Dangerous Brown Workers: How Race and Migration Politics Shape the Platform Labour Market

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It is notoriously difficult to secure basic workers' rights in the platform economy.[1] Across the world, workers have organised against platformisation's most excessive violations, achieving significant gains despite the overwhelming barriers to unionisation written in its DNA.[2] Many of these struggles focus on the central contradiction upon which platforms are built: the (mis)classification of workers as independent contractors. This contradiction, whereby workers are legally and culturally defined as self-employed, yet subject to levels of employer control that often exceed traditional employment, is considered to be at the heart of many of its exploitative practices.[3]

However, platform work is not an abstract model designed in Silicon Valley and deployed top-down to workers across the world. It is an unfolding, contingent phenomenon that has emerged through and alongside particular contexts – contexts it has shaped and been shaped by, and which are critical to understanding the particular model of exploitation proliferating throughout the working world. We must take these grounded realities into account when building a platform labour movement and policy framework capable of asserting platform workers' rights.

What is the Platform Economy?

The platform economy refers to the intersection between the digital and gig economy. This paper focuses specifically on what De Stefano calls "work on-demand via apps"[4] – a subset of the platform economy where gigs are assigned via location-based apps, typically involving "local, service-oriented tasks"[5] like minicab driving, domestic work and courier work.[6] Popular apps like TaskRabbit and Uber fall under this category.

1. Mark Graham and Jamie Woodcock. "Towards a Fairer Platform Economy: Introducing the Fairwork Foundation." Alternate Routes 29 (2018): 242–53.
2. Niels Van Doorn, "On the Conditions of Possibility for Worker Organizing in Platform-Based Gig Economies." Notes From Below (2019). https://notesfrombelow.org/article/conditions-possibility-worker-organizing-platform.
3. Miriam A. Cherry, "Beyond Misclassification: The Digital Transformation of Work." Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal 2 (2016): 1-27. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2734288#.
4. V. De Stefano, "The Rise of the "Just-in-Time Workforce": On-Demand Work, Crowdwork and Labour Protection in the "gig-Economy." (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2016) 1.
5. International Labour Organization. 'Crowdwork and the Gig Economy (Non-Standard Forms of Employment). https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/non-standard-employment/crowd-work/lang--en/index.htm.
6. Alex Rosenblat, Uberland: How Algorithms Are Rewriting the Rules of Work (California: University of California Press, 2018).

The prevalence of this work model has skyrocketed in the past decade. In the UK, the proportion of adults doing some form of platform work at least weekly effectively doubled between 2016 and 2019 – from 4.7% to 9.6%.[7] A report by the European Commission showed that in 2018, an average of 7% of the adult working population across 14 European countries provide some of their labour over location-based apps.[8] A similar figure was reached for the US, where 7% of workers are digital gig workers.[9] Similar data for the Global South is harder to come by – however researchers are keeping an eye on the particular ways in which this work model is unfolding across Africa and Asia in particular.[10] Considering many of the biggest platforms were founded less than a decade ago, the proportion of the Euro-American workforce it engages suggests a rapid rise – and it is forecast to continue growing. Researchers have outlined how this rise was facilitated by the conditions created following the 2008 Global Recession.[11] As traditional economic and political institutions failed to protect people's livelihoods, the appeal of 'being your own boss' and promise of a job – no matter how insecure – felt like a lifeline for many.

Where is Platformisation Happening, and to Whom?

However, there is more to be said about the social, spatial and political contexts in which the platform economy has been cultivated. Firstly, platformisation is happening in particular *spaces* – it is a fundamentally urban phenomenon.[12] Its business model relies on the rapid accrual of data network effects – the data of a continually *increasing* number of people. This requires the population density and demands of cities. Gaining a foothold in heavily networked 'global cities' like London and New York is particularly key to the sustenance of global platforms, as they rely primarily on venture and data capital.[13] Platformisation is also primarily happening in particular *sectors* – namely urban and social infrastructure. This includes the obvious, like transportation and courier work. However, it also refers to social reproductive work, like elderly and child-care, private household cleaning,

7. Ursula Huws, et al., 'The Platformisation of Work in Europe', (2019), 5. https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/the%20platformisation%20of%20work%20in%20europe%20-%20final%20corrected.pdf.

8. A. Pesole, et al., 'Platform Workers in Europe Evidence from the COLLEEM Survey.' JRC Science for Policy Report. Luxembourg: European Commission, 2018. https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC112157/jrc112157_pubsy_platform_workers_in_europe_science_for_policy.pdf.

9. Sarah Grotta, 'Payment for Work in the U.S. Gig Economy'. Viewpoint. Marlborough: Mercator Advisory Group, 2019. https://www.mercatoradvisorygroup.com/Viewpoints/Payments_for_Work_in_the_U_S__Gig_Economy/.

10. Mark Graham, Digital Economies at Global Margins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019).

11. Nick Srnicek, Platform Capitalism (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017); Rosenblat, Uberland: How Algorithms Are Rewriting the Rules of Work.

12. Francesca Artioli, 'Digital Platforms and Cities: A Literature Review for Urban Research'. Cities Are Back in Town. Paris: Sciences Po Urban School, 2018. http://blogs.sciences-po.fr/recherche-villes/files/2018/06/WP01_2018-Artioli.pdf; Michael Hodson, Andrew McMeekin, and John Stehlin, 'Platform Mobilities and the Production of Urban Space: Toward a Typology of Platformization Trajectories'. Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, 2020; Jathan Sadowski, 'Cyberspace and City-scapes: On the Emergence of Platform Urbanism'. Urban Geography (2020): 1–5.

13. Jathan Sadowski, 'When Data Is Capital: Datafication, Accumulation, and Extraction'. Big Data & Society 6, no. 1 (2019).

sex work, home repairs, gardening or beauty and grooming services.[14] While not often considered 'infrastructural', these services are essential to the functioning of cities, taking on the omnipresent, systemic quality that defines infrastructure.[15] Furthermore, the on-demand provision of these services is increasingly becoming a benchmark for global cities in particular.[16] Finally, platformisation is happening to particular *workers*. Existing research on the platform economy often notes that the platform workforce is largely migrant workers and/or the racially minoritised. However, this is often treated as incidental rather than a central driving force of the platform business model.

Austerity Urbanism

The post-2008 recession and its fallout had a significant impact on urban workers. It dispossessed swathes of the workforce, particularly those already marginalised by race, migration, sexuality and gender, pushing them into the hands of the insecure, 'entrepreneurial' work model offered by platforms. It also crippled public and urban planning budgets, undermining the provision of public infrastructure and creating space for private sector intervention. What Jamie Peck calls 'austerity urbanism' refers to this dual process of "government downsizing" and "rolling privatization."[17] Despite the branding of platforms as part of a 'sharing economy' – suggesting a cooperative model – the political economy of large platform companies is typical of a corporate private entity. They are profit-driven, subject primarily to antitrust and intellectual property laws and responsive to competition, rather than long-term sustainability and public value.[18]

The absorption of public infrastructure needs into the platform model is particularly visible with childcare, elderly care (both of which often overlap with cleaning work) and transportation platforms – sectors which have all been decimated by austerity,[19] yet are highly demanded in contemporary urban contexts. Services not typically considered public utilities, like private household cleaning and home repairs/household tasks, are nonetheless essential urban reproductive services reliant on a combination of unpaid and outsourced women workers – the pressure

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14. Ursula Huws, *et al.*, 'The Platformisation of Work in Europe', (2019).

15. Kendra Strauss, "Labour Geography III: Precarity, Racial Capitalisms and Infrastructure." Progress in Human Geography, 2019; A. De Coss-Corzo, H. A Ruszczyk, and K Stokes, eds. Labouring Urban Infrastructures. Manchester: Manchester Urban Institute, 2019. http://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/mui/InfrastructuresZine191007.pdf.

16. Ashlin Lee, *et al.*, "Mapping Platform Urbanism: Charting the Nuance of the Platform Pivot." Urban Planning 5, no. 1 (2020): 116–28.

17. Jamie Peck. "Austerity Urbanism." City 16, no. 6 (2012): 626.

18. Ashlin Lee, *et al.*, "Mapping Platform Urbanism: Charting the Nuance of the Platform Pivot".

19. For impact of cuts on care work, *see*: Nick Bailey, Glen Bramley, Maria Gannon, Annette Hastings, and David Watkins. "The Cost of the Cuts: The Impact on Local Government and Poorer Communities." York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2015. https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/Summary-Final.pdf; for impact of cuts on transportation, *see*: TfL. "TfL's Budget Shows Operating Deficit Almost Halved as Mayor Calls for Government Investment in Transport." London: Transport for London, 2019. https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2019/march/tfl-s-budget-shows-operating-deficit-almost-halved-as-mayor-calls-for-government-investment-in-transport; For impact of cuts on London councils, *see*: London Councils, "London's Local Services: Investing in the Future," 2018. https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/our-key-themes/local-government-finance/london%E2%80%99s-local-services-investing-future/london%E2%80%99s-local.

on which is increased by the dismantling of the welfare and social state. In high-income countries, the combination of an ageing population, decreased social care provision, increased participation of middle- and upper-class women in the labour force results in demand for cheap, outsourced domestic work paid hourly.[20] This greater demand is captured by private platform companies.

The capacity of monopolistic platforms to collect vast amounts of urban data also gives them a level of insight into the city that is traditionally the domain of the state.[21] This scale and type of data collection takes on an infrastructural quality, as the "managed and built environments increasingly depend on data in real-time."[22] The acquisition of such infrastructural power by private platform companies, through a mutually dependent combination of accruing data network effects and providing cheap labour is made partly possible by austerity urbanism, in which the state not only withdraws from the provision of public social and urban infrastructure, but actively manages its transition to the private sector.[23]

20. Margarita Estévez-Abe and Barbara Hobson. "Outsourcing Domestic (Care) Work: The Politics, Policies, and Political Economy." Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society 22, no. 2 (2015): 133–46. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxv011.
21. Josh Gabert-Doyon. 'What Citymapper's Business Plan Tells Us about the Future of Smart Cities'. CityMetric. 2019. https://www.citymetric.com/transport/what-citymapper-s-business-plan-tells-us-about-future-smart-cities-4800.
22. Peter Kawalek and Ali Bayat. 'Data as Infrastructure – Paper for the National Infrastructure Commission'. Data for the Public Good. London: National Infrastructure Commission, 2017, 1. https://www.nic.org.uk/publications/data-infrastructure-paper-national-infrastructure-commission/.
23. Mara Ferreri and Romola Sanyal. 'Platform Economies and Urban Planning: Airbnb and Regulated Deregulation in London'. Urban Studies 55, no. 15 (2018): 3353–68..

Immigration and the Post-2008 Infrastructural Workforce

The urban infrastructural workforces undergoing significant platformisation have historically been dominated by migrants and the racially minoritised;[24] indeed, the reliance of global cities on low-wage migrant work is well documented.[25] These sectors often have a history of informal, poor working conditions, which is related to the social, cultural and political status of the workers in them.[26] This is heightened when immigration controls are tightened, which results in a higher proportion of migrants being categorised as 'irregular.' The social and economic effects of being 'irregular,' or dancing precariously on the edge of regularity, creates a pool of workers whose material conditions make them vulnerable to labour exploitation. In this way, immigration controls function as a "tap regulating the flow of labour" and as a "mould shaping certain forms of labour."[27]

The 2008 financial crisis, and the response to it from political and financial institutions, further degraded the work opportunities and conditions for migrant workers globally. Migrant workers are often among the most vulnerable to labour exploitation and social marginalisation in times of economic crisis.[28] This manifests in the form of hostile immigration policy, a rise in national populism in response to perceived job scarcity and the outsourcing of so-called 'unskilled' labour to private companies as part of cost-cutting measures. Together, these factors place migrant workers at heightened risk of precarity and therefore exploitation.

The UK provides a paradigmatic example. Ethnic minority workers in the UK experienced the brunt of the recession - experiencing higher levels of unemployment and lower wages than their white counterparts.[29] Like many nations across the Global North, the UK has also seen an uptick in right-wing populism and conservative immigration policy, which has manifested in the 2012 Hostile Environment legislative framework. This set of policies pushes service providers, like healthcare professionals, educators, employers and landlords, to act as border agents - making them legally liable for checking someone's documentation before

24. A. Çaglar, and N.G. Schiller. Migrants and City-Making: Dispossession, Displacement, and Urban Regeneration (Duke University Press, 2018).

25. S. Sassen, The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Chris Hamnett, "Social Polarisation in Global Cities: Theory and Evidence." Urban Studies 31, no. 3 (1994): 401–24.

26. Huda Tayob and Suzanne Hall. "Race, Space and Architecture: Towards and Open-Access Curriculum." London: London School of Economics and Political Science, Department of Sociology, 2019. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/100993/3/Race_space_and_architecture.pdf.

27. Bridget Anderson, "Migration, Immigration Controls and the Fashioning of Precarious Workers." Work, Employment and Society 24, no. 2 (2010): 301.

28. Ibrahim Awad, "The Global Economic Crisis and Migrant Workers: Impact and Response." International Migration Programme. Geneva: International Labour Office, 2009. http://ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---integration/documents/publication/wcms_126183.pdf.

29. Danny Dorling, "Race and the Repercussions of Recession." Bulletin: Runnymede's Quarterly. London: Runnymede Trust, 2009. https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/360-BulletinDecember09.pdf; Paul Fisher and Alita Nandi. "Poverty across Ethnic Groups through Recession and Austerity." University of Essex: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2015. https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-across-ethnic-groups-through-recession-and-austerity.

providing them with essential services. It also creates a "labyrinthine immigration system"[30] that is complex and expensive to navigate and remain on the 'correct' side of. Migrants often find the rules change "under their feet", and lose status without realising.[31] The social effects of this framework is the criminalisation of access to the means of survival (work, housing, healthcare, banking) for those without particular versions of leave to remain,[32] and the cultivation of a culture of surveillance and suspicion[33] towards racially minoritised people.[34]

Through a myriad of political, social and economic measures, we can therefore see a rise in the systematic enforcement of fear, punishment and precarity upon racialised populations in the UK - the sharp edge of which is felt by the working class and those with uncertain migration status. This has a significant impact on how migrants interact with the labour market. Increased border controls produce precarious workforces, who are not officially unionised, unlikely to come forward cases of abuse or exploitation and whose (official or unofficial) denial of access to public services and formalised work labour makes them prone to being stuck in poor working conditions. This is because, while strict immigration controls do not abolish the root causes of migration, they do increases the proportion of migrants who are classified as irregular, or are forced to stay and live in a country through 'illegal' means.[35]

This combination of slashed public spending and the social and material precarity of migrant workers provide ripe conditions for rolling out a 'lean' model of work based on not resourcing labour rights. It is a framework that benefits from its workers being socially and politically rendered disposable, and having few other options in the labour market. Furthermore, the 'on-demand' model relies on a pool of constantly available, surplus labour,[36] the creation of which is formented by the systemic cultivation of precarity and anxiety by the Hostile Environment detailed above. Indeed, infrastructural work is not the only kind of work that is adaptable to the logistical framework of the platform model – other forms of work can be broken down into 'tasks' and mediated through a programmable digital platform (*see* Phil Jones' contribution to this collection). Rather, it is the legal, political and social contexts of urban infrastructural work and workforces that lend themselves to the political economic interests and power dynamics of the corporate platform economy.

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30. Maya Goodfellow, Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Become Scapegoats (London: Verso, 2019).

31. Ibid.

32. NRPF Network. "Who Has NRPF?" NRPF Network, 2017. http://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/information/Pages/who-has-NRPF.aspx.

33. This is bolstered by increased immigration raids (including in the workplace), data sharing between the Home Office and third sector organisations and public political campaigns such as Operation Vaken (Home Office UK 2013).

34. Liberty. "A Guide to the Hostile Environment." (London: Liberty, 2019). https://www.libertyhuman-rights.org.uk/issue/report-a-guide-to-the-hostile-environment/.

35. R. Andersson, Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

36. Alex Foti, General Theory of the Precariat: Great Recession, Revolution, Reaction (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2017).

Case Study: Uber in London

The material and social precarity of low-income migrant workers in London have helped construct the mould that shapes the platform workforce. Indeed, migrant workers turn to platform labour for many reasons. The relatively low barrier to entry is appealing to people who struggle to find work through other means; for most platforms, the 'onboarding' process is simple, quick and does not require personal networks or an interview/probation period. The dominance of platforms in migrant-heavy workforces also means that those already making a living in these sectors have had to turn to platforms to continue accessing work.

My own qualitative research with Uber drivers in London indicates that the automated distribution of work via the platform is appealing to workers who have experienced prejudice or unfair treatment by a human boss - a finding substantiated by other studies of migrant platform workers in Europe.[37] This relief is often expressed alongside frustration with and suspicion of the algorithm that designates them work - yet drivers I spoke to often sought comfort in the idea that the algorithm does not know their religion or ethnic background. This does not mean the algorithm is not shaped by racial and gendered inequalities - in fact, the rating system upon which the algorithm is based tends to aggregate existing prejudices within society.[38] Nonetheless, the relative sense of fairness and autonomy makes platform work appealing when compared to other available options.

Different platforms have different documentation requirements in the UK. Larger platforms tend to have more stringent documentation requirements and checks - possibly due to heightened media scrutiny. Most big platforms have a right to work check as part of 'onboarding,' in line with Hostile Environment legislation; in other European countries, where regulations are less strict, documentation is not required by all platforms.[39] Undocumented migrants are therefore shut out of platform labour in the UK - although anecdotal evidence and observation of online worker forums indicates a 'black market' where workers 'rent' their account for a percentage fee to those who without necessary documentation. This indicates an ecosystem of practices around the platform economy that provide one of the few paths to earning for undocumented migrants. However, this frequently sparks moral panics in the media about "illegal immigrants" with potential "criminal backgrounds" working in the UK through platforms.[40]

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37. Niels van Doorn and Darsana Vijay., "The Appeal and Challenges of Platform-Based Work from the Perspective of Three Migrant Workers - Part 2." Platform Labor, 2020. https://platformlabor.net/blog/the-appeal-and-challenges-of-platform-based-work-2.

38. Aaron Belzer and Nancy Leong. "The New Public Accommodations: Race Discrimination in the Platform Economy." The Georgetown Law Journal 105, no. 1271 (2017): 1272–1322; Julietta Hua and Kasturi Ray, "Beyond the Precariat: Race, Gender, and Labor in the Taxi and Uber Economy." Social Identities 24, no. 2 (2018): 271–89.

39. Niels van Doorn and Darsana Vijay. "The Appeal and Challenges of Platform-Based Work from the Perspective of Three Migrant Workers - Part 2".

40. Leigh McManus, "Deliveroo and Uber Eats Riders are Renting Their Jobs to Illegal Immigrants." Daily Mail Online, 2019. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6562151/Deliveroo-Uber-Eats-riders-renting-jobs-illegal-immigrants.html.

Moral panics surrounding the prevalence of migrant workers in platform work in turn shape how platform workers are regulated by the state, and also the development of the platform model itself. A consistent theme in my research has been Uber drivers reporting feeling excessively surveilled by police and Transport for London regulators, who conduct searches and inspections in places where drives congregate, such as near airports, train stations and social hotspots. This is related to a racialised portrayal of Uber drivers as potential sexual predators and terrorists - a moral panic surrounding racialised and migrant men that has a long history in the UK, Europe and North America.[41] In 2017, Uber's license was revoked, partly citing these 'public safety' concerns, despite Uber drivers being subject to identical background checks as the white-dominated black cab industry.[42] There is also no evidence suggesting increased risk of unsafe activity by private hire drivers compared to black cab drivers.[43] The LTDA - the main union representing black cab drivers - has conducted a persistent campaign against Uber, on the basis that Uber drivers are threats to the public. Indeed, the LTDA General Secretary described getting into an Uber as "like getting in a sea of sharks" because of "these third world countries" that Uber drivers come from.[44]

The ability of Uber drivers to gather outside airports and train stations has been challenged on the basis of anti-terror laws,[45] and the gathering of racialised men in public space has been flagged by officials within TfL as a potential terror threat.[46] This has been further bolstered by extensive media coverage pointing to Uber drivers as sexual and security threats - a sense of which consistently appeared in my research as causing anxiety, frustration and fear for those trying to make a living through the platform. I have also observed consistent policing of drivers, whose cars are searched and inspected, and who are routinely asked to show their documentation. Similarly, couriers have described being frequently stopped and searched by police in spaces where they gather - such as outside restaurants (where they are often not allowed to enter) or outside 'dark kitchens' supplying food for multiple restaurants on the app.[47]

In turn, the design of the Uber app has evolved in light of this systemically enforced suspicion and hostility towards its workers. The response by platforms to these moral panics - fuelled by the state-sponsored production of marginalisation by the Hostile Environment - has been to adapt the algorithm to lower the bar of deactivation for workers. The rating system, and the management algorithm on which it is built, is centred around suspicion of the worker and the word of the

41. Gargi Bhattacharyya, Dangerous Brown Men: Exploiting Sex, Violence and Feminism in the 'War on the Terror (London: Zed Books, 2008).

42. Transport for London. "Licensing Information." 2018. https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/taxis-and-private-hire/licensing/licensing-information#on-this-page-3.

43. Georgina Lee, "Are Black Cabs Safer than Ubers?" Channel 4, 2017. https://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck/factcheck-are-black-cabs-safer-than-ubers.

44. Dominic Gover, "Uber: 'Third World Immigrant Drivers' Are Dangerous, Claims Black Cabbies' Leader." International Business Times, 2014. https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/uber-third-world-immigrant-drivers-are-dangerous-claims-black-cabbies-leader-1478806.

45. Sian Berry, "Proposals for Reducing Problem Parking on Pancras Road." London: Camden Green Party, 2015. https://camden.greenparty.org.uk/assets/files/localparties/camden/Pancras_Road_Parking_Proposals_Aug2015.pdf.

46. London Transport Committee. "Transport Committee - 8 July 2015; Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - Taxi and Private Hire Services in London." Meeting Minutes. London: TfL, 2015. https://tfl.gov.uk/cdn/static/cms/documents/board-20170919-item03-minutes-20170719-for-approval.pdf.

47. Sarah Butler, "How Deliveroo's 'Dark Kitchens' Are Catering from Car Parks." The Guardian, 2017. http://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/oct/28/deliveroo-dark-kitchens-pop-up-feeding-the-city-london

customer. In Uber's case, a driver can be deactivated temporarily or permanently due to a customer complaint, or if their rating dips below an average of 4.7 stars out of 5.[48] Appealing deactivation is a difficult and lengthy process, as drivers have few modes through which they can contact Uber, apart from a standardised, online complaints system. This is of course compounded by potential language barriers.

The highly reactive and severe treatment of workers, which is coded into the management algorithm, is key to how platforms cultivate trustworthiness in the context of the moral panics surrounding their workers;[49] the claim being that workers, prone to unsafe behaviour, are immediately dealt with if a customer flags their behaviour. However, this is not mutual; whilst drivers can 'rate' customers, there is no indication that a customer with a consistently low rating will lose access to their account.

This is similarly the case for Uber's recently introduced 'safety toolkit' for passengers, which includes an emergency assistance button, the option to share location with up to five 'trusted contacts', report if a driver's behaviour made them feel unsafe and access to further information about their driver.[50] Such an infrastructure of recourse to safety is not implemented in the app's affordances for drivers however, despite minicab driving being a notoriously dangerous profession, with drivers frequently at risk of abuse and violence from passengers.[51] The app design and algorithmic management model is therefore constructed around an assumption that risk only exists from the worker toward the customer. This is not based in the statistical reality of how risk is experienced on both sides, but rather in racialised anxieties surrounding the platform workforce. In this way, Uber's model has been built off the social and political status of its workers - enabling the offshoring of the model's risks, costs and accountability to its demonised and disempowered workforce.

The power of the algorithm to instantaneously cut off a worker from their income source is integral to the precarity experienced by workers; one driver described the rating system to me as "a sword on top of [his] head". With limited options in the labour market, and the dominance of particular platforms in the sector they work in, drivers frequently expressed anxiety around potentially upsetting customers, for fear of receiving a bad rating or complaint that could jeopardise their ability to work. This encourages drivers to withstand abuse, harassment or repeatedly having to undertake unprofitable rides; the phrase "keeping my head down" is a consistent theme when interviewing drivers. The lack of labour protections, stemming from workers not being legally recognised as employees, leaves workers vulnerable to dismissal without process or reason and unprotected by official union recognition. The anxiety felt by drivers as a result is compounded by the systemic imposition

48. Ngai Keung Chan, and Lee Humphreys. "Mediatization of Social Space and the Case of Uber Drivers." Media and Communication 6, no. 2 (2018): 29–38.

49. Alexandra Mateescu and Julia Ticona. "Trusted Strangers: Carework Platforms' Cultural Entrepreneurship in the on-Demand Economy." New Media & Society 20, no. 11 (2018): 4384–404.

50. Sachin Kansal, "New Safety Toolkit Arrives in the United Kingdom | Uber Newsroom United Kingdom." Uber Newsroom, 2018. https://www.uber.com/en-GB/newsroom/new-safety-toolkit-arrives-united-kingdom-2/.

51. Rene Chun, "Rough Ride-Share: Why Drivers Are Also at Risk of Violence." The Guardian, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/feb/06/uber-rideshare-lyft-safety-crime; Kristin Kloberdanz, "Taxi Drivers: Years of Living Dangerously." Consumer HealthDay, 2020. https://consumer.healthday.com/espanol/encyclopedia/work-and-health-41/occupational-health-news-507/taxi-drivers-years-of-living-dangerously-646377.html.

of precarity and exclusion from public life that the Hostile Environment creates, including the inaccessibility of Universal Credit and secure work - or work where you are not under threat from immigration raids in the workplace.[52]

By excluding migrants from the means of survival or social security, workers are pushed to withstand exploitative labour models. There is a strong sense amongst migrant platform workers that if you are spat out of the system, you will struggle immensely to get back in. *The sense of systemic disposability experienced by platform workers is therefore constructed in the image of the systemic disposability resulting from the racial and migration politics of cities like London post-2008.*

Policy Implications

Given the racialised and highly-disciplinary nature of the current context of platform work, migrants' rights and anti-racism must lie at the heart of an effective platform labour movement and policy framework. This is because without the coercive effects of both immigration law and racialisation (which are often interdependent processes), the conditions in which the corporate platform model has arisen and thrived would not exist – and the socio-political fabric upon which this exploitative model relies on would be compromised. *This analysis is rooted in the understanding that platform work did not have to turn out this way: the digitisation of all or parts of the labour process does not unavoidably result in the exploitation we see today. Rather, the structural rendering of populations as exploitable has been captured, reinvented and adapted by changing technological and network capabilities.*

1. Hostile Environment

The Hostile Environment produces material and social precarity for migrants and those perceived to be migrants. This pushes many migrant workers into a position where they have no choice but to take on poorly waged and conditioned work.

a) Steps should be taken to end the hostile environment, especially the policy that renders there being no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

b) NRPF criminalises the access to basic services for a large proportion of migrants, and especially affects those with care responsibilities. *This forces migrant workers to withstand exploitative, unfair and even abusive work conditions as they have no safety net for them and their dependents in the event of income loss.*

c) Scrapping these policies is key to undermining the "mould" that shapes particular workforces to be exploitable by the platform economy's current form.

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52. Lisa O'Carroll. "'It Was a Fake Meeting': Byron Hamburgers Staff on Immigration Raid." The Guardian, 2016. http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jul/28/it-was-a-fake-meeting-byron-hamburgers-staff-on-immigration-raid.

2. Labour Rights

The algorithmic management model treats platform workers as disposable, and places added insecurity for racialised and migrant platform workers who are disadvantaged by the rating system. Instantaneous and unexplained 'deactivation' violates the norms surrounding fair dismissal as outlined by the UK government.[53] Establishing a framework of fair dismissal for platform workers is sorely needed.

a) A framework of fair dismissal must recognise that loss of income for any period of time is a drastic measure of last resort. Before dismissal can occur, workers must have a right to an extended investigation process that follows a transparently outlined procedure (*see point below*), the ability to be accompanied by a union representative at all stages of investigation or disciplinary procedure, a fair system of warning and a genuine opportunity for appeal.

b) Workers must also have access to a written version of the dismissal and disciplinary procedure upon starting work, which outlines exactly under what circumstances a worker can be disciplined or dismissed. This document must be available in a range of languages, and be adhered to during the investigation process.

3. Creating Demand for Jobs

If the platform labour market has been built upon - and as replacement for - decimated public services and an informalised labour market, then part of the policy response will lie in shaping a new labour market with better working conditions. One route to achieving this would be state-led job creation schemes. Such a scheme would be intended to:

a) Create alternative job options to those available in the platform labour market, with better working conditions, including employment security as well as control over working hours. Public sector workers need not have to choose between security and flexibility (as is often presumed to be the case). A practical balance between quantity of working hours, choice of working schedule and decent pay can be struck with correct policy in place.[54]

b) Meet the demands of an ageing population and repair a withered social fabric. A large (and growing) part of wealthier economies now centres upon reproductive labour. As Hester and Srnicek note, social reproduction jobs across health care, education, food service, accommodation, and social work now account for 23% to 28% of the labour force, and this only looks set to increase over the next 5 years.[55] Their analysis suggests that 47% of total job growth between 2014 and 2024 is set to be in sectors associated with social reproduction.

53. GOV.UK. "Dismissing Staff." https://www.gov.uk/dismiss-staff/fair-dismissals.
54. Living Wage Foundation, "Living Hours." 2020.
55. Helen Hester and Nick Srnicek, "The Crisis of Social Reproduction and the End of Work." Open-Mind, 2018. https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/BBVA-OpenMind-Helen-Hester-Nick-Srnicek-The-Crisis-of-Social-Reproduction-and-the-End-of-Work.pdf..

c) Achieve sustainability goals necessary to fight climate change. As these public works.

Such job creation schemes would echo the large-scale schemes of Roosevelt's New Deal (initiatives that were also spawned in times of crisis and extreme precarity). More radically, they could take the form of a job guarantee, that would blunt the threat of job shortages (and therefore also the power dynamics between employers and workers).[56]

Why Should the Public Sector Lead this Job Creation?

Public sector employees are relatively cheap. On Autonomy's calculations, due to National Insurance contributions and returns from income tax, the net cost of public sector employees is relatively low.[57] Creating between 300,000 and 500,000 new public sector roles, for instance, would amount to just over 1% of annual public spending.[58]

Public sector jobs offer a greater degree of protection from market volatility (and exploitative employers). As the Covid pandemic has shown, in times of crisis private employers are often the first to deal out layoffs, potentially throwing many thousands into unemployment and underemployment; conditions, as we have seen, that are fertile for the platform economy to thrive in. The public sector, by contrast, can be oriented to aims other than shareholder value and CEO pay, thus potentially providing much greater security for staff at all levels.

The More Universal the Better

As demonstrated, the platform economy exploits conditions that place racialised populations in positions of extreme precarity and inequality (both materially and in terms of opportunity). This production of a particular population (stratified predominantly by race and class) is best met with universal measures. Universalism - services with little to no cost at the point of use, coupled with a lack of conditionality - meets the needs of the most vulnerable and exploited whilst also providing social goods for wider society at large. At the same time, a rollout of universal basic services would help roll back the cuts that public services have witnessed under austerity urbanism.[59]

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56. TUC (2020) "A new plan for jobs - Why we need a job guarantee." https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/new-plan-jobs-why-we-need-new-jobs-guarantee.
57. Jones et al., "Public Sector as Pioneer." London: Autonomy, 2020. https://autonomy.work/portfolio/publicsectorpioneer/.
58. Ibid.
59. J. Portes, Reed, H. and A. Percy, "Social prosperity for the future: A proposal for Universal Basic Services." 2017. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/igp/sites/bartlett/files/universal_basic_services_-_the_institute_for_global_prosperity_.pdf.

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