

## Playful Digital Narratives by Black Women Domestic Workers in the Social Media

### Account '@Faxina Boa' [Good Cleaning]

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines how Verônica Oliveira, a Black domestic worker and content creator, utilized social media under the username @faxinaboa (2016–2022) to contest the enduring gendered and racial power dynamics rooted in colonial structures around domestic work in Brazil. Through “digital alchemy” (Bailey, 2013; 2021), during a time marked by personal hardships and far-right policies in the country, Oliveira created playful digital narratives that asserted the right of marginalized individuals to produce humor and have fun. This research investigates Oliveira’s creative use of memes, parodies, puns, and wordplay using a close qualitative reading of @faxinaboa’s content on Facebook and Instagram. Drawing on the concept of the “playful citizen” (Lammes et al., 2015; 2019), which explores civic and political engagement through playful interactions, this study argues that Oliveira’s digital narratives emphasized the importance of domestic work and acknowledged the multifaceted humanity of Black women domestic workers.*

**Resumo:** *Este artigo examina como Verônica Oliveira, uma trabalhadora doméstica negra e criadora de conteúdo, utilizou as mídias sociais com o nome de usuário @faxinaboa (2016-2022) para contestar as dinâmicas de poder raciais e de gênero enraizadas nas estruturas coloniais em torno do trabalho doméstico no Brasil. Por meio da “alquimia digital” (Bailey, 2013; 2021), em uma época marcada por*

*dificuldades pessoais e políticas de extrema direita no país, Oliveira criou narrativas digitais lúdicas que afirmavam o direito de indivíduos marginalizados de produzir humor e se divertir. Esta pesquisa investiga o uso criativo de memes, paródias, trocadilhos e jogos de palavras criados por Oliveira através de uma leitura qualitativa do conteúdo de @faxinaboa no Facebook e no Instagram. Com base no conceito de “cidadão brincalhão” (Lammes et al., 2015; 2019), que explora o engajamento cívico e político por meio de interações lúdicas, este estudo argumenta que as narrativas digitais de Oliveira enfatizaram a importância do trabalho doméstico e reconheceram a humanidade multifacetada das trabalhadoras domésticas negras.*

## **Introduction**

Verônica Oliveira, a former *faxineira* (cleaning lady) and current digital influencer, deftly navigated the digital space in her social media accounts under the username @faxinaboa (good cleaning) between 2016 and 2022. In this paper, I propose that this case reveals the digital domain’s transformative potential to endow marginalized individuals with the right to create and mediate digital narratives while pursuing social justice in Brazil. This process, called “digital alchemy” by Afro-American feminist scholar Moya Bailey, involves marginalized groups using digital platforms to craft counter-content and forge alliances to recode the harmful narratives that negatively impact their lives. Women of color, Black women, and Black gender-variant individuals transform everyday digital tools into powerful resources to resist “misogynoir” — a term Bailey defines as the specific blend of misogyny and anti-Blackness targeting these groups (Bailey, 2021). For Bailey:

Alchemy is the “science” of turning regular metals into gold. When I talk about *digital alchemy*, I am thinking of the ways that women of color in particular transform everyday digital media into valuable social justice media magic. We turn scraps into something precious. Like chitterlings, the discarded pig intestines of the internet can be reworked into a delicacy. People can assume that leftovers are enough and abandon efforts to make sure everyone gets their fair share. It is the delicate balance of making do and pushing for more that informs my thinking on women of color’s transformative digital media magic (Bailey, 2013, n.p., emphasis in original).

Oliveira, a Black woman content creator and domestic worker, transformed what could be considered “scraps” into valuable digital narratives on her social media accounts from 2016 to 2022. This period marked a crucial time to resist, individually and collectively. Oliveira faced severe challenges, including job loss, precarious housing, and depression, leading to a suicide attempt. Brazil experienced the impact of far-right policies that strained its democracy and undermined the rights of domestic workers, further exacerbating this historical systemic racism and sexism. Home to the world’s largest population of domestic workers, approximately 5.8 million women, Brazil’s domestic labor sector is overwhelmingly represented by Black women—who make up 67.3% of these workers and earn, on average, 20% less than their non-Black counterparts (DIEESE, 2023). The legacy of slavery and colonialism in Brazil continues to affect domestic work, which primarily involves low-income women, who often find themselves marginalized and undervalued, experiencing precarious working conditions and lacking full labor rights (Teixeira, 2021).

Drawing on the notion of the “playful citizen” (Lammes et al., 2019), which explores how individuals can engage in civic and political participation through playful interactions, I

argue that Oliveira created playful digital content on her social media accounts which asserted the right of Black women domestic workers to produce humor and to have fun. Researchers in play and media studies have examined the “playful citizen” concept within digital culture and gamification. Instead of seeing “play” merely as a source of entertainment, it is viewed as a meaningful form of engagement. A “playful citizen” refers to individuals who do not adhere to only traditional methods of civic and political engagement, like voting or attending public meetings; instead, they utilize often featuring gamified or playful elements to question norms, express creativity and exercise agency (Lammes et al., 2019).

Oliveira emerged as a “playful citizen” by using social media as a space to endure and to play. Irreverence, humor, wit, and sarcasm were her framing devices to expose, criticize, and reshape the discourses around domestic work in her visual and written creations. Memes, parodies, puns, and wordplay played a central role in her commentary. She linked civic and political processes to common online practices, by adopting these everyday social media rituals typical of memetic and fun culture (Highfield, 2016). The domestic worker and content creator explicitly shared content with political themes, including her perspectives on domestic work policies and rights and her progressive political preferences. However, politics also emerged in her mundane personal activities online, such as her cleaning tips, music playlists, and advertisements for cleaning job opportunities.

In her 2020 biographical book titled *Minha Vida Passada a Limpo: Eu Não Terminei como Faxineira, Eu Comecei* [*My Life Come Clean: I Didn't End Up Being a Cleaner, I Started as One*],<sup>1</sup> Oliveira says that she first mobilized social media in 2016, starting with a personal Facebook

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<sup>1</sup> Own translation. All translations from Portuguese to English in this article are my own.

account. She created parodies of movie and TV posters to promote her cleaning services blending humor and pop culture references. To craft her promotional materials, she collaborated with her ex-boyfriend and a friend and accessed free Wi-Fi at the square, metro station, or bakery with her borrowed iPhone 4S after selling her own to pay off debts (Oliveira, 2020, p. 124). Despite limited access, Oliveira produced ludic expressions that caught the attention of the Brazilian Internet.

Her creative approach quickly gained popularity, with her first post receiving 10,000 likes and 6,000 shares—far exceeding her 300-view goal. Within a week, she received numerous job offers, created the page @faxinaboa, gained 10,000 followers, and had her first press interview (Oliveira, 2020, pp. 124-125). From that point forward, Oliveira began to expand her presence on Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube by adopting a playful approach to her social media content. She created posters, photos, and videos that included informative and narrative texts, sharing her thoughts on domestic work issues and beyond. Topics included the right to leisure and rest, motherhood, pregnancy, self-esteem, body image, politics, education, communication, entrepreneurship, empowerment, and everyday life.

Oliveira was interviewed by several prominent media outlets in Brazil including UOL, Carta Capital, and Rede Record. In 2022, she was featured in an episode of *PodPah*, the most listened-to podcast on Spotify in Brazil and 24th in the global ranking of the most popular podcasts (Huertas, 2022). Between 2016 and 2022, many followers of @faxinaboa commented that the page's digital stories "speak our language" or helped them grasp complex issues, influencing how they interacted with their employees, society, and themselves. Oliveira's presence in both online spaces and the mainstream cultural sector demonstrates that

narratives from a marginalized perspective, facilitated by the digital domain, captivate both local and national interest.

Oliveira's irreverent personality, marked by spontaneity, fun, and a blend of urban language and cultural diversity, shaped her digital presence. She states, "os anúncios do @faxinaboa sempre tinham a cultura pop como referência, pois isso faz parte de quem eu sou" [The @faxinaboa ads always referenced pop culture because that is a part of who I am] (Oliveira, 2020, p. 128). Growing up in the downtown neighborhood of Vila Buarque, São Paulo, Oliveira benefited from the stability her grandmother—a lifelong domestic worker in affluent areas—provided. This support enabled her to access a quality education and various cultural experiences. Her exposure to heavy metal and rock music, movies and series, public libraries, cultural centers, and skateboarding influenced her perspective (Oliveira, 2020, pp. 18-28). The following passage elucidates the creation process of @faxinaboa:

Eu não sabia absolutamente nada sobre criação de conteúdo ou como gerenciar uma página de Facebook, mas fui fazendo aos poucos, errando, acertando, descobrindo. Vi que ali havia espaço para muito mais do que postar anúncios de faxina: também dava para iniciar conversas, promover reflexões, fazer denúncias e, claro, **me divertir**. Então passei a postar desde pequenas crônicas sobre o dia a dia até *playlists* de música que escuto enquanto limpo, dicas de limpeza, relatos de situações de abuso e preconceitos vividos por mim e outras pessoas entre outras coisas. **O mais importante era sempre deixar clara a importância do trabalho que eu faço e estender isso a outros prestadores de serviço** [emphasis added] (Oliveira, 2020, p. 127).

[I knew absolutely nothing about content creation or how to manage a Facebook page, but I did it little by little, making mistakes, getting it right, and discovering. I saw there was room for much more than posting cleaning announcements: I could also start conversations,

promote reflection, make complaints, and, of course, **have fun**. So, I started posting everything from short chronicles about everyday life to playlists of music I listen to while I clean, cleaning tips, and reports of abuse and prejudice experienced by myself and others, among other things. **The most important thing was always to make clear the importance of the work I do and to extend this to other service providers**].

The act of claiming joy, “me divertir” (to have fun) resonates with bell hooks’ (2014) argument that Black women need spaces to express themselves freely and to pursue activities that bring joy as acts of resistance, healing, and survival. It constitutes Oliveira’s radical rejection of the systemic dehumanizing forces that seek to oppress Black women domestic workers’ bodies and dictate their places and roles in Brazilian society. Oliveira’s statement, “The most important thing was always to make clear the importance of the work I do and to extend that to other service providers,” reflects her commitment to address the recognition of domestic work in Brazil. This is relevant since improving the treatment of domestic workers in Brazil extends beyond just legislative measures; it requires a fundamental redefinition of how domestic work is perceived. It involves a broader social and cultural shift in how domestic workers are seen and valued (Gillam, 2016).

Focusing on @faxinaboa content created on Instagram from 2018 to 2022, I conducted a qualitative close reading utilizing digital content collection and systematic observation (Androutsopoulos, 2008). To grasp Oliveira’s initial presence in the digital space, I also investigate some of her early publications on Facebook, dating back to 2016. Additionally, I enhance my analysis with insights from journalistic interviews, podcasts, and her biographical book. As of December 2022, the @faxinaboa Instagram page had 956 posts and 331,000 followers, marking the conclusion of this research.

This study examined social media as a crucial platform for cultural expression for marginalized groups. Instagram, Brazil's second most popular social network as of 2022, saw approximately 53% of its users checking it multiple times daily (Opinion Box, 2024). This frequent engagement is particularly significant for lower-income groups (classes C and D), where 85% access the internet exclusively via smartphones—devices that are often their only gateway to online spaces. This demographic consists mainly of 65% Black Brazilians, compared to 51% White Brazilians (NIC.br, 2019), illustrating the platform's role in amplifying the voices of historically underrepresented populations.

The ethical framework for this research adhered to the guidelines set by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR, 2019). Images and texts were collected through screenshots taken during fieldwork conducted from 2022 to 2024. Sensitive information, such as Oliveira's phone number in her ads, was redacted to protect user privacy. Some verbatim citations from followers' comments on @faxinaboia were utilized to explain the diverse perspectives on the content published. All comments were anonymized by removing usernames, profile pictures, and any identifying information from the text. Additionally, publication dates were omitted to prevent profiling or exposure on social media.

### **1922-2022: Redefining Domestic Work Bodies, Places and Purposes**

In the context of this special issue titled "Ruptures and Continuities in Brazilian Cultural Production," the digital narratives from @faxinaboia present a compelling case for rethinking and democratizing the concept of Brazilian culture. This case addresses important historical omissions and challenges that began with the 1922 Week of Modern Art, which still resonate today in 2022. The page's digital narratives significantly contributed to the



sociocultural-political debate on representations of domestic work and Black women domestic workers in Brazil.

Tarsila do Amaral, an influential painter associated with anthropophagic ideals in the 1920s, which aimed to “devour” and reinterpret foreign cultural influences to create something uniquely Brazilian, sought to integrate the influence of Afro-Brazilian culture into the art scene (de Oliveira, 2014, p.264). In her painting *A Negra* [*The Black Woman*] (1923), Amaral challenges the artistic norms of her time by placing a marginalized black domestic worker at the center of her artwork. However, the figure without a name is still objectified, with her identity solely defined by her color – Black. While her presence is acknowledged, it is only validated through the lens of the white enslaver’s household, emphasizing a dynamic of control and marginalization (Paula et al., 2019).

This portrayal is rooted in the memories of the nation’s subservient past marked by enslavement and colonialism. *A Negra* symbolizes “the great slave mother of the mulatto, the mixed-race and hybrid nation” (de Oliveira, 2014, p.261). The imagery of a naked woman with a pendulous breast, shaped by the influence of Amaral’s childhood experiences on a family farm and interactions with enslaved domestics, invokes the figure of “mãe preta” (“Black Mammy”). This suggests a reflection on the history of wet-nursing and the intimate, yet exploitative bonds formed in such relationships (Meira, 2008). In Brazil, two primary tropes characterize the stereotypical cultural representations of Black women. The first is the “mulata”, which refers to a mixed-race woman of African and European descent who has features associated with whiteness and is often depicted as sexually available. The second is the “mãe preta”, representing a larger, asexual Black woman characterized by nurturing qualities (Gonzalez, 1984). The maternal and sexual themes in Amaral’s painting are evident,

as analyzed by Meira (2008):

Tarsila do Amaral's "Black Woman", apathetic in her surroundings, expresses nothing of revolt or maladjustment due to her servile condition. The monstrous connotation of the native and exotic figure of the *Negra*, stylized, in a way, in an almost architectural effect of figuration, would give vent to Tarsila's interpretation of the stories of maternal duties; at the same time as it unconsciously brought clues and portraits of the reality of the native Brazilian black woman. Racial situations are subtly evoked, and the uncomfortable position of the black woman is revealed, illustrating aspects of sexual exploitation and labor in the Brazilian household at the end of the 19th century (Meira, 2008, p. 949; my translation).

Teixeira et al. (2020), from examining employers' discussions about domestic workers on social media platforms, such as Orkut and Twitter, revealed that these themes continue to be disseminated in the country. For instance, the authors analyzed the thumbnail image of a Twitter group featuring an apparently period studio-made photograph with direct reference to a Black enslaved woman caring for a white newborn. The wet nurse in the image is fully dressed, unlike the depiction in *A Negra*, where the subject's breast is exposed. However, she evokes the painting through her apathetic gaze directed at the camera, seemingly detached from her surroundings. Her subservient demeanor exemplifies the relationship between proximity and subordination to the masters. The phrase "Don't let the whip hit you on the way out" accompanied the photo in the Twitter group. According to the authors, such portrayals reveal a persistent attribution of inferiority to impoverished Black workers, intertwined with a nostalgic glorification of past enslavement and exploitation (Teixeira et al., 2020, pp. 34-35).

The "mãe preta" and "mulata" tropes, deeply tied to ideologies that associate

Blackness with servitude, often manifested in the figure of the *doméstica* (“maid”). This figure carries negative connotations related to sexuality, kindness, cleanliness, and work ethic. It has been used to address Brazil’s colonial legacy of servitude in relation to its modernization while also serving the cultural and political interests of the ruling classes (Roncador, 2014). For example, the *doméstica* in television and cinema often appears through the lens of deprecating humor. In the 1950s, Brazilian films began featuring domestic workers, especially in comedies like *Cala a Boca, Etelvina* (1958), and *Minervina Vem Aí* (1959). These films presented caricatured and grotesque representations of maids, depicting them as either sloppy or benevolent (Ramos, 1987). The contemporary film *Que Horas Ela Volta?* (2015) portrayed the main character, Val, as *mãe-preta*, a kind, charismatic, funny, and zealous house cleaner, cook, and nanny (Velho, 2022).

In *Domésticas* (2001), *Brega* music—labeled as “the sound coming from the kitchen” in the film—serves as the soundtrack for the *doméstica* characters. This Brazilian genre is often pejoratively called tacky or low-taste music (Bernardino, 2016, pp. 36-43). It reflects the persistent societal pressure to maintain the rigid boundaries between social classes reinforcing the common image that domestic workers must be confined to the private sphere of the home (Teixeira et al., 2015). On television, domestic workers appeared as fundamentally “different” from their employers, often labeled as “poor,” “ignorant”, “trashy”, and “superstitious” (Rezende, 1997). Ludically rendered as a dreamy and sensual figure, the housemaid rises socially through unexpected artistic talents, as seen in *Transas e Caretas* (1984) (Araújo, 2004) and *Cheias de Charme* (2012) (Macedo, 2016).

A hundred years after *A Negra*, Oliveira’s social media posting rejects the reduction of Black women domestic workers to their bodies, places, and purposes. In sync with other Afro-

Brazilian media creators who “focus on Afro-Brazilian women as subjects with inner lives in ways that deviate from mainstream media” (Gillam, 2016, p. 1444), Oliveira portrayed Black women domestic workers as protagonists of their own stories, centering on their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. She showed this group’s struggles and aspirations within but also outside their profession and workplace.

Oliveira redefined domestic work as a respected profession, advocating liberation from the historical ties to servitude. This approach challenges the persistent feelings of shame associated with domestic work, a sentiment that domestic workers have widely documented since the 1980s in their written testimonies, and more recently on platforms like Preta Rara’s Facebook page *Eu, Empregada Doméstica* (Randall, 2024). Oliveira’s empowerment strategies focused on acknowledging the expertise and techniques of domestic workers, positioning them as skilled professionals rather than subordinate laborers. By valuing their knowledge and abilities in household management and care, she elevated their role and contributes to recognizing their dignity and importance.

The comical portrayals of Black women domestic workers in @faxinaboia offered a refreshing contrast to historically grotesque depictions. Oliveira’s use of parody and wordplay allowed her to highlight the identities of Black women without resorting to degrading bodily aspects. On August 27, 2021, Oliveira posted a comical photograph of herself breastfeeding her daughter in a bakery in São Paulo (Figure 1). This image parallels *A Negra* and the photograph used in the thumbnail of the Twitter group, where the Black woman, mother, and domestic worker is central. However, unlike these earlier depictions, Oliveira’s image subverts the narratives that link Blackness and servitude.



Figure 1: Faxina Boa, Instagram. Edited screenshot. August 2022.

Here (Figure 1), she is not portrayed as a caretaker nourishing the nation, someone else domestic space, or a white child; instead, she feeds her daughter in a public space on her terms. Her facial expression breaks from the serious, submissive demeanor seen in *A Negra* and the Twitter image discussed by Teixeira et al (2020); a burp cloth humorously obscures her face. The caption, written in uppercase, reads “PUT A CLOTH OVER IT,” mocking the common Brazilian criticism that women should not breastfeed in public. Oliveira sarcastically responds with “done,” subverting this discourse by covering her face instead of her breasts. Here, her breasts are hers.

On the @faxinaboa page, unlike in the 1920s, the marginalized individual is not only a subject but an active creator of culture, engaged in self-representation. Storytelling is entirely crafted by a Black woman domestic worker, who has historically been misrepresented and perceived through someone else's eyes. Oliveira's approach in creating her world through her own eyes and crafting her digital stories with her own hands aligns with the fundamental cultural aim championed by Afro-Brazilian historian, poet, and activist Beatriz Nascimento, who argued that Black people must establish their own image and reclaim their imagination about themselves (Nascimento, 2022).

### **(Non)Digital Challenges in Times of Escalating Sexism and Racism**

The digital narratives of @faxinaboa emerged from a digital alchemy process informed by "the delicate balance of making do and pushing for more" (Bailey, 2013, n.p.) as the country and Oliveira confronted moments of pain, injustice, and indignity while striving to navigate a life of joy, justice, and dignity. Brazil witnessed the consolidation of political instability/destabilization of democracy, including the parliamentary coup that led to the impeachment of democratically elected left-wing female president Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the subsequent presidency of extreme right-wing and authoritarian Jair Bolsonaro (2018-2022). It saw the challenges experienced by care workers during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the emotional, physical, and logistical burdens on healthcare professionals (Pinheiro, Tokarski and Vasconcelos, 2020).

The country also beheld setbacks in Brazilian labour laws, notably, the *PEC das Domésticas 72/2013* (Constitutional Amendment 72/2013) and *Lei Complementar 150/2015* (Complementary Law 150/2015). Aiming to improve the rights and conditions of domestic

workers in the country, these laws had sought to ensure equal treatment for domestic workers, including entitlements such as a 44-hour working week, paid holiday leave, maternity leave, and unemployment insurance (Silva et al., 2022). After a decade of policy implementation, the number of workers with formal contracts fell from 1.9 million in 2013 to 1.5 million in 2022. Meanwhile, informal employment (unregistered workers) rose from 4 million to 4.3 million over the same period (Miranda, 2023). According to Cleide Pinto, Director of the National Federation of Domestic Workers (Fenatrad), formal employment has declined across Brazil for multiple reasons: “It is due to the previous government’s lack of investment in job creation, the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of gig platforms, and job agencies that barely comply with labor laws. This is the current picture of Brazil’s employment informality crisis” (Pinto in Miranda, 2023).

The @faxinaboa account emerged in 2016 when Oliveira, a single mother of two, faced challenges due to precarious labor conditions and limited housing and mobility in São Paulo, the largest city in Latin America. The city has a population of 11,451,999, and the metropolitan region’s population, including the city’s, reaches 20,743,587 people (IBGE, 2022). Oliveira had no choice during this period but to live with a friend after the medical company she worked for went bankrupt. She says in her biography:

tudo que já estava indo de mal a pior ficou ainda mais caótico com o *impeachment* da presidenta Dilma Rousseff, trazendo medo e incerteza para todos nós e fazendo com que muitos dos meus amigos decidissem sair do país -- até que chegou a vez da minha melhor amiga



[everything that was already going from bad to worse became even more chaotic with the impeachment of President Dilma Rouseff, bringing fear and uncertainty to all of us and causing many of my friends to decide to leave the country – until it was my best friend's turn] (Oliveira, 2020, p. 96).

In 2016, political instability in Brazil was a key factor that led to an economic crisis, resulting in the country's worst recession in decades. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contracted by 3.6% in 2016 (IBGE, 2017). Moving then to cheaper but poorly maintained collective housing downtown, Oliveira encountered hostile relationships among the residents, reflecting the struggles, such as hunger, many faced at the time. Struggling with depression, she attempted suicide and was hospitalized at a psychiatric clinic (Oliveira, 2020).

Upon discharge, she stayed at a friend's house and helped clean the apartment to contribute. Impressed by her hard work, her friend offered to pay her 150 reais. It was then that Oliveira realized she could earn a stable income by offering cleaning services regularly. At the time, Oliveira made only 680 reais per month while on medical leave. If she cleaned for a few hours daily without a formal contract, she would cover her family's housing and food expenses. She began working at the homes of friends and acquaintances and saw housekeeping as her new profession for the first time (Oliveira, 2020).

Most domestic workers in Brazil, like Oliveira, are *diaristas*, which is another term for *faxineiras* ("cleaning ladies"). They work in multiple households within a week and usually earn a higher hourly wage. Many domestic workers, especially in the urban areas of Brazil's southwest and south, prefer working as *diaristas* because it gives them more independence to choose the days and number of days they work per week (Barba, 2011, in Teixeira, 2021).



However, most of these women work informally, without social protection, and often must deal with a schedule filled with heavier cleaning tasks (Teixeira, 2021).

In an interview with *PodPah* podcast in August 2022, Oliveira mentioned that she initially completed 60 cleaning jobs in two months because she urgently needed money to address her financial problems. However, she had to stop working because she became ill with a herniated disc from carrying and pushing heavy items while cleaning houses. Oliveira says that she even risked cleaning the windows of Copan, an important historical building in São Paulo. This case highlights the dangers and lack of protection many *diaristas* face.

In addition to the socio-economic and political background, concerns about the dominant power structures co-opting digital narratives, as well as limitations and ethical issues relating to social media platforms and internet access in Brazil, mark the appearance of @faxinaboa. Corporate platforms like Instagram and Facebook can influence which stories reach a wider audience and which remain marginalized by their control over algorithms and content distribution. This selective dissemination can impact the visibility of narratives created by marginalized individuals, potentially perpetuating existing power imbalances (Holmes, 2016). Silva (2022) discusses digital racism, algorithmic bias, and the role of technology in perpetuating racial and gender stereotypes in Brazil. According to the author, algorithmic racism refers to:

(...) how the arrangement of technologies and socio-technical imaginaries in a world shaped by white supremacy performs the racialized algorithmic ordering of social classification, resources, and violence to the detriment of minority groups. Such ordering can be seen as an additional layer of structural racism, which, moreover, shapes the future and horizons of power relations, adding further opacity to the global exploitation and oppression that has already been taking place since the colonial project of the 16th century (Silva, 2022, p. 69; my translation).

The internet access issues in the country complicates the matter, as disparities in access limit the reach of these narratives to specific segments of society. Brazil grapples with a digital divide that leaves many of its poorest citizens, including domestic workers, with limited or no access to the internet or the necessary devices to utilize it. While the proportion of Brazilian households with internet access has increased notably in recent years, a significant portion of the population still lacks internet access (Randall, 2024). In 2018, nearly a quarter of Brazilian adults had never used the internet, with internet usage closely correlated with factors such as education, income, and age, approximately 12.6 million households in the country did not have internet access (IBGE, 2019).

Moreover, turning Oliveira's self-branding and the pages' followers into revenue, for instance, stresses that while the digital space serves as a potent platform for seeking social justice, it simultaneously transforms such activism into another type of labor within the social media economy. As Randall pointed out, these types of pages:

involve the creation of an online community that tempts users to interact with others by responding to or liking posts and thereby sharing even more personal data that can be harvested for profit to financially benefit social media companies as well as the third parties with which the companies encourage users to connect (2021, p. 201).

While @faxinaboa focuses on transformative narratives about domestic work, the page also engages in paid partnerships with well-known Brazilian companies such as Google, Youtube, Bradesco and Boticário. Sponsored content is a common monetization method where brands pay influencers to promote products or services through posts, stories, or videos. Its success depends on blending naturally into the influencer's usual content, keeping it authentic while conveying the brand's message (Pitafi and Awan, 2024). Some media outlets describe Oliveira's journey as an example of a successful woman who transitioned from cleaning services to conquering the world (Veja, 2021; CNN Brasil Soft, 2022; Printi, 2024). This portrayal frames her story within a highly individualistic and neoliberal narrative of success. It emphasizes a vision of upward mobility for domestic workers who transition out of traditional roles, often reinforcing the idea of personal achievement over structural change. The notion of rising above one's circumstances through financial success and fame remains largely unattainable, particularly for *faxineiras*, who continue to face extreme inequality and a persistent disregard for their legal rights.

Despite the challenges, the @faxinaboa digital narratives on social media remain relevant. In the playful digital narratives of @faxinaboa, the "discarded pig intestines of the internet can be reworked into a delicacy" (Bailey, 2013, n.p.). Building on Oliveira's marginalized perspective, these narratives challenge the material and symbolic subjugation

of Black women domestic workers in Brazil. Oliveira came across as a “playful citizen” to show that in Brazil, Black women domestic workers creatively repurpose the digital landscape despite facing racism, sexism, limited access to technology, and social, political, and economic instability.

### **The Playful Digital Narratives of @faxinaboa**

On November 10, 2016, Oliveira shared in her Facebook account a parody of a movie and a series along with a funny and sincere text advertising for houses to clean. While looking for ideas to craft her materials, Oliveira noticed that online promotional materials were very similar:

muitas mulheres oferecendo o serviço por valores muito baixos na esperança de conseguir trabalho, muitas justificativas por estar prestando esse tipo de serviço, e muita gente que claramente não gostava do que fazia e o fazia por não ter outra opção, além de um sem-número de histórias tristes

[Many women offering the service at very low rates in hopes of finding work, numerous justifications for providing this type of service, and many people who clearly did not enjoy what they were doing but continued out of necessity. This was alongside countless sad stories] (Oliveira, 2020, p. 123).

She acknowledged the difficult factors that forced them to write such sad texts, however she believed it was necessary to incorporate her preferred style into her creative posters (Oliveira, 2020, p. 123).



Figures 2 (top) and 3 (bottom): Faxina Boa, Facebook, 2022. Edited screenshots. August 2022.

One of the posters had the slogan “Casa Zoneada? Better Call Veronica!” (Messy House? Better Call Veronica), inspired by a character from her favorite TV series *Better Call Saul* (Figure 2). The other was a montage featuring a character from Quentin Tarantino’s

famous film, *Kill Bill* (Figure 3). The use of parody as a communication strategy showcases the creator's social media literacy and political awareness (Highfield, 2016). It is employed to engage potential employers online and meet her immediate financial needs. Yet, it also shows her humanized perspective on the role of Black domestic workers in society.

The Black woman domestic worker is not a supporting character in both parodies. Instead, the cleaner takes on the lead role. Oliveira introduces herself as a professional worker, like any other recognized expert, capable of solving crucial problems in a customer's everyday life. In this case, it is a messy house — similar to how lawyer Jimmy McGill (Bob Odenkirk) handles court cases in the original character in *Better Call Saul* (Figure 2). This positions the domestic worker not as mere laborer suited for physical tasks and lacking intellectual capabilities (Teixeira et al., 2015), but rather as a provider of a specialized service for which they should be appropriately compensated. The expression “not toll-free”, written in capital letters, indicates that the service has a set fee.

Correspondingly, just as The Bride/Beatrix Kiddo (Uma Thurman) wields the instrument of power—a sword—in the film *Kill Bill*, the Black cleaner in Oliveira's parody wields a broom, symbolizing her authority in her field of activity (Figure 3). This visual depiction contests the persistence of broader societal biases that often overlook the significant presence and contributions of Black women in the domestic workforce. For instance, in a quick Google Images search in September 2022 for the phrase “faxineira para trabalhar em São Paulo” [cleaning lady to work in São Paulo], the author of this paper found that the first 15 ads featured domestic workers wearing uniforms or aprons. These are symbols of the subordinate and overlooked status of these workers in Brazilian society (Da Silva and Lira, 2021). Notably, 13 of these images depicted white women, with only two showed mixed-race

ones. However, currently in Brazil there are about 3.9 million Black women working in this sector, compared to 1.9 million non-Black workers (DIEESE, 2023).

Oliveira, who is the warrior in her advertisement, gazes directly into the camera, her eyes ablaze with intensity, her expression fierce. She is not wearing traditional domestic workwear. Her hair, a magnificent afro, a sacred means of expression, and a symbol of liberation (Campbell, 2020), stands tall —an imposing crown that speaks volumes and asserts her Black identity. In the Google Images search mentioned above, all cleaners have straight hair, are seen with their hair tied up, and some are wearing headdresses. This implies that Black women not only provide essential services and expertise to maintain Brazilian households but also have the right to do so without having to deny their Blackness. This confronts the issue of shame which leads to processes where individuals assimilate into the ideal of whitening society and deny elements of black identity as a means of social ascension (Carneiro, 1995; 2015).





Figure 4: Faxina Boa, Facebook, 2022. Edited screenshot. August 2022.

Shared on November 18, 2016, still on Facebook, her second advertisement continues to engage in creations with funny experimentation twists. Its references are now anchored in the famous films from the *Star Wars* series (Figure 4). This approach might strengthen the audience's connection with the domestic worker, promoting a more humanized view of those who are often marginalized. Oliveira replaces "Princesa Leia" (Princess Leia), who becomes "Limpeza Leia" (Cleaning Leia) in Portuguese, creating a playful twist on the character's name by using the similar "-esa" ending sounds. Furthermore, the famous *Star Wars* line, "The Power of the Dark Side," turns into "Faxina Boa: O lado limpo da força" [Good Cleaning: The Clean Side of the Force]. Instead of using self-deprecating humor to create comedic effects, this ad focuses on wordplay. Oliveira situates the act of cleaning within the familiar *Star Wars* universe, transforming an everyday task into an almost heroic mission.



These advertisements tap into the global influence of U.S. pop culture by referencing popular TV shows and films, aligning with Oliveira's embracement of today's memetic and fun culture (Highfield, 2016). The ads challenge traditional societal structures that maintain domestic workers as distant or disengaged from political and civil matters. Instead, the domestic worker appears as an active participant in this shared cultural space, becoming part of a broader trend of participatory creativity, where individuals adapt and remix media to create new meanings, create community connections, and foster a sense of belonging.



Figure 5: Faxina Boa, Instagram, June 2018. Screenshot. August 2022.

The challenge to the “trashy” cultural tastes often attributed to domestic workers is evident in Oliveira's creation of her eclectic cleaning playlists (Figure 5). The cleaner shows that *faxineiras* can enjoy various musical genres, including heavy metal, rock, and pop bands. This contrasts with the common portrayal that links these workers solely to popular genres

like *Brega*. Her choices do not reject specific genres but highlight her autonomy and individuality in her musical preferences. It underscores the multifaceted identities of domestic workers who are not isolated from global trends nor confined to a singular cultural expression. Furthermore, the use of the conditional sentence, “if you want me to clean, you have to know that here the sequence is like this”, illustrates Oliveira’s rules for completing her work. She stresses the importance of music and fun as essential parts of her cleaning routine and insists that these are non-negotiable conditions to perform such work.

The recognition of domestic work is also addressed on @faxinaboa through the debate on the stigma of shame. Oliveira’s strategy for dispelling such perceptions is to empower other women in the field to recognize their proficiency and methods. For example, through lighthearted interactions characterized by amusing language that recurred on her Instagram over the period of the fieldwork, she explains in detail what she does to clean windows, wash the dishes or take out the trash. Oliveira describes the appropriate work instruments, such as gloves, chemical products, brooms and squeegees, for domestic workers’ safety and better cleaning results.

In a debate about dealing with the accumulation of dirty dishes in the kitchen sink, followers engaged by sharing their thoughts on Oliveira’s strategies and offering their own perspectives on this everyday challenge. One follower suggested, “Limpo de dentro p fora...renovando energia” [I clean from the inside out...renewing energy]. Another posed a question, “louça faz parte da faxina? Pq mtos me dizem que não. Me ajuda aí” [Is washing dishes part of the cleaning job? Because many people say no. Help me.]. Reflecting on the broader issue, another follower commented, “Acho o uó esse povo que deixa acumular a louça a semana inteira porque vão fazer faxina X da semana. Cobrava um extra!” [I think it’s crazy

that people let dirty dishes accumulate all week because someone will clean on a set day. I would charge extra!"]. Finally, someone shared a more personal approach: “Eu sigo as dicas da minha sábia avó” [I follow the tips of my wise grandmother].

By playing with familiar domestic life tropes, Oliveira prompts her audience to think more critically about the values attributed to such tasks and domestic labor in general. This zoom into the expertise of domestic workers is compelling since these ideas emerge in a simple and accessible fashion. Unlike the complex jargon often found in institutions such as trade unions, media, and academia, Oliveira’s language makes these insights more accessible to a wider marginalized audience. She opens spaces for political and civic engagement in innovative ways which offers a fresh approach to interacting with democracy’s formal institutions (Lammes et al., 2019).

The February 7, 2018, post titled “Momento Cultural #faxinaboa” [#faxinaboa Cultural Moment], featured an Instagram carousel displaying two photos. The first one showed a bathroom sink with slime (Figure 6), while the subsequent one showed a clean sink without any residue (Figure 7). Although the source does not appear, Oliveira explained in scientific language that the slime is composed of chlorophyte spores that appear when the water heats up. However, since the objective of the account is to “pass on to other service providers the importance of domestic work”, Oliveira understands that this technical information for cleaning quality must be presented in a more accessible language “na linguagem da ZL que nós e acostumada: ‘eca, nojinho’” [in the ZL language that we are used to: ‘yuck, gross’]. This language is directed to followers familiar with the marginalized language used in the São Paulo periphery, here characterized by the *Zona Leste* (East Zone).

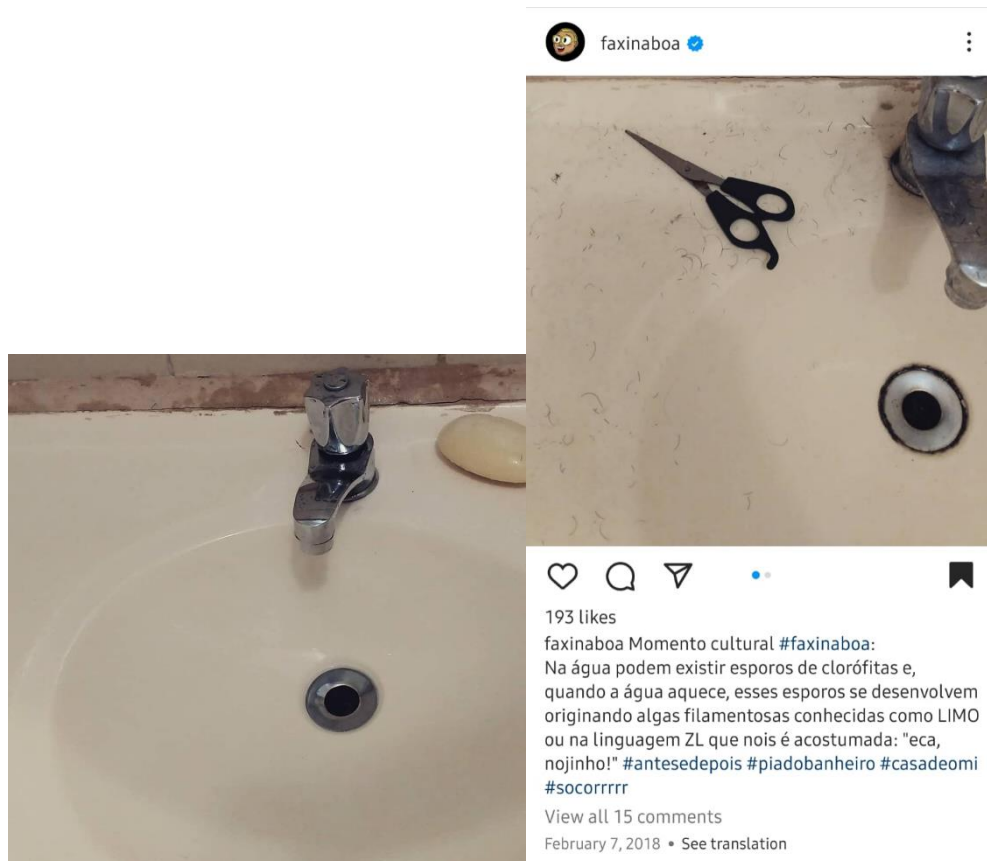


Figure: 6 (right) and 7 (left): Faxina Boa, Instagram, February 2018. Screenshot. August 2022.

Although @faxinaboa was not explicitly linked to a domestic workers' union or political party, it contributed to the aims of these institutions. For instance, some posts and videos explained how to identify and combat possible discrimination and analyze the advances made by the category after ten years of the domestic workers' law. During Brazil's 2022 presidential campaign, Oliveira released a video featuring various domestic workers reacting to the far-right president Jair Bolsonaro's comments expressing his dislike for domestic workers' labor laws (August 18, 2022). The women in the video were visibly upset by his remarks, voicing their concerns and stating that they could not support a candidate

who threatened to strip away the rights they had fought hard to achieve. The @faxinaboa video resonated widely, reaching 14,000 views.

In June 2020, when protests intensified in Brazil against the genocide of the Black population and in favor of democracy—sparked by the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis—public and anonymous figures from both countries used social networks to show solidarity under the banner of the anti-fascist movement (UFMG, 2020). Oliveira participated in this social media ritual (Highfield, 2016) by adapting and using an antifascist meme. She was not alone in positioning herself, but she added her own context to the creation. She crafted a personalized slogan featuring “Faxineiras Antifascistas” (Anti-fascist cleaning ladies) (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Faxina Boa, Instagram, June 2020. Screenshot. June 2024.

Despite their replicative nature, this case shows that the spread of memes relies on intentional agents with decision-making powers. Social norms, perceptions, and preferences play crucial roles in the memetic selection processes (Conte, 2000). This moment stresses Oliveira's commitment to social justice and alignment with global movements advocating for racial equality and human rights. The caption reads: "Sou contra o autoritarismo. Sou contra a ditadura. Sou contra a ideia de superioridade racial. Sou contra a censura. Sou a favor da liberdade, do chá mate, da felicidade e do piso limpinho e cheiroso" [I am against

authoritarianism. I am against dictatorship. I am against the idea of racial superiority. I am against censorship. I favor freedom, mate tea, happiness and the clean-smelling floor].

The former Minister of Economy, Paulo Guedes in February 2020, commented during an economic crisis that the dollar should not drop because “maids were going to Disneyland [in Lula’s era], a hell of a party”. On February 16, 2020, in a post featuring a screenshot of a news headline about Guedes’ position, Oliveira expressed her outrage at Guedes’s discriminatory view:

Quando um ministro deixa claro que uma empregada doméstica não deve ir à Disney, está legitimando o discurso de que nós não podemos prosperar. Eu sei que muitas de nós mal conseguimos sair de nossas cidades para passeios mais simples, quanto mais viajar pelo mundo. E eles querem que você pense que isso é errado. Sabe aquela coisa de ‘coloque-se no seu lugar?’ POIS O MEU LUGAR É TODO LUGAR. (...) Enquanto estamos limpando sua sujeira somos boas, mas quando sentamos ao seu lado no avião aí já é demais, não é? Pois saiba que eu não aceito, e gostaria que você que estiver lendo também não aceite. E ao ministro, um beijo e saiba que esse passaporte ainda vai ver muito carimbo.

[When a minister makes it clear that a domestic worker should not go to Disney, he legitimizes the discourse that we cannot prosper. I know that many of us can barely get out of our cities for the simplest outings, never mind travelling worldwide. And they want you to think that this is wrong. You know that expression ‘put yourself in your place’? WELL, MY PLACE IS EVERYWHERE. (...) While we are cleaning up their mess, we are good, but when we are sitting next to them on the airplane, that is too much. Well, you should know that I do not accept it, and I would like you reading this not to accept it either. And to the minister, I send a kiss and better you know, my passport will have many more stamps.]

Her reflection shows that she is a conscious subject who maintains a sense of herself while handling this exploitative labor terrain (Gillam, 2016). Oliveira refuses to conform to the spatial and ideological place that is determined for domestic workers. She challenges the systemic efforts to limit the aspirations of marginalized groups, arguing that they should not be restricted from pursuing experiences beyond their assumed social boundaries, such as traveling to Disney. Her sarcastic question highlights the contrast between society's acceptance of domestic workers in subordinate roles and the discomfort felt when seen in positions of equality. She asserts her right to occupy any space she chooses.

Nevertheless, stepping beyond the confines traditionally imposed upon domestic workers in this post and many others attracted some backlash. The cleaner and content creator frequently received both public and private messages that threaten her, insisting that, as a domestic worker, she should "stay in her place"—essentially to remain subservient and confined within the domestic space. One follower even warned Oliveira that he would report her online behavior, describing her actions as too "audacious" toward her employers.

In his research, Trindade (2018) demonstrated that racist slurs on social media are primarily reactions to positive events involving black women in Brazil. When black women showcase various forms of prestige—such as holding respected professions like medicine and journalism, occupying leadership positions in media, traveling internationally, or participating in beauty contests—it can trigger instances of racist harassment on social media. Oliveira, however, resists these limitations by bringing depth and complexity to her life, asserting her identity beyond the secluded and stereotypical confines of domestic labor. Through her roles as an entrepreneur and writer, she illustrates that Black women can and do occupy spaces of power, creativity, and influence.



In these pictures (Figure 9 and 10), Oliveira is front and center, surrounded by recording cameras, microphones, and computers, which highlights the importance of her opinion in discussions about the challenges of entrepreneurship in the digital age. This emphasizes her credibility and the value of her insights. On the other hand, Oliveira is shown celebrating the promotion of her newly published biography, which emphasizes her sense of accomplishment and the importance of sharing her story. This shows her determination to create a domestic worker's identity in constant movement.



Figure 9 (left) and 10 (right): Faxina Boa, Instagram. Screenshot/edited screenshot. August 2022.

By 2020, Oliveira was no longer be working in the domestic sector. Her work on social media has led Oliveira to other enterprises: she is currently a speaker, entrepreneurial writer,

digital influencer, and, as she defines herself, *atual faxineira de ideias* (“current cleaning lady of ideas”) (Figure 11). This title suggests a role focused on refreshing, clarifying, and deconstructing outdated or limiting concepts, like a cleaner removes physical clutter. By “cleaning” ideas, Oliveira positions herself as a transformative figure intent on influencing new approaches. Yet, she fully embraces *faxineira* as an integral part of her identity and knowledge base by maintaining it in her profile.



Figure 11: Faxina Boa, Instagram, 2022. Screenshot. September 2022.

## Conclusion

Verônica Oliveira’s journey as a domestic worker and a content creator epitomized the power of social media as a transformative platform for marginalized perspectives. Her @faxinaboa page showcased how Brazilian marginalized individuals can turn “everyday digital media into valuable social justice media magic” (Bailey, 2013, n.p.). Oliveira crafted stories that contest the enduring gendered and racial power dynamics rooted in colonial

structures around domestic work in contemporary Brazil, particularly those that affect the lives of Black women domestic workers.

The digital alchemy described by Moya Bailey (2013; 2021) is evident in Oliveira's work since this digital transformation is about creating engaging content, reshaping cultural perceptions, and advocating for social justice. Between 2016 and 2022, Oliveira faced numerous challenges, ranging from precarious working conditions to health issues. At the same time, Brazil was grappling with serious concerns about the erosion of its democracy and the weakening of labor laws. However, the digital narratives of @faxinaboa transformed Oliveira's experiences and those of other domestic workers into a powerful form of counter-narrative.

Oliveira's approach bridges past and present debates regarding the roles and representations of Black women in Brazil. Her playful digital narratives starkly contrast with the reductive portrayals seen in works like Tarsila do Amaral's *A Negra*. While Amaral's modernist depiction acknowledged the existence of Black women, it retained a colonial perspective that perpetuated their objectification. Oliveira's narratives subvert traditional tropes, such as the "mãe preta" and "mulata," reshaping the identities of domestic workers and positioning them as protagonists in their own stories rather than mere subjects of servitude. Her content emphasized the importance of domestic work in Brazil and acknowledged the multifaceted humanity of Black women domestic workers.

Her approach aligns with the concept of the playful citizen, as discussed by Lammes et al. (2019), which emphasizes the importance of playful interactions in civic and political engagement. Through parodies inspired by *Better Call Saul* and *Kill Bill*, Oliveira reimaged domestic labor as a space of agency and expertise, portraying herself as a professional and

even heroic figure in her advertisements. These representations highlighted the essential contributions of domestic workers while affirming their intellectual and social value. By proudly showcasing her Black identity, including her afro hair, Oliveira challenged societal biases that marginalize or devalue Black women in this field, rejecting narratives rooted in shame or the pressure to conform to whiteness. Expanding her creative approach, she connected with audiences through eclectic cleaning playlists and humorous references to pop culture, such as *Star Wars*, infusing her work with relatability and wit.

Although not directly associated with domestic workers' unions or political parties, Oliveira played a significant role in local and global movements for racial equality and labor justice. Her content addressed systemic issues, such as the rollback of domestic workers' rights during Jair Bolsonaro's presidency, and voiced opposition through widely shared posts, including a video critiquing Bolsonaro's disdain for labor protections. Similarly, Oliveira actively participated in broader social justice movements, such as the anti-fascist protests in 2020, where she created the personalized slogan "Anti-fascist Cleaning Ladies."

Oliveira used her platform to challenge the societal limitations imposed on domestic workers, including the dismissive attitudes exemplified by Minister Paulo Guedes' remark about maids traveling to Disneyland. Her response boldly asserted that domestic workers have the right to occupy any space, rejecting the expectation to remain in subordinate roles. Despite facing online harassment and threats, Oliveira continued to embrace her identity as a Black woman, entrepreneur, and writer while dismissing harmful stereotypes. Her journey from domestic work to becoming a digital influencer and what she describes as the "current cleaning lady of ideas" reflects her mission to disrupt limiting narratives, share her unique perspective, and inspire transformative conversations about labor and identity.

The @faxinaboa digital narratives presented challenges, particularly regarding memetic culture and the limitations of social media. While memes and their various genres promote accessibility and virality, they risk oversimplifying critical discussions into transient content that gets replicated multiple times, ultimately diminishing essential debates. Moreover, Oliveira's work also highlights the tension between authenticity and commercialization, as the monetization of @faxinaboa raises questions about the sustainability of grassroots activism in an increasingly commodified social media landscape.

Oliveira's work nonetheless contributed significantly to discussions about race, gender, labor, and representation in Brazil. From her marginalized position, she challenged both the symbolic and material experiences of Black women domestic workers. Oliveira pioneered new meanings and criteria to create opportunities for addressing social and digital cultural issues through the knowledge and creativity of these women. Her digital narratives highlight how playfulness can coexist with activism, offering a fresh perspective on how marginalized communities navigate oppressive systems. By reclaiming joy and humor as forms of resistance, Oliveira critiques systemic inequalities and inspires collective resilience.

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