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EDITORIAL

MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS: INVISIBILITY, CARE, AND STRUGGLES

*Trabalhadoras domésticas migrantes:
invisibilidade, cuidado e lutas*

Roberto Marinucci^a

The domestic and care work carried out by migrant women involves a set of activities that concern reproduction and life-support, as well as the care of extremely vulnerable social groups. From an economicist approach, paid domestic work enables the propagation of the labor market itself (reproduction of the productive), whose female presence in many countries has become possible only through the commodification of care and domestic tasks, generally with a large presence of migrant women (Ambrosini, 2020).

Despite their importance for sustaining and reproducing society, caregiving and domestic service activities are marked by informality, devaluation, invisibility and violation of rights. In the case of migrant women, the situation becomes even more serious, since labor precariousness intersects with gender, race, and nationality discrimination. In other words, as women, they suffer the consequences of the patriarchal, androcentric ethos, which makes them more vulnerable and susceptible to gender and sexual violence. Finally, as foreigners, they experience the consequences of xenophobia and the rigidity of migration policies – rigidity that contrasts with the flexibility of labor laws, where administrative infractions in documentation weigh more heavily than exploitation, discrimination, and abuse in the workplace.

The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened this reality. Indeed, for many migrant women, the pandemic context has led to unemployment, with serious consequences even for the social reference units that depend on them. Other women workers have been forced to continue working, even at the risk of catching the virus. In other cases, they have been obliged to work as “interns”

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to reduce the risk of infecting their employers. To this can be added the difficulties created by the restrictions on mobility or, for women with children and stepchildren, by the closure of schools (OIT, 2022).

The dossier of *REMHU, Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana* n. 65, organized by professors *Delia Dutra*, *Mirza Aguilar Pérez* and *María José Magliano*, aims to deepen this theme. We refer to the introductory article by the organizers for a more detailed presentation of the dossier. In this editorial we want to focus on three aspects only.

First, domestic and care work, historically undervalued, if not despised, brings us to what Fabio Perocco (2017) calls a pedagogy of precarity that aims to “educate” the migrant worker a subordinate inclusion. Moreover, the condition of foreign workers can become “a laboratory for the experimentation of new forms of precarity, which then spread to other layers of workers” (Perocco, 2017, p. 80, our translation). Indeed, in the neoliberal perspective, the perfect worker is the *gastarbeiter* (guest and temporary worker), with no close family and no union ties, with reduced claiming capacity, few support networks, and an urgent need for money. We understand that in this “pedagogical” process of labor precarization, the starting point is the subordination of racialized migrant women, especially in irregular migration situation, involved in domestic activities. This makes it a priority, from this point of view, to include the gender perspective in studies and policies on the topic of work.

Second, the so-called “care crisis” (Pérez Orozco, 2006) triggered by demographic ageing and the entry of indigenous women into the labor market has not generated dynamics aimed at greater equality in the division of household responsibilities. The solution was the use of migrant women through the commodification of care work and domestic chores. The division of labor remains based on gender roles. In the words of Salazar-Parreñas (2002, p. 29, our translation)

To free themselves of the burden of domestic work, women depend on the commercialization of this work and they buy the services of poorer women cheaply. And in our globalized society, it is the migrant workers from the South who are increasingly freeing the women of the North from this burden. However, this has significant consequences for the relationship between women. The progress of one group of women comes at the expense of the disadvantage of another group of women, because in the process of relieving other women from this burden, the right to care of their own families is often denied to migrant domestic workers from the South.

This generates “global care chains” (Hochschild, 2000, apud Carpenedo, Nardi, 2017), in which women from receiving countries take on paid work outside the home by hiring migrant women who, in turn, must delegate responsibility for their homes in the country of origin to family members or other women. Without belittling the potential for empowerment and agency that the act of migration may entail for many women involved in domestic

work, we believe that the topic of global care chains is an issue to be taken into consideration in studies on the topic, especially due to violations of rights suffered by migrant women and even the negative impact that this entails in relation to struggles and demands for gender equality and the recognition by the State of reproductive work, with the consequent strengthening of welfare (Casalini, 2009).

Finally, a third aspect is migrant women's individual and collective strategies of resistance and struggle. Despite, or perhaps because of, the vulnerabilities imposed on them and the violence they have suffered, many migrant women domestic workers show solidarity, organize themselves, denounce and demand their rights by means of acts of citizenship in order to overcome conjunctural and structural adversities, both individual and collective. We believe that the support of organized civil society is fundamental to this process, a support that avoids forms of paternalism and, at the same time, is at the service of migrant collectives' struggle strategies, especially to politicize domestic work and caregiving, as well as to overcome analytical and political approaches that subordinate life support and workers' dignity to the interests of the markets (Pérez Orozco, 2006).

In addition to the dossier, REMHU n. 65 has five texts in the *Articles* section. Seeking to articulate the human rights agenda, the migration issue and the gender perspective, *Kristina Pirker* analyzes the work of three feminist civil society organizations in Mexico that assist migrant women seeking to promote their visibility and autonomy. The author starts from the observation of the absence of migrant women in the public and decision-making space. She reflects on the mobilizations and acts of citizenship developed by marginalized migrants who self-understand and take a position as political subjects of social transformation. In this context, the article stresses the need for the formation of networks that promote new narratives about migratory dynamics from a gender perspective, as well as collectively constructed diagnoses of migrant women's displacements. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of strengthening the involvement of migrant women with regard to the set of political incidence activities, so that there is "the transformation of the individual experience of suffering and resistance into public testimony that allows them to be recognized as voices of their group". The article is very precious in order to reflect and evaluate the work of civil society.

Regina Yoshie Matsue analyzes the "Japanese model" of coping with the Covid-19 pandemic and its relation to the migrant groups present in the territory, with emphasis on the Brazilian community. The author presents and questions the myth of "racial homogeneity" of the country, which sees itself as a "unified

nation” with a “homogeneous people”. Such ideology ends up interfering in immigration policies that tend, on one hand, to supply labor shortages and, on the other hand, to preserve the supposed “racial homogeneity”. It is in this context that the Covid-19 pandemic breaks out, worsening the already precarious living, working, and health conditions of the Brazilians living in the country. The accounts of Brazilians interviewed confirm the difficulties faced, especially in the area of health, even mental health.

An analogous reflection to the previous one is developed by *Lineu Norio Kohatsu*, *Adriana de Carvalho Alves Braga* and *Irene Monteiro Felipe*, who focus on the subject of Bolivian high school students and Bolivian children in São Paulo, Brazil, in order to examine the proximity or distance of the mother language and the main cultural traditions of Bolivia. According to the authors, the research reveals that the experiences of the young people interviewed are singular and heterogeneous. Therefore, it highlights the need not to crystallize national identities, since “the identity processes do not need to follow the excluding logic of ‘this or that’, of irreconcilable dichotomies, of essentialized and immutable conceptions of culture and identity, but approach the hybridization experienced by those who move in the diaspora”. The article is an important source for reflecting on policies of social incorporation within the educational system.

Carla Martins Mendes and *Andrea Seixas Magalhães* address the theme of dual belonging of second generations of Brazilian migrants in Portugal, delving into the processes of generational transmission in children of Luso-Brazilian couples. In general terms, the authors maintain that in the process of building individuality, dual belonging is not configured as something homogeneous, uniform (half Brazilian and half Portuguese); but, as the product of a constant circumstantial negotiation that takes into account family relations (including the family of origin, in Brazil), external stigmas – suffered especially by Brazilian women – and, of course, the aspirations of the people involved. Specifically, it highlights how Brazilian identity remains more focused on the private sphere and linked to elements of popular Brazilian culture (music, cuisine, dance), in addition to affective and sensory memories produced and revived by new technologies in order to strengthen ties. The article focuses on the theme of mixed couples and second generations in Portugal, realities that are becoming more and more widespread and that, for sure, deserve an in-depth study by the academic world.

In the last article, *Joanna Rocha Muniz* examines the model of refugee governance in Brazil from the perspective of multilevel governance theory. The author seeks to understand how the organizational network for the reception and integration of refugees is structured, paying attention to the importance of decentralization and the involvement of multiple actors. Specifically, the

interaction and interdependence between governmental organizations and other actors, such as non-governmental organizations, international agencies and other segments of civil society are analyzed. Therefore, after a theoretical and historical approach, the author focuses on governance at its different levels: supranational, national and subnational. Among other aspects, the text emphasizes the importance of interdependence and autonomy of the actors involved, drawing attention to the essential role played by civil society, especially in the process of integration at the local level.

In the “*Report and reflexions*” section, *Lilia Elena Rodríguez Estrada* narrates her migration to Acre, in Brazil, along with her daughter, and their return to Venezuela. Her migratory journey is marked by mistakes and misunderstandings, desires, frustrations and, above all, by exploitation in domestic work. Furthermore, the report shows her resilience and the importance of support networks – in this case, a religious group – to overcome adversities.

Valdiza Carvalho’s book review “*Dilúvio das almas*” by Tito Leite ends issue 65 of REMHU.

We wish you good reading!

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