

CITIZENSHIP, ENVIRONMENT, AND CARE IN TIMES OF NEOLIBERAL CRISIS

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This dossier stems from a specific understanding of neoliberalism: rather than approaching it solely from the perspective of economic policy — or even economic rationality — we conceive of neoliberalism as a political order. According to Gary Gerstle (2022, p.2), a political order is a complex formation, a “constellation of ideologies, policies, and electorates that shape politics” far beyond electoral cycles. In addition to encompassing a political-economic program, the establishment of a political order requires campaign donors, think tanks, the ability to shape the opinions of judicial elites and the mass media, the capacity of the dominant party to exercise ideological hegemony and thereby subject opposition forces to a particular horizon of what is considered politically possible and desirable, and, finally, a moral vision of the good life worthy of inspiring ordinary people. In the case of the neoliberal political order, according to the author, two moral perspectives on how to achieve the good life emerged and were actively promoted: the neo-Victorian perspective and the cosmopolitan perspective.

The latter perspective is the one through which the American historian approached the phenomenon that Nancy Fraser (2018) conceptualized as progressive neoliberalism: the hegemonic bloc in American politics during the Clinton and Obama administrations (i.e., from 1993 to 2016), an unlikely alliance between the most dynamic sectors of the US economy (Wall Street, Hollywood, and Silicon Valley) and liberal sectors of the new social movements — feminists, LGBTQIAPN+ activists, anti-racist groups, multiculturalists, and environmentalists — as minority partners. This alliance was grounded in progressive recognition politics that helped legitimize regressive redistribution politics, ultimately reducing equality to meritocracy.

This dossier therefore seeks both to advance reflection on how the category of progressive neoliberalism may be productively mobilized to interpret the specificities of the Brazilian case in light of the social, political, and economic characteristics of the United States, and to operate from the diagnosis that neoliberalism is currently undergoing

a process of transformation in Brazil and globally, marked by a crisis of legitimacy of the neoliberal political order (Gerstle, 2022) — or, in other words, by a crisis of the hegemony of progressive neoliberalism (Fraser, 2022).

In addition to engaging with the concepts of political order and progressive neoliberalism, this dossier contributes to the consolidation of an innovative interpretation of the history of citizenship in Brazil, moving beyond the framework established by Carvalho (2013). Although Marshall's classic definition (1967) and Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos's influential diagnosis (1979) of regulated citizenship remain useful for understanding the inclusion of certain state-regulated professions within systems of social and labor rights — and the exclusion of categories such as informal, rural, and domestic workers — the process of Brazilian redemocratization and the 1988 Federal Constitution demand new analytical frameworks. Within the CCI/Cebrap, we have been working with categories such as mediated citizenship (Medeiros, forthcoming) and pluralization of citizenship (Lavalle et al., 2025) in order to understand the historical novelties of the post-1988 period.

The pluralization of rights, themes, and actors occurred alongside the multiplication of socio-state interactions and institutional arrangements, while Brazilian-style progressive neoliberalism coexisted with what Dagnino (2004) termed the “perverse confluence” between the democratizing project and the neoliberal model. To trace the neoliberal reconfiguration of citizenship, it is also useful to map what Fraser (2022) calls boundary struggles — particularly, in the case of this dossier, the boundaries between society and nature on the one hand, as reflected in the consolidation of progressive neo-extractivism (Gudynas, 2008; Svampa, 2019), and between economic production and social reproduction on the other, as illustrated by the case of care work (Guimarães, 2023).

Thus, a cross-cutting issue running through the three articles in this dossier concerns the tendencies and countertendencies surrounding how the crisis of neoliberalism — and the possible transition toward a post-neoliberal sociopolitical order — implies reconfigurations of citizenship in Brazil. Put simply, the emerging post-neoliberal hegemony appears to be shaped by conflicting political paradigms: either a neo-progressive and democratic perspective — characterized by an ecological transition driven by productive interactions between the state, the market, and environmental organizations, capable of disarming the neo-extractive trap currently underway and advancing a social protection system that combats inequalities by incorporating workers historically excluded from social and labor rights — or a conservative and even reactionary perspective, in which private actors, churches, politicians, and influencers construct the

symbolic legitimization of increasingly destructive forms of neo-extractivism and labor precarization.

Interdisciplinarity is a defining feature of the articles gathered in this dossier, fostering dialogue among anthropology, environmental studies, political science, law, and economics. The institutional context that enabled this interdisciplinarity is twofold. Internally, the dossier brings together the results of investigations conducted by an interdisciplinary team of PhD researchers affiliated with the Center for Critical Imagination: Political Economy and Citizenship (CCI/Cebrap), in addition to its research director and former advisor (both co-editors of this dossier). Through weekly meetings held between March 2024 and February 2025, this group of researchers collectively discussed the projects, preliminary findings, and final results of the articles included here — as well as other works to be published elsewhere. These collaborative exchanges challenged the authors to engage with multidimensional phenomena, particularly across the micro/macro, global/local, and institutional/intra-institutional scales, as well as the complex interactions between material and symbolic processes underlying their investigations.

Externally, CCI/Cebrap is part of the Emerging Political Economies (EPE) network, which includes 15 other research centers, predominantly from the Global North (especially the United States and the United Kingdom), but also from the Global South. In addition to Brazil, participating countries include South Africa, Colombia, Egypt, India, and Mexico. The interdisciplinary research team also held biweekly discussions on some of the leading scholars affiliated with EPE centers, developing a critical and interdisciplinary understanding of both mainstream and alternative economic theories in dialogue with the social sciences and humanities. The articles in this dossier present the results of three research projects conducted by the CCI/Cebrap interdisciplinary team.

Brazilian environmental policy is the focus of the first article, written by Maira Rodrigues and titled “Institutionalization and deinstitutionalization of environmental policy: effects on the pluralization of citizenship.” The article reveals a scenario marked by tensions between democratic institutionalization and the forces of neo-extractivism. This model imposes an international ecological division of labor in which the state frequently acts as an agent of intensive natural resource exploitation at the expense of socio-environmental rights. Data from the Map of Civil Society Organizations (MOSC) reveal a counterintuitive phenomenon: during the Bolsonaro administration, the number of CSOs active in the environmental field increased. However, this expansion in the number of actors was accompanied by a reduction in the number of projects, indicating fragmentation and concentration of

resources. Environmental deregulation not only threatens ecosystems but also weakens the regulatory role of the state, generating fiscal constraints that directly undermine the financing of new social policies.

The author concludes that the institutionalization of environmental policy contributes to the pluralization of citizenship by enabling the participation of a diversity of actors and projects. Conversely, the recent process of deinstitutionalization negatively affects access to rights, even amid a nominal increase in registered organizations. The study reinforces the importance of understanding projects not merely as administrative instruments, but as spaces of political contestation and democratic construction.

The second article, “Platform-mediated domestic work in Brazil: continuities and changes of an “old” occupation” reveals the impact of digital platforms on Brazilian domestic work, a sector historically structured by the legacy of slavery. Author Ana Carolina Brito Brandão argues that domestic work in Brazil has deep roots in slavery and, despite constituting one of the country’s largest occupational categories, has historically remained excluded from legal protections. Constitutional Amendment Proposal 72/2013 sought to equalize labor rights, but the exclusion of daily domestic workers maintained a large portion of the category in conditions of informality. In this context, the emergence of digital platforms such as Parafuzo, Donamaid, and Tidmo introduced forms of algorithmic management that promise modernization while operating within a structure of social reproduction marked by the devaluation of care and super-exploitation.

In practice, these platforms operate through a symbiosis in which the archaic feeds the modern — revealing the continuing relevance of Oliveira’s (2003) analysis. Technology centralizes the management of a mass of informal workers in order to reduce the costs of social reproduction. Although the standardization of tasks attempts to challenge the figure of the “substitute housewife,” whose obligations are perceived as unlimited, algorithmic management reproduces racial hierarchies. This becomes evident in the presumption of worker culpability: in situations of conflict, platforms frequently suspend workers preemptively. The study concludes that platform mediation promotes a form of “pseudo-formalization,” establishing clearer rules for service provision without disrupting historical hierarchies. Platform support systems often reinforce presumptions of worker guilt, reflecting the racist and sexist structures of Brazilian society. Ultimately, technology reconfigures exploitation by combining modern surveillance mechanisms with long-standing practices of devaluing care work within peripheral capitalism.

Finally, the third article, “The future of care: redesigning social protection under a neoliberal horizon,” by Camila Fernandes, examines the emergence of care as a central political agenda grounded in the

recognition of care as a work form, a necessity, and a right. Historically organized through gendered and racialized arrangements, care systems visibly collapsed during the health crisis. The pandemic functioned as a revealing event, exposing how the reproduction of life in Brazil depended on the disproportionate burden borne by poor Black women. This dynamic became evident in emblematic cases such as that of Cleonice Gonçalves — the first fatal victim of Covid-19 in Rio de Janeiro — and of the boy Miguel, whose death exposed the extreme vulnerability of domestic workers on the invisible “front line.”

The institutional response to this scenario materialized in the construction of the National Care Plan (PNC), articulated alongside legislative initiatives such as Bill (PL) n. 2762/2024 and PEC n. 14/24. These measures carried significant symbolic weight in the reconstruction of public institutions, signaling an effort to place care at the center of macroeconomic and social protection policies. However, this attempt to defamiliarize care has encountered a new frontier: digital commodification, which generates new forms of precarization. The article concludes that care emerges as a tool of critical imagination capable of redesigning social protection. Although enduring tensions persist between the logic of rights and the neoliberal rationality of the market, the institutionalization of care in Brazil represents a milestone in the construction of a care-centered society, one that seeks to confront structural inequalities of gender, race, and class.

The integration of care and environmental governance as pillars of citizenship rights constitutes one of the central challenges facing a post-neoliberal Brazil. Care, understood as both a public good and a human right, challenges the logic of progressive neoliberalism, which often offers symbolic recognition while maintaining austerity measures that dismantle the material foundations of social protection. The consolidation of a National Care System — mirroring the experiences of the SUS (Unified Health System) and the SUAS (Unified Social Assistance System) — requires time, a federal pact, and funding protected from cycles of fiscal austerity. The sustainability of life and environmental preservation are inseparable: both require the state to reclaim its regulatory role in the face of the unlimited commodification of existence. Vigilance against institutional setbacks depends fundamentally on sustaining active social participation capable of defending democracy and social justice against predatory market pressures.

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