

# The Non-place of Domestic Work in the Intermediation of Digital Platforms\*

*[English version]*

El no-lugar del trabajo doméstico en la  
intermediación de las plataformas digitales

O não-lugar do trabalho doméstico na  
intermediação das plataformas digitais

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## Abstract

**Objective:** To understand the aporetic situations generated by the use of digital platforms in the intermediation of domestic work performed by women in Bogotá D.C from a socio-legal perspective. This is analyzed in light of the social reconfiguration produced by super-modernity, a phenomenon Marc Augé terms the “non-place”

**Methodology:** Qualitative, based on case studies through a hermeneutic analysis, starting from the legal-normative framework to delve, –based on the concept of the “non-place”– into the sociocultural dimensions of the relationships shaped by the use of digital platforms in domestic work. **Results:** The legal configuration of digital intermediation, grounded in classical assumptions of time and space in employment contracts, was found to produce aporetic situations sustained by conditions of turnover, dispensability, and segregation, which prevent the weaving of symbolic interactions among the concurrent population. **Conclusions:** Three discussion categories arise that must be considered in the socio-legal debate on domestic work mediated by digital platforms: 1) the diffuse space of legal regulation in labor relations, 2) socio-spatial segregation, and 3) exclusion to non-historical spaces generated by the digital intermediation model.

**Keywords:** domestic work; labor intermediation; non-place; reproductive work (from the Women's Thesaurus).

## Resumen

**Objetivo:** comprender, desde una perspectiva socio-jurídica, las situaciones aporéticas que producen el uso de plataformas digitales en la intermediación del trabajo doméstico realizado por mujeres en la ciudad de Bogotá D.C. Lo anterior, debido a la reconfiguración social acontecida bajo el producto de la sobremodernidad, y que Marc Augé denomina «no-lugar». **Metodología:** cualitativa, basada en el estudio de casos desde un análisis hermenéutico, la cual parte de la configuración jurídico-normativa para profundizar –según el concepto del «no-lugar»– en las dimensiones socioculturales de las relaciones que producen el uso de plataformas digitales en el trabajo doméstico.

**Resultados:** se evidenció que la configuración jurídica de la intermediación digital, que parte de presupuestos clásicos en tiempo y espacio del contrato laboral, producen situaciones aporéticas sostenidas sobre las condiciones de rotación, prescindibilidad y segregación que no permiten tejer interacciones simbólicas entre la población concurrente. **Conclusiones:** se abren tres categorías de discusión que deben ser tenidas en cuenta en la discusión socio-jurídica del trabajo doméstico mediado por plataformas digitales: 1) el espacio difuso de la reglamentación jurídica en las relaciones laborales, 2)

la segregación socioespacial, y 3) la exclusión a los espacios no-históricos engendrados sobre el modelo de intermediación digital.

**Palabras clave:** trabajo doméstico; intermediación laboral; no-lugar; trabajo reproductivo (obtenidos del Tesauro de mujeres).

## Resumo

**Objetivo:** compreender, a partir de uma perspectiva sociojurídica, as situações aporéticas decorrentes do uso de plataformas digitais na intermediação do trabalho doméstico realizado por mulheres na cidade de Bogotá D.C. Tal análise se justifica diante da reconfiguração social advinda da sobremodernidade, fenômeno que Marc Augé denomina “não-lugar”. **Metodologia:** pesquisa qualitativa, baseada no estudo de casos com enfoque hermenêutico, partindo da configuração jurídico-normativa para aprofundar –à luz do conceito de “não-lugar”– as dimensões socioculturais das relações produzidas pelo uso de plataformas digitais no trabalho doméstico. **Resultados:** evidenciou-se que a configuração jurídica da intermediação digital, fundamentada em pressupostos clássicos de tempo e espaço do contrato de trabalho, gera situações aporéticas sustentadas nas condições de rotatividade, descartabilidade e segregação, as quais impedem o estabelecimento de interações simbólicas entre os sujeitos envolvidos. **Conclusões:** emergiram três categorias que devem ser consideradas no debate sociojurídico sobre o trabalho doméstico mediado por plataformas digitais: 1) o espaço difuso da regulamentação jurídica nas relações laborais; 2) a segregação socioespacial; e 3) a exclusão de espaços não-históricos gerados pelo modelo de intermediação digital.

**Palavras-chave:** trabalho doméstico; intermediação laboral; não-lugar; trabalho reproductivo (extraídos do Tesauro de Mulheres).

## Introduction

The accelerated technological development of recent years has disrupted the forms of relationships in the lifeworld, substantially changing personal, social, economic, and labor relations. In the face of this total transformation, which requires global reflection, directing attention toward reproductive work, specifically domestic service, mediated by digital intermediaries is proposed.

Domestic service as part of reproductive work has been fractured by the sexual division of labor and is carried out mainly by poor, migrant, and Afro-descendant women. Due to the social construction of gender roles that naturalize their function in society, domestic service has been excluded from the labor rationale of productive work. This leads to its precariousness, low remuneration, and even being regarded as a duty, which results in a devaluation of the activity and a belittling of the people who perform it (Niño, 2021). Consequently, in Latin America, domestic service has developed under informal conditions, which increases exploitation and the lack of guarantees for the women in this sector<sup>1</sup>.

In recent years, however, a phenomenon has unfolded that deserves attention. The increase in companies seeking to outsource services through digital platforms has impacted the transformation of service provision. These platforms develop their business offerings mainly through three models: the first is built on the conception of female workers as independent; the second, by contrast, is consolidated as a bridge to connect service personnel to other companies; and the third is a model in which the platforms directly hire the female workers and offer the services.

Despite being distinct forms of contracting, they have in common the fact that they are developed through the transfer of constant locations. Female workers move through different spaces in the city to meet service demands, which leads to the construction of the “non-place.”<sup>2</sup> This concept, coined by Marc Augé (2000), refers to a reconfiguration on which the products of super-modernity are based: spaces where encounters between individuals fail to generate symbolic interactions. As a result, the possibility of mutual recognition dissolves, given that the scrutiny of the other is fleeting. Spaces called “place”, by contrast,

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<sup>1</sup>. According to a survey conducted by DANE in 2020, 62% of people engaged in domestic service earn a minimum wage or less.

<sup>2</sup>. The concept of non-places is proposed by Marc Augé (2000) in the text “Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Super-modernity” (2000), as a product of super-modernity in which there is no longer any identity with the different settings of life, since their fixation is quickly erased by an ephemeral construction that eliminates any possibility of history, narratives, and relationships. The non-place does not allow an existential relationship with objects due to constant transit and makes establishing acquaintances or knowledge about the other or others impossible.

would be: the neighborhood shop where neighbors do their shopping every day, the park where children and their families meet after school, or the tree-shaded bench where neighbors pause after running errands. Spaces which, in short, allow the community to coexist; these are called “places” because, over time, they lend themselves to the maturing of relationships and to the generation of roots, as well as to the exchange of knowledge beyond what is imposed by market logics. A non-place would be the airport, the train station, or the shopping mall—spaces where one is in transit and casual crossings with others are so quick and volatile that they do not allow the consolidation of symbolic exchange that translates into recognition.

It is important to note that non-places are not only situated at the confines of the space where the relationship occurs, but that, by eroding the time that constitutes the anthropological places of the female workers, they also strip workers of their condition as historical subjects, which is produced by a common-union. The management of their relationship with time and place —now marked by constant transit that confines them exclusively to labor tasks— ultimately subjects them to “non-historical” spaces and deprives them of the possibility of narrating their own story. In turn, by stripping the subject of their historical condition, these spaces also remove the possibilities for emancipation. These are the new spaces, hereafter “non-places,” upon which labor relations mediated by digital intermediation in domestic service are configured.

This has created diffuse elements for legal regulation, insofar as contemporary law presupposes a subject who inhabits a specific space and a specific cultural time, who has relationships with a defined environment and concrete people. By contrast, intermediation built upon non-places detaches itself from legal assumptions; that is, the relationships established in the traditional paradigm become unbalanced in super-modernity. The female workers no longer go to a place to provide their services, but to a non-place.

Consequently, this paper seeks to answer the following question: What aporias emerge in the non-place of performing paid domestic work due to the legal configuration of digital platform intermediation? To develop this thesis, the first part presents a description of the legal configuration of the business model that has developed from the intermediation of digital platforms in paid domestic work. In the second part, three aporetic situations are revealed, arising from the diffuse spatial condition that presupposes a subject who does not inhabit a specific place, but rather a non-place, pushing female domestic workers who perform their labor through digital intermediation into scenarios of segregation, exclusion, and abandonment.

The current state of the research problem presents two diagnoses. On the one hand, there is a constant denunciation of digital platforms that outsource domestic service tasks, such as the study by Ferrerira and Nociolini (2021), which highlights the labor precariousness in which female domestic workers who mediate their work through digital platforms find themselves. On the other hand, the article “Caregiver and Domestic Service Digital Platforms in Latin America and the Caribbean” (2024) shows how a legal framework that determines the form of contracting between companies and female workers can contribute to labor formalization. The diagnosis, then, focuses on showing that those platforms that only act as links for information transfer are contributing to forms of labor precariousness, insofar as the form of contracting is neglected. However, those platforms that assume the labor relationship are formalizing jobs in this sector.

Nevertheless, despite these important approaches to understanding the phenomenon, they neglect the focus that this article seeks to make evident, namely, how female domestic workers provide their services, which opens spaces of non-places. Even when there is formalization of employment, there are aporias that cannot be resolved with current law and that, on the contrary, contribute to forms of labor precariousness to which women are mainly subjected. Therefore, the research aims to create a critical framework for the labor protection of this sector.

The methodological strategy of this research is qualitative, based on a hermeneutic analytical perspective. Within this framework, legal and philosophical issues surrounding the phenomenon of digital platform intermediation in domestic work were identified. The research employed the following strategies: literature review, observational analysis, and case study analysis. The case study methodology is understood to integrate multiple perspectives with a holistic component, as outlined by Yin (1994)<sup>3</sup>.

Using the case study, fourteen digital platforms operating in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, were analyzed. Based on the collected data, a matrix of contractual typologies was developed, enabling the identification of the different forms of contracting used to connect women domestic workers with third-party beneficiaries—those seeking to have these services performed in their homes, offices, or other spaces. This analysis led to a typological distinction in the hiring arrangements of domestic workers, as well as an examination of the implications

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<sup>3</sup> A case study investigation successfully addresses a technically distinctive situation in which there are many more variables of interest than observational data; and, as a result, relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data that must converge in a triangulation style; and, also as a result, benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions that guide data collection and analysis (p. 13).

stemming from the variation in responsibilities and labor obligations associated with each model.

In the next phase of the research, observational analysis provided detailed information about the activities carried out by female domestic workers whose labor is mediated by digital intermediation platforms in the city of Bogotá. These workers commute from their homes to various workplaces using public transportation. This information was then correlated with data analysis from institutional reports on commuting times, the location of bus stops, gender segregation in Bogotá's public transport system, the residential locations of service users in relation to those of the women providing the service, as well as the analysis of scholarly documents on the impact of rating systems in digital labor, and an analysis of laws and their materialization.

These elements, analyzed from a hermeneutic perspective on the labor conditions of women working through digital platforms, based on the concept of "non-places" developed by anthropologist Marc Augé, made it possible to establish that domestic service, administered through digital platforms, pushes female domestic workers toward sterile spaces —hereafter referred to as "aporetic"— that prevent them from claiming their labor rights. This concept is used as the methodological basis that allows comparing information and making a critical diagnosis to establish the relationship between the sample, the collected information, and the established theory.

The proposed hypothesis is that the new forms of intermediation of domestic work conceal dynamics of exploitation that escape the traditional structural logics of labor law in this area and foster precariousness in the lives of domestic workers —and even of users— by transforming the spaces where the experience of labor and work is materialized. This evidences the limits of labor law that leave those who provide this service without protection.

## **Legal Configuration of the Intermediation between Digital Platforms and Domestic Work**

Digital platforms are considered technological tools that enable the development, management, and administration of the resources of a given business; they have transformed supply and demand relationships, and with them, the way services are provided. Thus, new technologies have acted as intermediaries in a market model based on mediation through the use of electronic devices, which establish the connection between the person providing a service and the one needing it. The development of intermediation, as outlined in the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 181 of 1997, can occur primarily in two ways. The first is a third party that does not intervene in an employment relationship but connects the parties. The second is the employer of those who offer a service and make it available to a third person who would not enter into an employment relationship but merely benefits from the service.

In the case of Bogotá D.C., among the platforms offering domestic service-related labor, companies were identified that have developed the various models previously described, each with distinct nuances. Among the platforms analyzed, some operate as intermediaries and classify workers as independent contractors, as seen in the cases of *365 Timbrit* and *Ayda*. Others, such as *Agemser* and *Zolvers*, function as intermediaries that act as employment exchanges, facilitating the hiring process. Finally, some platforms employ workers directly and offer their services to third-party clients.

To better analyze the models developed in digital platforms and domestic service, the contractual model is divided into three stages. Clarifying that platforms can combine services and provide those services in various ways is important; for this reason, three specific models are addressed in general. They will be described in order to determine the nature of the contract that arises between the parties involved.

### **Intermediation: Female Independent Workers**

Several platforms have developed a model based on intermediation between the person who will provide the service and the person who will receive it. This model shifts the responsibility for protection and social security to the worker, who is considered an independent person. This indicates that she is not required to comply with a set schedule, insofar as she can regulate and adjust the application according to her convenience. Remuneration is based on the work performed,

and some platforms retain a percentage of the fee paid for the service. From this analysis, two forms of work management can be identified within this model: **(1) As a source of information and communication.** For example, in the case of *365 Timbrit*, the platform simply serves as a network that enables connection, where the worker can have contact with the client, set prices, and arrange schedules. While this platform is completely free, it charges for a premium account to access better information, but does not intervene in the management or creation of the work. **(2) As a work manager.** Some platforms set prices, establish schedules, and provide training on how to offer the service, which constitutes a way of disguising employment relationships, since “they configure the nature of the work, appropriate its value, and regulate behaviors” (Ferrerira & Nociolini, 2021, p. 3). Similarly, the research shows that although platforms seemingly grant workers the ability to manage their own time, this autonomy is a diffusion of time that deviates from classical labor logics and ultimately serves as a form of concealment. Once the worker accepts a service, her time becomes regulated in terms of arrival and departure. Moreover, the application retains authority to set prices, determine service conditions, implement a rating system, and impose sanctions on workers.

In general terms, the concept of work mediated by digital platforms is problematic. The Ilaw Network (2023) (Legal Assistance Network for Workers) has compiled a database, for the Latin American context, that gathers bills, administrative resolutions, and judicial decisions in this sector. Regarding the latter, a total of 20 court rulings were identified between 2018 and 2022, of which 11 established the existence of an employment relationship between the platform and the worker. The main sectors that have filed claims are transportation, with platforms such as UBER, and the delivery sector. However, the debate is not easy, and legal experts have opted to make a diagnosis regarding the service provided, as each develops in a different field, and the jobs and the sector in which these practices take place may have specific characteristics that differentiate the relationships.

Regarding domestic service, Ferrerira and Nociolini (2021) describe the model implemented by the company *Donamaid*, which operates in Brazil. Through an application, it allows the recruitment of people who work in cleaning, telling them they are their bosses and are independent in managing their time; however, it generates an entire control mechanism, such as prohibiting the sharing of contact information, not using a cell phone at work, and leaving before the agreed time. The worker must check the application at least four times a day, have money for transportation and for the supplies she must bring, and in case of canceling the service, the platform imposes fines.

Similarly, these platforms conceal employment relationships through a rhetoric of autonomy and flexible time management, while undermining the protections guaranteed by labor law, such as wages and social benefits, even in the case of daily employment. This is despite the fact that Decree 1072 of 2015 and related regulations establish the obligation to pay daily social benefits. This creates a dual legal responsibility to the platform offering the service, and to the individual receiving it. Both parties are required to assume responsibility for the payment of benefits to those performing this work through the platforms, given that they exercise the full range of employer powers. In other words, platforms that define the work and determine: (i) obligations, (ii) responsibilities, and (iii) pricing, are effectively meeting the three conditions of an implicit employment contract. In doing so, they are disguising labor relationships, resulting in increased precariousness.

### **Intermediation: As Managers for the Hiring of Wage Labor**

In this model, platforms operate as intermediaries or as an employment exchange for hiring cleaning personnel. Two forms of contracting can be developed: **(1) As a bridge for the formalization of work without intervening in the negotiation:** this is the case of *Zolvers*, which manages workers' information regarding place of residence, available schedules, and connects them with potential employers. In the ILO report, Pereyra, Poblete, and Tizziani (2023) describe the model developed by *Zolvers*, one of the most important companies in Latin America for this sector. It sets a price at the beginning of the relationship, and later, the parties proceed to agree on the labor conditions. In this way, *Zolvers* conducts the selection and registration process for the platform, which, after approval, allows the worker to view the offers approved by the application. Workers apply for the ads, and once accepted, the parties agree on the hiring (Pereyra *et al.*, 2023).

### **Female Workers with Employment Contracts Directly with the Application**

Part of the rationale for hiring workers to perform domestic service relates to the trust involved in allowing people into homes. This leads companies providing these services through platforms to consider it important to build trust through workers, which entails using employment contracts that, based on a series of interviews and documentation requirements, generate and reinforce, through the sanctioning authority of labor law, the duties and obligations that workers must

assume. Even though the worker has an employment contract, she is subject to the demands made through the digital platforms.

The different forms of providing the service through digital platforms show that, although there are several ways to materialize the legal relationship, service configurations are subject to new logics of time and space that blur the understanding of the classic employment contract and impose new forms of exploitation, now subject to precarious discourses that invite the women performing this work into uncertainty about the workplace they must attend daily. This implies numerous difficulties in reaching new spaces, the possibility that the worker may be replaced at any time, and a constant variation of employers who determine her duties, leading to insecurity about responsibilities that may arise in cases of occupational accidents and workplace harassment, among others.

## **Aporias of the Non-place in the Digital Intermediation of Domestic Service**

The previous section examined the legal configuration of labor intermediation to demonstrate the emergence of a new conception in the materialization of domestic service, one that disrupts the foundational assumptions of classical labor law, which is grounded in fixed notions of time and space. As a result, women performing this work are increasingly situated within *non-places*, contributing to the precariousness of their labor. This section shifts the focus to the social transformations brought about by digital intermediation, intending to identify a mutation in the lifeworld of female domestic workers. Specifically, the displacement and redefinition of the spaces where their labor is performed have undergone a process of dissolution. Workers no longer travel to a specific place to provide their services; rather, they are directed toward *non-places*.

In contrast to the “non-place” is the “place,” an anthropological space of belonging, of care, of half-finished conversations that must be resumed and that, over time, generate identity. When female domestic workers have a fixed workplace, the transportation and even the home where they work are configured as a “place” (in the anthropological sense proposed by Augé), but when place disappears, so too does the possibility of creating spaces for dialogue with other workers that generate awareness about labor conditions and experiences. This is not about romanticizing the place as a space that produced well-being for domestic workers, but about bringing to light the loss of culture, history, and relationships that are sacrificed in the name of progress and that give rise to new forms of exploitation.

From the legal diagnosis that configures labor intermediation in domestic service, it can be noted that workers encounter companies that support the possibility of consolidating job offers, which tends toward the formalization of employment and the payment of labor rights. However, this formalization of work is carried out based on the need for the service, which is now controlled, manipulated, and directed by the applications, meaning that the worker finds herself in a continuous change of location and workplace. This, in turn, creates aporias that, as stated, are formed from the configuration of the non-place.

In other words, what is common across the various intermediary companies is precisely the consolidation of the information they manage, which ultimately determines the workspaces where domestic workers are to carry out their tasks, regardless of whether the business model classifies the worker as dependent or independent. The constant fluctuation imposed by the control of information and the need to respond to various service requests —whether the platform acts as a coordinator or as an employer— subjects these women to multiple work scenarios throughout the city. These are navigated precariously, given the fragmented and inadequate public transportation infrastructure.

In light of the above, the purpose of this section is to reveal the diffuse space generated in the socio-legal nature of domestic work, due to the reconfiguration brought about by the intermediation of digital platforms in this field. This reconfiguration is based on the product of super-modernity that Marc Augé calls the “non-place,” which produces aporetic situations that perpetuate exploitation and precariousness. To this end, the study will address three specific aporias, noting that they are not closed, and others may be identified. On this matter, Derrida (1998) states:

I once used the word aporia and proposed a kind of non-passive endurance of the aporia as a condition of responsibility and decision. Aporia rather than antinomy: the word antinomy was to some extent unavoidable, since what was at stake, in the order of the law (*nomos*), were contradictions or antagonisms between equally imperative laws. Here, antinomy deserves rather the name of aporia, insofar as it is neither an “apparent or illusory” antinomy, nor a dialectical contradiction in the Hegelian or Marxist sense, nor even a “transcendental illusion in a Kantian-type dialectic,” but an endless experience. (p. 12).

Thus, the three aporetic situations revealed in this analysis occur in: (1) the immediacy with which workers are connected to users via transactional virtual flows mediated by technology, and the opposition that arises in the material territory in which workers travel through the city of Bogotá, segregated under socioeconomic logics; (2) the productive model of efficiency, sustained through

the numerical rating of technologized work that conceals a discriminatory and exclusionary system against pregnant women, women with disabilities, illness, advanced age, LGTBIQ populations, and/or with contingencies stigmatized by social canons. This, due to the constant turnover of personnel, leads to the consolidation of a culture in which workers are considered disposable, as illustrated in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* when describing the experience of the handmaid concerning the wife: "she does not speak to me unless she cannot avoid it. To her, I am a disgrace. And a necessity" (Atwood, 2023, p. 37); and (3) the final aporetic situation occurs in the diffuse space of contemporary law, which is subject to the constant reconfiguration of the subjects involved in the relationship, making identifying labor responsibilities regarding violence and harassment in the world of work impossible.

### **On the Speed of Virtual Transactions vs. the Slowness of Public Transportation that Segregates the City**

Paid domestic work carried out in the city of Bogotá is, for the most part, performed by women living in poverty<sup>4</sup>. This economic condition forces them to inhabit vulnerable areas, far from the residential spaces where the population with purchasing power that requests their services lives. This is because the city of Bogotá—a mirror of large Latin American cities—is structured under logics of segregation and economic stratification. It places domestic service providers, mediated by digital platforms, in an environment of precariousness, resulting from the socio-spatial conditions that reproduce the schemes of territorial exclusion, lacking human-centered planning, and pushing workers to carry out their jobs under yet another form of structural injustice; in this case, spatial injustice.

The lack of equitable planning in public transportation, which addresses the needs of the most vulnerable population, makes it impossible for workers to balance the time dedicated to professionally performed productive work with the time dedicated to reproductive work and personal care, since, in addition to the time spent at their paid jobs, they must endure long commutes on public transportation—both in distance and time, given that Bogotá is one of the most congested cities in the world—to reach their workplaces.

In this analysis, emphasizing another key element is important: digital intermediation platforms are structured under a supply-and-demand model

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<sup>4</sup>. According to ECLAC (2023), domestic work is highly feminized, with women accounting for 91.1% of those engaged in this labor in Latin America.

that imposes a rotation pattern in the assignment between the person who will provide the service and the person who will receive it. This scenario may lead domestic workers to attend more than five different services per week in a constant alternation of transportation routes, spaces to intervene in, and clients to serve, which aggravates the situation described above.

Thus, the precariousness of labor guarantees they have, together with the consolidation of socio-spatial segregation in public transportation brought about by the growth of routes without effective and equitable planning, inserts domestic workers —mediated by digital platforms— into situations described here as “aporetic”. The first of these arises from their permanent displacement, where the immediacy with which workers are connected to users via transactional virtual flows —mediated by technology— stands in opposition to the material space in which they move through a fragmented territory under socioeconomic logics.

In this way, the flexibility and speed of the user to assign the service according to their needs, as well as the speed with which the platform assigns the provider who will perform the service, contrast with the following structural components to which the female domestic worker is subjected:

(1) Due to the rotation in the assignment of workplaces —subject to demand—the worker must allocate additional time beyond transportation time and paid work time. In other words, the domestic worker subjected to rotation is unaware of the real time that new public transportation connections and routes will require, as well as the travel time from the nearest transportation stop to the assigned workplace. This adds an extra factor to travel times: planning and anticipating commutes<sup>5</sup>. All of this results in an increase in the time the worker devotes to commuting to work, which is not included in the recognition of her fees.

(2) Due to factor (1), the domestic worker finds it more difficult to reconcile her double working day, productive, as already described, and reproductive. Through caregiving, women weave their territories and establish connections with their families (Rodríguez, 2024). The latter takes place in the home and is arbitrarily assigned due to the historical roles produced by the sexual division of labor, permeated by roles established according to patriarchal schemes, which will

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<sup>5</sup>. Conceivably, algorithms could be used to establish territorial parameters that assign services to domestic workers closer to their homes. In cases where the requested service is part-time, another job could be scheduled within a defined radius —measured in meters— to mitigate a structural deficiency in the public transportation system. However, considering the territorial segregation on which the urban structure of Bogotá is built, connecting the places of residence of female domestic workers with the areas of demand would not suffice to overcome the distances faced by a significant portion of the workforce. This is because service demand, often better paid, is generally concentrated in areas far removed from where the workers live.

ultimately cause less presence in the accompaniment and care of their children. This has consequences for the psychosocial development of children, whose vital and academic needs accumulate in the absence of parental support.

The above, combined with the socioeconomic conditions in which the families of female domestic workers live, explains the impossibility of paid external support to cover caregiving needs in their own homes. This creates a vicious circle that prevents the social emancipation of the most vulnerable social classes in Latin America and calls for the deconstruction of the mythologized narrative of meritocracy. There is no possibility of merit for a child when the house that shelters them is empty.

(3) As a result of the last two items presented here, the female domestic worker performing the job in the modality under study suffers a new loss: the familiar faces with whom she shared stories, experiences, and knowledge at the bus stop or on the bus itself, and even the landscapes and facades that signaled the arrival at work. She loses, ultimately, a place because it has been transformed into a *non-place*. And with it, that space of identification that is the mirror that is the other, the one in which injustice normalized became labor and/or social vindication thanks to the guidance of other women who had been through similar conditions. Public transport became a space that sheltered the encounter among women who work in private households, scattered throughout the city.

Domestic workers perform their labor in closed spaces that are not open to the public, which implies a separation that, in many cases, has led to the normalization of oppression. However, in the long public transportation commutes and the trust that comes from habitual encounters, women performing the same type of work can talk about their labor conditions and experiences. These dialogues create relationships of sorority and become improvised sessions of education on salary increases, the obligation to pay annual bonuses, health and pension affiliation, among others. Support networks that, in many cases, were formalized through union membership, and which now vanish in an endless series of relationships, spaces, and events that must be constantly undertaken due to permanent displacement (Niño, 2024).

What the walls concealed, transportation revealed. In the informal sector, it has not been institutions that have most effectively promoted a labor rights pedagogy among domestic workers, but rather the workers themselves, through the exchanges that occurred during the exhausting commutes home on public transportation. It is important to note that, although public transportation will continue to be the primary means of mobility for domestic workers, the rotation system, enabled through digital intermediation, disrupts the cohesion and collective struggles that once existed. The constant change in routes and

schedules erodes the possibility of recognizing a familiar face through repeated encounters, and with it, the trust necessary to share the intimate conditions of one's labor —and life— conditions that become worthy of reclaiming as if they were one's own.

### **On the Expulsion and Dispensability Model, Based on the Quantitative Efficiency Rating**

The increase in the sense of dispensability among workers has been heightened through the power granted to the user by the impersonal materialization of their selection and evaluation of the service provided, carried out —indeed, even concealed, one might say— through a simple transactional operation within the application. This has had direct consequences on the way the subjectivities that transact outside the digital sphere are conceived: dehumanization sketches —or blurs— identification.

The globalization of media and social networks has brought about profound changes in the lifeworld, in culture. One no longer lives rooted in a specific place, nor even in a shared language. We have shed our cultural garments to embrace a new way of being in the world. We have been detached from the tangible to be elevated into the immaterial. It is the flows and information networks that now provide us with knowledge, certainties, values, and even identity. We live increasingly de-territorialized, adrift. Our *res extensa*, however, is reaffirmed in the market. “A market that, rather than uniting, seeks to standardize”. For it is erected upon and sustained by precariousness and the fragmentation of emergent values. (Viana, 2018, p. 47).

In a culture where the paradigm of knowledge exchange has been replaced by that of economic transaction, value is measured according to efficiency criteria. In this way, under these new parameters, female domestic workers are subjected to evaluations by users after each of the services provided. This becomes a method of optimizing labor. Those workers who do not meet the quantitative measurement criteria established by intermediation platforms will be expelled or, failing that, relegated to low-visibility rankings determined by the efficiency algorithms of the platform itself; this, in turn, reduces their chances of being selected to provide their services. This logic of evaluation means that the worker must give her best every working day, since she is always subjected to constant dynamics that require her to learn about new places, people, tastes, and preferences. Her work is always uncertain or unfamiliar, because while the task itself may be the

same, the conditions under which it is performed are uncertain, and therefore more precarious.

Given the vulnerability and socio-economic precariousness in which female domestic workers are immersed, combined with the power the user has to determine visibility within platform algorithms through their rating —whether expressed quantitatively or qualitatively in the form of an opinion— workers may be forced to accept requests outside the agreed terms, under pressure from the threat of arbitrary reprisals via the user's ability to rate the completed work, a tool to which the worker herself has no access. This new form of intermediation in domestic labor relationships perpetuates, and even exacerbates, hierarchization and segregation.

The capacities that drive the development of these systems and innovations are not necessarily intrinsically brutalizing, but they become so when they operate within certain types of organizing logic. These capacities should have been used to develop the realm of the social, to expand and strengthen the well-being of society, which includes working with the biosphere. Instead, they have almost always been used to dismantle the social through extreme inequality, to destroy much of the middle-class life promised by liberal democracy, to expel the poor and vulnerable from their lands, jobs, and homes, and to expel pieces of the biosphere from their vital space. (Sassen, 2015, p. 15).

The constant turnover of personnel who come to perform the domestic tasks required by the user causes the worker's identity to become disconnected from her labor. This prevents the user from knowing the worker's potential beyond the skills required in the technical execution of her duties. In this way, "soft skills", so highly valued today as distinctive and valuable resources in hiring, are lost due to the establishment of mere technologized transactions. This impoverishes relationships, flattening and shortening them; they are emptied of value and built upon the foundations of dehumanization. Contingencies do not matter, only efficiency does.

This productive model of efficiency, sustained through the numerical rating of technologized labor, conceals a discriminatory model that dehumanizes workers and expels from its ranks pregnant women, those with disabilities, illnesses, members of discriminated and stigmatized populations, the elderly, and LGTBIQ+ individuals. This is not only dehumanization, but—as the author of the previous quote points out—expulsion, even when disguised as inclusion.

That is, while from a formal perspective this population group may be included in the labor pool, user ratings ultimately expel them from service assignment. Evaluation criteria are not limited solely to efficiency parameters, but also to subjective assessments in which socially accepted and established normative standards mediate the rating given. This results in workers in the labor pool being excluded from assignments because the algorithm excludes them due to low ratings. Thus, a new aporetic situation emerges.

We are witnessing systematic discrimination in intermediation against those women who are not in a peak stage of productivity or who do not meet socially accepted standards, making it impossible to provide them with labor, legal, and social protection that would shelter them in their vulnerable situation. As Monique Witting (2005) points out, women, though visible as sexual beings, still—despite all efforts—remain invisible as social beings. Finally, women often accept and endure precarious conditions due to being in situations of greater vulnerability (Garavito *et al.*, 2023).

### **Labor Relations in the *Non-place*: on the Diffuse Space of Legal Regulation in Labor Relations in the *Non-place***

Labor law emerged at the beginning of the 20th century in Latin America out of the need to differentiate itself from other legal systems, especially from relationships of a civil nature. Labor regulations are largely based on the intrinsic relationship of time and space between employer and worker, which allows for the functioning of the labor market relationship system.

However, digital transformation dissolves the essential elements upon which the employment contract was traditionally constituted and, at the same time, makes it impossible to discern the application of the employment reality test. The negative impact of the *non-place* can not only lead to the disregard of the employment relationship but also erase the rights that are protected and can no longer be made visible. First, the power of direction is fragmented into multiple wills, which results in increased labor exploitation. Second, erasing the employment relationship as the personal provision of services in a specific place generates new challenges in the identification of risks such as workplace and sexual harassment, and unforeseeable occupational hazards. Each of these is described below.

**(1) The fragmentation of subordinating powers:** women thrown into these relationships do not find a clear figure of direction, but rather several actors who evaluate their function and, therefore, control the activity. Erasing a clear figure of the employer has repercussions for the construction of legal institutions,

such as para-subordination and related norms (as is the case in Italian legislation); various theorists maintain that self-employed workers, even without the element of subordination, have labor rights. For Vasconcelos (2021), this figure is nothing more than a disguise to avoid recognizing the full extent of labor rights. However, what is relevant about this institution is not the quality of the worker since, in the Colombian case, most platforms hire workers directly, and others risk labor lawsuits, given that Colombian legislation has been clear regarding domestic service work. Therefore, para-subordination is relevant because it reveals the transformation of the employer into employers, fragmenting the subordinating power for the provision of the service. This results in increased exploitation, as workers are subjected to endless changes in the performance of their work, requiring a constant flow of orders depending on the place they must go, which pushes their capacities to the limit.

The *workplace*, unlike the *non-place*, generates decent work that entails learning and appropriation, which can be materialized through relationships of trust. However, the endless configuration of relationships in the *non-place* generates abuse of capacities, forcing the worker to accept arbitrary clauses and adapt to jobs that do not allow her to build a safe environment for training and seeking new opportunities.

This overexploitation does not mean that domestic work does not require training and techniques for its performance, but rather that the *non-place* subjects women to various moods, dispositions, and spaces they do not recognize and that may intimidate them.

**(2) The direct provision of the service in the non-place:** in the *non-place*, risks arise that cannot be foreseen and controlled by a company when activating prevention, sanction, and reparation mechanisms. Specifically, female domestic workers may be subjected to forms of violence and harassment at work that go unnoticed in their suffering and may not even be recognized by legal systems, since, although the ILO contemplates in *Convention 190* the possibility of violence and harassment by third parties, this is not recognized in Colombia. Furthermore, *Law 1010 of 2006* does not consider these figures outside the employment relationship; for its part, the Constitutional Court has recognized some cases, such as harassment of contractors, but not by third parties involved in the employment relationship.

The performance of work can also be exposed to countless occupational hazards arising from the structure of the *non-place*. The *place* allows for the trust of the known, of human relationships; in the *non-place* there is no such predictability, and the female domestic worker does not know what risks may arise in the place where she is to perform her duties: illnesses due to inadequate hygiene in certain locations, or carrying out activities that involve the use of

dangerous materials, among others. The worker goes to the *non-place* with the possibility of encountering serious difficulties that cannot be foreseen. In Colombia, the implementation of the General System of Occupational Safety and Health implies that employers know each space that can increase risk possibilities. The *non-place* does not allow for this; companies are not in a position to conduct prior studies of the spaces where the worker will perform her duties, which is why her functions are exposed.

## Conclusions

The increase in demand for the services offered by domestic work intermediary companies in Bogotá responds to the needs arising from the social, spatial, and economic transformations that have been taking place in recent decades. Despite technological advances, the legal configuration is still manifested under the assumptions of the classic employment contract, which inevitably leads to the generation of *non-places* that produce aporias, which in turn foster the exploitation of reproductive labor.

While innovation in this form of intermediation has been observed to generate positive effects, such as a tendency toward the formalization of domestic work, which has historically been relegated to informality, the conditions of domestic workers under this relationship remain precarious, with a tendency toward segregation. They are subjected to new logics of exclusion, which have contributed to generating situations of incongruity referred to in this article as “the aporias emerging from the *non-place* of female domestic workers”. These aporias will continue to be sustained under similar models, insofar as the form remains transitory, ephemeral, agile, fast, and imbued with a sense of dispensability.

Care must be exercised around relationships of recognition, which arise in anthropological spaces; otherwise, workers are pushed to inhabit “non-historical” spaces, where time erases their trace in history, thereby annihilating their condition as historical subjects. This is why the only way out of the aporias is a radical understanding and appreciation of what reproductive labor entails, insofar as if this labor —based on the reproduction of the human species and the maintenance and care of life— continues to be compartmentalized with distinctions such as domestic service, unpaid household work, care work, among others, its impact on the construction of society is concealed, and different people, especially women, will not feel part of the same exploitation.

However, if reproductive labor is to be regulated in its total impact, with the protections afforded by the framework of decent labor law, it would necessarily lead to a dignified life both for the one receiving care and the one providing it. This would produce a dignified environment involving all members of society and allow for a substantial transformation, dissolving the aporetic contexts.

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