial returns, to produce more with fewer resources, fewer processes, in less time, with fewer people, and less waste (Garcia, 2019; Thomaz Júnior, 2019).

In the processes of redesigning modes of production, and applying management and worker management paradigms, Lean Production operates these reductions, arguing that increasing productivity with less investment in resources leads to high levels of excellence. This logic is concerning because historically, it has resulted in an increase in psychosocial risks, such as different cases of stress, anxiety crises and malaise, psychosomatic symptoms, depression,

harassment, burnout, and work-related suicide (Chagas, 2015; Pereira et al., 2020; Rodrigues, Faiad, and Facas, 2020).

The detection of these psychopathological symptoms highlights how the meaning and value in the world of work have been altered, degrading the dignity and mental health of workers (Braz and Silva, 2020). The management strategy based on the capitalist political-economic system absolves organizations and the state from co-responsibility for the psychosocial risks that negatively impact the mental health of workers, legitimizing and reinforcing their globalizing origins and effects (Franco and Ferraz, 2019; Monteiro et al., 2022; Nascimento and Borges, 2022). Mental health thus takes on a central role in the discussion of the world of work, as its concept encompasses the worker's efforts to reconcile, cope with, and balance the daily challenges, adversities, and tensions at work. In this process, workers need management and work organization that promotes autonomy and cooperation, allows for dialogue, and provides a space for speaking and listening so that sources of suffering and illness can be expressed. It is necessary to collectively negotiate more creative, democratic, and healthy ways of resolving adversities, constraints, anxieties, and other work-related issues, redefining work experiences as sources of pleasure and better quality of life (Galhardo, 2020; Goulart, 2013; Monteiro et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2020; Silva Resende, Mata e Paiva Castro, 2015). This dialogue requires constant engagement with unions, aiming to recognize the causality between illness and work.

Indeed, decades passed before organizations took responsibility and recognized that there are psychosocial risks at work that can harm workers' health (Franco and Ferraz, 2019; Monteiro et al., 2022). What is being discussed today are new forms of alienation and exploitation that mobilize union and governmental interventions for improvements concerning health and labor rights. Therefore, problems arising from work activity should not be individualized, nor should the workers be blamed for them. The struggle must continue, which, today, takes on a new configuration: the struggle for spaces, replacing the typical class struggle of industrial capitalism. The dispute is now about securing a space in the world to survive and exist in society. Those who do not engage in this struggle do not exist. And those who lose the dispute are ignored, discarded, excluded (Silva and Pacheco, 2017).

In view of this, companies perceive the need both to constantly reinvent themselves to keep up with technological (Dias, Fernandes, and Silva, 2022), social, and economic transformations in the world, creating rules, norms, and goals for their workers, and to leverage available technologies to enhance productivity and competitiveness. Contradictorily, however, the demands imposed by companies to meet the expectations of international institutions regarding quality control and excellence (Gaulejac, 2007) of products and services do not correspond to the resources they provide to workers to fulfill their responsibilities, leading to alienation, dissatisfaction, suffering, and illness. As a

result, paradoxes (Gaulejac, 2021) arise in the work context, where prescriptions diverge from actual working conditions, triggering a sense of helplessness and guilt in workers when they cannot adapt, accept, or flexibilize themselves sufficiently in the effort to "be a team player" and "give their all" for the organization's success (Gaulejac, Braz, and Silva, 2020; Linhares and Siqueira, 2014; Viana Braz, 2019).

There is a direct relationship between flexibility which primarily serves the interests of capital and the precarization of work. As states increasingly submit to neoliberal impositions, requiring workers to be flexible, multifunctional, multidisciplinary, and possess multiple skills and competencies that span different responsibilities to meet organizational demands, precarization ensues. These conditions are a result of the flexploitation of workers (Areosa, 2020; Bourdieu, 1998, p. 125). By combining flexibility and superexploitation, flexploitation operates through the ever-increasing demand for excellence in productivity and organizational results displayed by workers, without their conditions and guarantees of social and labor protection being improved or even maintained.

André, Silva, and Nascimento (2019) observe that there is a difference between precariousness and precarization. Precariousness relates to work organization based on economic and financial ends that colonize workers and condition them to carry out their activities in contexts of risk and degradation, making them vulnerable, legally, socially, and psychologically unprotected, generating in them feelings of insecurity and powerlessness. Precarization, on the other hand, occurs when, through precariousness mechanisms, work deteriorates, and workers lose their stability and historically constructed labor rights (Alves, 2011b; Galvão et al., 2019).

Precarization is thus conceived as a multifaceted phenomenon in which workers have their rights and recognitions denied (Franco, Druck, and Seligmann-Silva, 2010) and gradually suppressed. Faced with precarization, workers develop strategies to withstand the sources of suffering and survive in territorial disputes. When these strategies fail, workers become ill, without being fully aware of the entire process that impacts not only their physical and economic dimensions but also their psychological and social dimensions, and imposes new forms of subjectivation (Alves, 2011a; Franco, Druck, and Seligmann-Silva, 2010; Nascimento and Muniz, 2019). It is within this context of flexibilization and precarization that the Uberization of work takes place through the actions of platform companies.

Labor precarization, uberization, and territorial dynamics

In the dynamics of spatial reproduction within the globalizing neoliberal political-economic system, which underscores social inequalities and exclusions, workers seek survival opportunities in urban areas, especially in metropolitan regions, metropolises, and medium-sized cities. Thus, the relationship between capital and labor takes on territorial dimensions, accentuating the manifestation, within space, of processes of superexploitation.

With scientific and technological advancements being under the submission of the interests of the financial market in recent years (Dias, 2022), neoliberal rules were strengthened, generating new productive and management models and a consequent scenario of worldwide labor precarization. Thus, the formula of Uberization (Abílio, 2020) consolidates itself in a world of work experiencing historical fragility, marked by deregulation that favors the emergence of new informalities and the disintegration of the working class due to the weakening of trade union movements. Uberization and precarization thus become a conceptual pair in a relationship of intimate interdependence (Abílio, 2021; Mendonça Azevedo and Oliveira, 2022).

In his work titled "Uberization: The New Wave of Precarious Work", Slee (2019) emphasizes that the phenomenon of Uberization was originally conceived and articulated to compose a sharing economy. Oitaven, Carelli, and Casagrande (2018) argue that Uberization would first constitute an informal economy designated by the authors as the "gig economy" (p. 11) – categorized into crowdwork, work on demand, and even characterized as non-standard work. These terms refer to work on demand, carried out entirely electronically, mediated by online platforms that connect companies, clients, and registered workers, who must be active and agreeing to submit to the controls, norms, and rules of the platform companies' algorithms (Cardoso, 2022; Rauber et al., 2022). The algorithms conduct searches and feed databases based on customer profiles, predicting their behavior and general conditions (Slee, 2019).

However, the algorithmic system defined by the platform company also operates an evaluation scheme that assigns ratings to the provided service, along with other ambiguous and obscured measures of gamification, surveillance, bonuses, and penalties (Braz et al., 2020; Cardoso et al., 2022). The system establishes quality standards for the existence and upkeep of the platform company, requiring workers to meet these standards. In light of such practices, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2006), in recommendation 198, globally encouraged states to intervene in contexts where false employment relationships are identified. Furthermore, the state must create laws and policies for the protection, humanization, and guarantee of labor rights, inspecting and penalizing companies that operate deceitfully while maintaining a discourse in which they offer an opportunity for work disguised as employment. To problematize the ILO's incentive and contrast the discourses and practices of platform companies, we highlight, in Chart 1, some of the missions expressed by these companies.

Chart 1 – Missions of platform companies providing urban taxi services and goods delivery, using motor vehicles, bicycles, or motorcycles

Platform company	Mission (source and date of access)
A 99 – 99	*In addition to our ongoing efforts for better service, we pursue the mission of positively impacting the population by making transportation cheaper, faster, and safer for passengers and everyday life more profitable and peaceful for drivers through technology.* (Available at: https://99app.com/sobre-a-99/. Accessed on: Jan 31, 2023).
iFood	We are much more than a food delivery service: we are a market, a pharmacy, a pet store, and a provider of benefits. And we are *eager to nourish the future of the world with our projects in Education, Environment, Diversity and Inclusion, in addition to promoting greater appreciation for those who make deliveries!* (Available at: https://news.ifood.com.br/teste-blocos/. Accessed on: Jan 31, 2023).
Rappi	*Our mission is to drive economic development across cities in Latin America by accelerating e-commerce adoption*. (Available at: https://about.rappi.com/br/quem-somos. Accessed on: Jan 31, 2023).
Uber	The kind of people who are relentless about our mission *to help people go anywhere and get anything and earn their way*. Movement is what we power. It's our lifeblood. It runs through our veins. It's what gets us out of bed each morning. It pushes us to constantly reimagine how we can move better. For you. For all the places you want to go. For all the things you want to get. *For all the ways you want to earn*. Across the entire world. In real time. At the incredible speed of now. (Available at: https://www.uber.com/br/pt-br/about/. Accessed on: Jan 31, 2023).
UberEats	UberEats' mission is *to make eating well effortless for everyone, everywhere. We want to be able to deliver to our users anything they want to eat: breakfast bright and early, lunch from the neighborhood restaurant, dinner from the city's finest dining establishments.* (Available at: https://epocanegocios.globo.com/Tecnologia/noticia/2017/04/sempre-que-ha-mais-opcoes-para-os-clientes-e-uma-coisa-boa-diz-diretor-geral-do-ubereats.html. Accessed on: Jan 31, 2023).

Source: prepared by the authors, based on consultation of the companies' websites; emphasis added.

With the discourse of providing greater fluidity to urban navigation, with more affordable prices and increased mobility and mobilization, combined with the supposed convenience of picking up and dropping off customers at their selected locations (taxi) or shipping selected and purchased products to the customer (delivery) more comfortably and safely, these companies end up attracting a certain clientele. This clientele prefers to use the apps rather than risk the potential overcrowding, discomfort, and insecurity of public transportation, plus the time it can take to reach said location, which are not always easily accessible. However, beyond the conveniences offered to the customer, it is important to consider at what cost these services are maintained, emphasizing the perspective of the workers and the psychosocial and labor consequences they suffer.

This spatialization of individualism as a hallmark of a new territorial reality (Seixas and Bordignon, 2022) aligns with a significant loss of a sense of collectivity and of struggling for the improvement of public goods, failing to fulfill the political function of the city. If urbanization is essential for capital accumulation, allowing for Uberization is to adopt a State project that systematically and daily subordinates urban life. This issue permeates the practices of the platform companies themselves and is one of their concerns: tirelessly, they plan and execute strategies to stay in the market and continue to profit, even if their strategies precarize labor or interpersonal relationships, mental health, and all other important dimensions of the lives of uberized workers (Barreira, 2021).

The ILO report (2018) confirms that work carried out by digital platforms is typically urban, showing that four out of every five workers operate in cities. This data is specified in a study by the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (Ipea, Institute of Applied Economic Research) (Góes, Firmino, and Martins, 2021), which estimated 1.4 million workers in the passenger and goods transport sector in Brazil, in labor relations between workers "and companies that hire labor to perform sporadic services without formal employment ties, mainly through apps" (ibid., p. 1).

There is, therefore, a managerial discourse of domination based on a paradox: platform companies do not practice what they preach. The contradiction lies between the companies' goals and the means they employ to stay in the market, at the expense of the superexploitation of workers. This paradox is rendered invisible, based on a managerial order grounded in sovereign instrumental rationality: the worker exists to keep the organization running. This is none other than the basis of capital accumulation, according to which the worker sells their surplus value to an employer who profits and reinvests in the company the capital gained from the exploitation of labor. Platform companies use this expedient, presenting themselves as harmless and concerned with the socio-environmental well-being of workers and customers, but their practice is violent: despite being the authors of the impositions, they are perceived as legitimate, while those who suffer from them develop feelings of guilt. Thus, Uberization is promoted as the hero because, symbolically, it removes the worker from the social shame of being unemployed.

Uberization, therefore, manifests not only as a new informality advent from the structural political-economic changes that globalized labor relations in a precarious manner. It also manifests as a form of work organization commanded by computational algorithms developed by companies (Antunes, 2020; Areosa, 2020; Uchôa-de-Oliveira, 2020), detrimentally altering the health-disease relationship in the workplace (Barreira, 2021; Barreira and Nogueira, 2022; Masson and Christo, 2021).

Here, Sato's (2017) reflections on different phases of work in the urban context and the intense and constant displacement of workers between central and peripheral urban areas are pertinent. Analyzing the Brazilian context, the author identifies the phenomenon of work polymorphism, which consists of the complex shifts that workers are forced to make in order to engage in multiple activities simultaneously, migrating between markets and creating jobs. In this perspective, Uchôa-de-Oliveira (2022) situates the precariousness

of the polymorphous nature of work in Brazil, mobilizing and reconfiguring Brazilian workers throughout history.

Based on the collection and analysis of narratives from workers of an uberized taxi service in Rio de Janeiro, André, Silva, and Nascimento (2019) highlight: a) episodes of gamification in which the driver should pass on their code to another worker and, if the other worker joined the app-based company, the driver would be rewarded; b) the contradictions in which the company regards the workers as partners, but they are the ones who bear all expenses and vehicle maintenance, including in situations where they may suffer an accident with themselves or with a third party or that may incur damage to the vehicle; c) discounts with which they are rewarded for strategic services, such as for car-cleaning services, to benefit the company's image rather than that of the uberized worker; d) excessive work journeys: interviewees reported working shifts of 8 to 20 hours, and on average, they argued that it was common to work about 10 hours a day, often making runs every day of the week; e) remuneration: Interviewees reported the necessity of accepting more rides in the city, as taking more trips resulted in higher remuneration. Notably, for a particular platform company, there was an automatic and non-transparent fare deduction method (potentially more than one), that withheld approximately 25% of the value of each ride; f) a sense of insecurity while traveling in certain areas of the city, and also due to the fact that the platform company may not have regulated activity in the municipality. This situation promotes fear, stress, and anxiety as they do not know if they can continue to rely on this work since the platform can cease its operation at any moment; g) psychosocial risks, subjective precariousness, and the impact of work on the health of the drivers, especially on mental health, as they feel watched, pressured, and evaluated daily, and may even be penalized by being excluded from the platform (André, Silva, and Nascimento, 2019; Barreira, 2021; Barreira and Nogueira, 2022; Masson and Christo, 2021).

More than a context of exploitation, the narratives exemplify a superexploitation that constitutes a predatory and degrading practice that weakens work relations and conditions, capturing and hijacking the subjectivity (Ferraz, 2019; Viapiana, Gomes, and Albuquerque, 2018) and dignity of Uberized workers, thus contradicting the missions proclaimed by platform companies. The workers also shared negative experiences of punitive measures, such as the account of a worker who, despite being available/online for 10 hours in one day, was assigned only one ride; the constant lack of training and organizational support; and the absence of concrete legal ties and symbolic/subjective guarantees. This whole scenario was interpreted by the delivery workers as a condition analogous to slavery, as provided by law No. 10,803 (Brazil, 2003). However, some interviewees do not recognize that being an Uberized worker necessarily implies being a precarious worker (André, Silva, and Nascimento, 2019).

In research conducted in the Metropolitan Region (MR) of Belo Horizonte with delivery workers using motorcycles and bicycles, Rocha, Pistolato, and Diniz (2021) corroborate and complement the phenomenon of Uberization and precarization of the drivers in Rio de Janeiro interviewed by André, Silva, and Nascimento (2019). Based on the workers' accounts, we can see that, like Uber and 99 drivers, they had also received punitive measures (blocked on the platform) for refusing a route and/or ride (service requested by the user via the app) assigned to them by the platform. The algorithm also sets a time limit for each delivery to be completed. If the worker exceeds this limit, they stop getting assignments. Thus, they may engage in reckless behavior in traffic to ensure that they are prioritized by the algorithm and continue to receive assignments. In fact, these delivery workers reported that they engage in reckless behavior in traffic to avoid punitive measures: blowing through red lights, coming up with shortcuts for faster delivery, and "cutting drivers off", illegally overtaking other vehicles to speed up their delivery aiming to complete more rides or deliveries. They also reported situations of embarrassment when entering condominiums with their thermal bags, sometimes in rain gear and/or drenched. There is an account of a situation in which the delivery worker was informed by the building's doorman that the customer had Covid-19, in a context where there was still no vaccine, and he refused to go to the customer out of fear of being infected. The customer complained that he did not receive the delivery in his apartment and rated the worker poorly on the platform. In another interview, a delivery worker disclosed that he hadn't logged a food delivery accurately on the app since he had eaten the intended delivery for being hungry during his shift and could not take a break to eat. The authors interpret this strategy as an attempt by workers to compensate for the injustices they suffer daily (Rocha, Pistolato, and Diniz, 2021).

When interviewing motorcycle couriers in the MR of Belém, Carvalho (2022) highlighted the importance of understanding territorial dynamics, as they externalize specific social relations arising from these workers, characterizing a reality of exclusion and precariousness generated by capital. Carvalho explains that,

> In this trajectory, the work of motorcycle couriers needs to be understood through the dimension of space, which permeates their lived experience in its historical determination, the conceived, and the perceived reality, defined by their insertion as a social class and their commitment as a social group. Thus, territory is the fundamental category as it allows us to see that the spatialization of the misery of precarious work territorializes itself based on power relations, the domination of market flows, which are controlled by those who dominate the influx of capital through the exploitation and plunder made possible by Uberization. (Ibid., pp. 92-93)

Therefore, the plasticity of work within the territory implies new processes of subjectivation and new forms of collective mobilization among Uberized workers. It is through the category of territory that it is possible to observe, between the lines of the globalizing neoliberal political-economic system, the evidence of social injustices, the spatialization of misery, power relations, as well as movements of domination, exploitation,

and control that constitute Uberized work, impacting the dimensions of territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization (Thomaz Júnior, 2019).

Neoliberalism articulates strategies to weaken the sense of collectivity and class consciousness among Uberized workers to further subjugate the poorest while ensuring its power and existence through superexploitation. Observing the routines and work dynamics in the MR of Belém, Carvalho (2022) emphasizes the basis of the superexploitation strategy based on the number of daily runs (ranging from 0 to 30, with an average of around 15 per day); the distance traveled (ranging from 30 to 200 km per day, with most averaging around 100 km per day); the number of hours worked (0 to 19 hours: the vast majority stated that they work more than 13 hours a day), with a monthly financial return ranging from R$1,000.00 to R$1,500.00, varying based on the number of daily runs. These figures, as reported in Carvalho's studies (ibid.), corroborate research by Cardoso et al. (2022) in Juiz de Fora; Rocha, Pistolato e Diniz (2021) in the MR of Belo Horizonte; Salvagni, Valentina e Colomby (2022) in the MR of Porto Alegre; André, Silva e Nascimento (2019) in the MR of Rio de Janeiro; and Souza Moraes, Oliveira e Accorsi (2019) in the MR of São Paulo.

The actions of platform companies affect territorial dynamics in different ways. First, because their algorithms map the entire territory where drivers and delivery workers circulate, assigning numerical values to each location and event, thereby inculcating in workers and customers a new way of relating to urban space, i.e., through its cartographic representation. It should not be forgotten that this representation displays only information selected and controlled by the companies, aiming to provide users with readings of their interest. Second, because workers and customers users of the maps are the primary providers of the information represented in them, often without being fully aware of this fact. For instance, the customer is identified and characterized not only through the data collected at the moment of their interaction with the app but also by the information accumulated by the platform about them and other users with similar profiles, in statistical and demographic terms (Gillespie, 2018). In addition to being available in the graphical interface of the apps, much of the information extracted without full consent remains hidden in the system's metadata, monetized for the exclusive benefit of the companies. By extracting, mining, processing, and analyzing georeferenced city data, platform companies identify areas with higher qualified demand and manipulate the flow of workers with attractive dynamic rates. Third, because one of the main objectives of the companies is to continually expand the territory where work is carried out, along with the expansion of the number of users. To achieve this, the computerized mapping and georeferencing system permanently expands and updates its database, increasing and enhancing its algorithmic management capacity of the territory (Langley and Leyshon, 2017).

We have, therefore, what Geography terms geographical processes of Territorialization-Deterritorialization-Reterritorialization (Chelotti, 2010), constituting an inseparable conceptual triad in continuous dynamism. Paraphrasing Chelotti, the connections between drivers and customers and the urban territory correspond

to territorialization, while the destruction – including temporary destruction – of these connections by the computational logic of the platforms constitutes deterritorialization. Their continuous recreation by algorithms, in turn, would preside over the subjects' reterritorialization processes. In this way, platform companies add, to the understanding of urban space, an information layer entirely controlled by them, perpetually manipulating the relationship between workers and the city according to corporate interests. Carvalho (2022) adds that

> [...] these workers suffer from the insecurity caused by the algorithmic logic that reproduces itself in the territory, using neoliberal logic and even globalization, causing high unemployment rates, enabling the deterritorialization of workers, and starting to control the reterritorializations in work processes, based on the growing numbers of unemployed people, who have platformized work as the only means to ensure their socio-spatial reproduction. (pp. 106-107)

Urbanization, according to Garcia (2019), is increasingly expressing the complex contradictions of human relations in territories, especially urban ones, emphasizing work dynamics. Reterritorialization, grounded in corporate interests and imposed covertly on workers, superimposes itself on the already perverse logics of urban occupation polarized between downtown areas and ghettos, with serious consequences for workers' lives, as argued by Garcia (ibid.):

> Urban commuting itself becomes an extension of work alienation. The endless journey between the inaccessible ghettos and precarious work or places of consumption reinforces the daily burden on workers' lives. The cost of reproducing the workforce includes the value extracted from rent, transportation fares, medicine prices, and school fees. Exploitation also materializes in the form of phone and utility bills. But worse than that, alienated life turns into a life without meaning, a life brutalized by dehumanization and violence. Money is the only meaning that seems to matter and serves only to maintain biological, animal survival. This process of urbanization will finally harvest the influx of technological innovations in informatics and telematics. The enormous capacity for processing, storing, and manipulating data (Big Data), organized by algorithms with increasingly artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities; the ability to manage information and decision-making processes in real-time surpasses the traditional role of physical space and reshapes not only the reproduction of capital but also the reproduction of life, considered in a new conception of territory (pp. 733-734).

Rolnik (2019) and Antunes (2020) support this interpretation, pointing out that the process of industrialization and urbanization promotes the privatization and financialization of basic resources such as sanitation, water, and energy, as well as social rights like healthcare, education, and security. The precarious condition of Uberized work thus directly impacts urban territory, particularly

concerning one of the primary rights to the city, which is urban mobility, as platform companies present themselves as businesses that "connect people", supposedly facilitating transportation services.

Motta Júnior (2019) highlights that in the early days of the industrial city, the spatial organizational logic was based on attracting and concentrating many workers to serve the interests of capital and accumulate wealth. It's important to remember that public administrators themselves were part of the local industrial and commercial bourgeoisie, thus participating in the formulation of the city project. This intermingling of public and economic interests between groups continues to generate tensions in public administration, exacerbating the unequal occupation of urban territory. The new forms of employment relationships practiced by platform companies establish a logic of urban space organization, especially those involving drivers in taxi and delivery services, whose algorithms resignify the understanding of territory by means of artificial intelligence, as the author explains:

> The power of the networks expands the operating scale of these companies, allowing global reach and enabling mass expropriation of value generated by labor. This technology allows comprehensive control over workers and the territory of large cities. (Ibid., p. 1913)

Employing strategies involving targets, gamification, and bonuses, platform companies exert control over specific areas of the city and the pace of workers' movements, thus establishing territorial dominance over both workers and their vehicles within urban space. By prioritizing certain areas, they incentivize workers to compete for these locations, motivating them to relocate to the most strategically advantageous ones in order to receive ride requests based on proximity. In other situations, companies may offer bonuses for starting a ride in a more distant part of the city, increasing certain fares based on location and working conditions (e.g., flexible rates during rainy weather or depending on high traffic hours or late at night). Within these actions, there are also punitive strategies. When workers refuse rides or do not adhere to the explicit or implicit protocols of gamification and bonuses, the algorithms, which monitor, oversee, and assess all workers, reduce the daily quantity and frequency of rides, thereby diminishing the advantages and privileges of conducting rides in more valued or attractive areas. Thus, it becomes evident that

> [...] the analysis of contemporary urban space significantly involves understanding the new logic of transnational capital and the repercussions of this new logic for workers, their political organizations, and actions against the new onslaughts of capital. The interpretation of the networked territory of these companies, such as Uber, is crucial for contemplating the transformations in capital vs. labor relationship brought about by the process of productive restructuring. (Ibid., p. 1914)

The emphasis on urban mobility in Moreira's studies (2021) highlights the dynamics of the historical interest of capital in transportation and movement systems in cities since these systems are essential for providing services to the entire production chain. Here, the collective is once again weakened, making way for actions and investments in the segregation of public resources and promoting individualism. Instead of encouraging

improvements in public transportation to serve everyone, the use of private vehicles is encouraged to meet market demands. Public transportation was indeed encouraged, but once again, to serve the interests of capital by ensuring the commuting of workers from their homes to work and vice versa. These demands, which are also social and collective, are, however, linked to the promotion of vehicles powered by fossil fuels and pollutants, hindering urban mobility by causing congestion and deepening spatial segregation and social inequality (ibid.).

According to Moreira (ibid.), Uberization is on the agenda of the debate on urban mobility because it represents economic sectors that reveal the conflicts of interest between the public and private sectors. It involves the movement of workers to their workplaces, and their access to urban services, and impacts the circulation of goods. The author emphasizes that "Uberization and urban mobility are perceived as praxis of labor relations. They are objects that summarize the disputes being waged, whether they are for more rights or for greater profit" (ibid., p. 132).

New subjectivations arising from platform companies' and city's violence

It is worth highlighting some peculiarities through which platform companies induce workers to conceive new ways of acting, feeling, and thinking to cope with the various forms of violence inherent in the organization of work and the city. Antunes (2018 and 2020) concludes that workers' submission to platforms is akin to "digital slavery", as we are not necessarily losing jobs in the digital age, but rather gaining, in different spaces, globally, new forms of informal work, based on the flexibilization of labor laws and loss of rights. Consequently, the new precarization masquerading as uberized work (Antunes, 2018; Moreira, 2021) is, in fact, a new facet of old precarization.

Carvalho (2022, p. 89) emphasizes the importance of monitoring these new forms of informality because they impact "[...] the deregulated and precarious relations that occur within the production of space". The author emphasizes that

> [...] with the new capitalist production regime, the working class assumes a new morphology, now composed of both classic urban and rural industrial proletariats, as well as new sub-contracted, outsourced, and informalized workers, including platformized or uberized workers. (Ibid., p. 89)

Platforms develop mechanisms that are almost omnipresent, whether visible or not, personified (Motta Júnior, 2019), through which workers have the illusion of controlling their own work, as if they were "the capitalists", entrepreneurs, "their own masters", self-sufficient, with their own goals and objectives (Abílio, 2019; Cardoso, 2022; Moreira, 2021), and manage the quantity, pace, frequency, and quality of their work. In reality, it is the platform that, disguised as a sharing economy (Slee, 2019), controls the lives of the worker-subjects who submit to the use of these apps. ICTs are thus being used to configure new forms of subjectivation among worker-subjects, with clear implications for the city's territorial organization. Harvey (2014)

argues that new forms of informality, such as uberized work (Abílio, 2020), are driven by financial institutions (Motta Júnior, 2019), through high-yield investments, sustained by major automotive, oil, telecommunications, and construction industries.

From the perspective of labor precarization, André, Silva, and Nascimento (2019) argue that Uberized workers are equally exposed to subjective precarity. Specifically, the negative feelings generated and constructed in the daily work routine, arising from a constant backdrop of demands, pressures, and tensions to maintain the quality standards required by the company through gamification and targets, being evaluated, supervised, and haunted by the fear of losing their source of income. Thus, fear and discouragement invade the thoughts of Uberized workers (Areosa, 2020), and platform companies seek to capture their subjectivity (Viapiana, Gomes, and Albuquerque, 2018), as the platform becomes the epicenter of their lives. Every day, their actions and energy are focused on keeping up with the demands and flows of the applications, which, in turn, is hijacking their time, depriving them of their rights to come and go and to occupy other social spaces and roles.

Authors have also observed a phenomenon of self-persuasion, according to which working for platform companies is considered good because the worker is earning money, has freedom, is their own manager, does not have an immediate superior supervising their work, and makes their own schedule. This, in turn, consolidates their commitment to the company, their desire to keep working and trying to produce more, and keeps them feeling good about it (Siqueira and Gomide Júnior, 2014). They feel productive because, without this work, they would not be generating income. Therefore, disguised as a modernization of labor (Rocha, Pistolato, and Diniz, 2021), there is also a perverse mechanism in the discourse of platform companies, through which workers develop psychological strategies to deal with the violence imposed by these companies, fueling the relationship of subordination and superexploitation imposed by them.

Furthermore, Uberized workers need to create various coping strategies daily. Salvagni, Valentina, and Colomby (2022) emphasize the strategy of being friendly all the time, with all customers, regardless of the context, for fear of reprisals in evaluations and punitive consequences from the company. The same authors mention instances of symbolic violence and sexual harassment, in which workers need to induce or suppress certain feelings to meet the expected quality standards imposed by the company. In such situations, to reinterpret possible embarrassing situations of this nature, drivers "play along", pretend not to understand, make an effort to remain calm and patient, and project themselves as friendly.

This approach of developing daily strategies to cope with adversities and constraints at work is called emotional labor (ibid.). It refers to workers' management of emotions to handle the different daily sources of suffering in their work, in an effort to maintain balance and be courteous to customers. In a study involving drivers in the MR of Porto Alegre, the main reported feelings were: a) fear of urban violence; b) the obligation to be friendly to all customers all the time, out of fear of being poorly rated

on the platform by vigilant passengers (who are sensitive to any possible lack of cordiality by the driver which would justify giving them a low rating, decreasing their ranking) and of receiving punitive measures, such as being assigned fewer rides; c) a sense of anguish due to their dependence on the app to survive in the city, without guarantees of income and without knowing how much they will earn in a day's work, even though they make themselves available for hours (ibid.). Evaluation reports issued by platform companies are not clear, making it difficult to obtain precise information about poor ratings, which would allow them to correct and improve their service and thus create learning opportunities as well as provide workers with a mouthpiece to express their concerns. The lack of feedback and information constitutes, in itself, another control mechanism.

In addition to the paradoxes pointed out so far, Gaulejac (2021) adds that, perversely, ironically, and contradictorily, the precarization resulting from the management of Uberized work is rooted in the consciousness of having a job (being that workers are getting paid for this activity), but that this work is not recognized as a legal employment relationship with labor rights. As we know, Uberized work does not constitute traditional employment. Platform companies offer opportunities for paid work but do not admit to establishing an employment relationship with workers. Being unemployed implies that a person does not maintain a legal employment relationship through which they can enjoy labor rights. The phenomenon of Uberization thus carries a symbolic effect in which workers feel employed without having traditional employment. They do not necessarily feel unemployed because they are generating income by reproducing platform companies' discourse that they have no bosses and are their own managers. Cardoso (2022) points out that what is most striking is not the fact that Uberized workers do not feel unemployed but that they feel like entrepreneurs/self-employed. By perceiving themselves as their own managers, using their own resources, managing their schedules, and receiving an income from it, workers convince themselves that they are not unemployed because they are working. To the point of answering, when asked about their occupation, that they are app/platform drivers or couriers. Indeed, they are, in some way, socially contributing with their labor force, acting in territorial dynamics, and playing a social role, but the reality is that they are unemployed from a legal standpoint, even though they are working and generating income.

Being out of work carries a negative social attribute, designating one as useless and unsuccessful, and therefore, without value. Given that this position is considered unacceptable within the context of capitalist society, it appears preferable to keep occupied, even with low financial returns and all the precarities discussed in this essay, than to be mistaken for a "nobody". The contradiction thus reveals itself: to be Uberized is to work without being employed. It is to be an unemployed person earning money in the city. In the neoliberal logic, it is worth more to be a busy unemployed person, earning income, than to be an unemployed person without income.

This symbolic dynamic is intersected and reinforced by the ideology of shame, in which the worker avoids showing any possible signs of weakness, illness, or other behavior that would distance their body from labor activities, thereby avoiding destitution (Dejours, 2018). Since work is the source of their survival/subsistence, not working has implications that are not only economic and financial, but, as we have seen, also psychological and social. Failing to provide for oneself or one's family is a source of shame. Therefore, the ideology of shame is invoked as a defense to deny supposed weakness, illness, tiredness, overload, and daily violence so that, in the end, the worker can provide for some of their own and their family's needs.

Alienated, the worker finds it difficult to attribute the source of their illness to the practices of the organization of work and blame themselves for their own sickness. Admitting that they are sick means acknowledging their vulnerabilities, their inadequacies, and their unproductiveness in their own eyes and in society. Since admitting their failure is unacceptable, Uberized workers silence their frustrations and anxieties and submit to the manipulation and all the platform companies' control strategies that ensure payment for the work performed. Thus, the fear of losing the platform company's financial return is intensified, because the consequence could be even worse: not existing in the city, being a "nobody", not having access to consumption. They then bow to the injunctions, they enter this game and conform to the rules, since it is the company that ends up having control (Cardoso, 2022) over their lives, allowing them to exist and survive in the city and not be excluded by neoliberal society.

It remains for us, therefore, to acknowledge the commodification of Uberized workers, as platform companies instrumentalize them for their financial, operational, and technical purposes. Platform companies conceive of them as resources, and in doing so, erase the possibility of them being conceived as subjects, since "to be a subject is to resist what does not make sense to oneself. To be a subject is to exist without bending to injunctions" (Gaulejac, 2021, p. 102).

Final considerations

We present critiques and reflections on how Uberized workers in taxi and delivery services experience new processes of subjectivation arising from neoliberal flexploitation, labor precarization, and the contradictions of platform companies. We also explore how they are vulnerable to daily psychosocial risks while navigating the city, changing urban territorial dynamics, and being changed by them. We address the tactics through which platform companies, according to their interests, continuously manipulate the relationship between workers and urban space in ongoing processes of territorialization-deterritorialization-reterritorialization through apps that are constituted by an information layer entirely controlled by them.

We observe that these workers confront unique daily challenges, including a sense of insecurity stemming from exposure to various forms of urban, symbolic, and interpersonal violence, whether in traffic, interactions with customers, or platform control management. They also experience a pervasive feeling of

powerlessness due to their lack of control over their own work, including the number of trips they undertake and the locations within the city where they must provide services for the platform. Furthermore, they must constantly exercise self-control to complete more runs and, consequently, travel more frequently and cover greater distances to maximize their earnings, all while laboring in poor working conditions and without access to support or guarantees, among other difficulties. In addition to these challenges, their subjectivity is appropriated, and they are stripped of their rights to the city, including the freedom of movement and the ability to occupy various spaces and social roles. Consequently, they develop psychological and social strategies to cope with anxieties, feelings of helplessness, and constraints stemming from the management and organization of work by platform companies, as well as interactions with customers.

This dynamic shapes subjectivity and impacts the workers' overall health, particularly in psychological aspects: mental health. Due to the workload, and exposure to stressful situations without any mediation or healthy strategies to cope with these psychosocial challenges, Uberized workers may be more prone to developing severe health issues such as depression, burnout, and even suicide. In this context, workers are subject to various types of accidents, especially in traffic, some of which can be fatal. They also fall victim to robbery and various forms of violence, do not have the right to time off or vacations, and often earn a monthly income below the minimum wage, remaining at the mercy of algorithms.

Despite changes in employment practices and benefits for Uberized work in other countries, as well as signs of resistance in Brazil (Moreira, 2021; Motta Júnior, 2019), this essay highlights the importance of advancing studies, programs, and policies that interconnect new forms of informal work, mental health, and the right to the city.

We recommend the creation of spaces for the voices of workers to be heard, allowing for the negotiation of labor rights and the right to the city as a state policy, beyond the unilateral, standardized, and rigid control of platform algorithms. By examining the precarization of Uberized work in taxi and delivery services within the logic of territorialized and neoliberal economics, we demonstrate that spaces that do not facilitate dialogue and cooperation increase psychosocial risks and contribute to unhealthy forms of worker subjectivation. This work organization that fails to promote spaces for dialogue ultimately leads to the individual's death and, in the case of platform companies, legitimizes the term "digital slavery" (Antunes, 2018 and 2020).

By favoring democratic spaces for dialogue, platform companies, other organizations, and the government can collaborate with workers collectives to develop more creative and participatory practices that promote, exercise, and guarantee more dignity, mental health, and quality of life while integrating urban services, citizens, and the city, in line with the missions of platform companies. Such spaces also hold the potential for opening new paths of resistance, social and labor organization, as well as the access to, the construction of, and the reconstruction of the right to the city.

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