
”The Platform Work Grey Zone: Epistemology and Workers’ Resistance North and South”

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Abstract

What are the epistemological tools needed to study how platforms continuously transform and recompose employment norms in increasingly elusive ways? How can these phenomena be compared across distinct national contexts, North and South? We draw upon the heuristic tool of ”grey zones of work and of employment”. Grey zones are spaces where the dynamics of disembeddedness and reconfiguration of work and employment become the critical object of study (Bureau, Corsani, Giraud, Rey 2019). Gray Zones are amplified with platform work (Carelli, Cingolani, Kesselman 2022). Gray zones recast the frame of workers resistance. We share discussions around new paradigms at two international conferences in Brazil (December 2024). The work is mainly, but not only, based on comparative situated micro-cases of App-drivers and food couriers in the Paris and São Paulo metropolises (ANR and FAPESP funded Regreyz&Co project).

Platform work regulatory gray zones are driven by several dynamics (Carelli, Kesselman, INDL-6): platform strategies, cognitive work, entrepreneur ideologies (Lima 2024, Dieuaide, Azaïs 2020); the state: how governments become ”co-creators” of gray zones (Bisom-Rapp, Coiquaud 2017), and ”institutional instability” that both results from and generates new gray zones (Grillo, Soares 2025); the influence wielded by new stake-holders in the public space of regulation (Azaïs, Dieuaide, Kesselman 2017). This creates new challenges for labor law to redefine work relations in Brazil, Spain/Europe and beyond (Marzo 2025; Machado 2024; Grillo 2024).

Gray zone research highlights the reconfigurations of formal and informal sectors through interactive North-South algorithmic management that complexifies workers struggles. New intermediaries constantly circumvent regulations, with social laboratories like Brazil (Ifood, Fioravanti, Rangel, Rizek 2022). The Global South ”periphery” is a vector reconfiguring informality (Abilio, INDL-7, Mendonça 2024). Racial profiling (Marchadour 2023), platforms work appropriations by ”colonizing” workers’ daily life, like commodifying their shopping

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behavior (Clic and Walk), extreme fragmentation (Foule Factory, Casilli 2019), through entrepreneurial ideologies and extreme neo-micro tasking undermine all rules (Cingolani 2021a). Its denouement determines the new phase of uberization: platforms as the post-Fordist work figure "Rule Makers" (Kesselman 2025; Azaïs, Dieuaide, Kesselman 2017). The aim is eliminating the horizon of emancipation through work (Rizek *et al.*, 2025). While collective actions pursue, the gray zone displaces references. Workers cherish flexible work-time (Magaldi, Azaïs, Razafindrakoto, Roubaud 2024) but continue to mobilize for better pay, and so, fewer hours (courier Breque dos Apps, Brazil 2025 mobilizations). Initiatives like cooperatives emerge North and South as forms of resistance in grey zones (Grohmann 2023).

Keywords: Platform Work, grey zone, epistémology, regulation, resistance, politics, France, Brazil, Belgium