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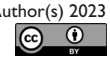

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The Fragmented Labor Power Composition of Gig Workers: Entrepreneurial Tendency and the Heterogeneous Production of Difference

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Abstract

The literature on digital labor platforms requires a focus beyond techno-utopianism, foregrounding the role of living labor that materially sustains the fantasies of convenience ingrained in platform capitalism. The gig workers embodying living labor exhausted by location-dependent platform work are mainly migrants. Yet, greater understanding of the complexity of difference production and the gigification of work is needed. The article is prompted by the desire to understand the relationship between entrepreneurialized workers and heterogeneously produced differences within the labor power composition of gig workers active on location-based labor platforms. Drawing on ethnographic data produced together with migrant workers engaged in food delivery and cleaning gigs via labor platforms in Helsinki, the article first analyzes the organizing logic of gig work mediated via platforms through the notion of transversal entrepreneurial tendency, and second, the entwined forms of social, legal, and algorithmic difference produced among gig workers. The article argues that differentiation in labor power composition is dynamically related to the interactions required and facilitated by the platforms. The article contributes to discussions on entrepreneurialization in the contemporary world of work and the specific ways in which the social, legal, and algorithmic production of difference shape the constitutive hierarchies of platform labor.

Keywords

entrepreneurialism, differentiation, gig economy, migrant workers, platforms, racialization, sociology

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Introduction

It is not uncommon that discourses and studies concerning algorithms, automation, big data, and the digital in general are seduced by their assumed novelty and a certain techno-utopianism, while the social context and human labor sustaining them are glossed over (e.g. Atanasoski and Vora, 2015; Miconi, 2023). Such digital fetichism (Fuchs, 2016; Miconi, 2023) is also evident in the case of digital platforms offering promises of convenient and 'magical' services, as noted by one food courier partaking in the research at hand. The business models of labor platforms are neither disruptive nor automated but instead build on earlier forms of organizing work, such as temp agencies, and continue to exploit human labor (Altenried, 2021). To further the analysis of the platform economy beyond techno-utopianism, a focus on the role of living labor that materially sustains the fantasies of convenience ingrained in platform capitalism, and simultaneously feeds the platforms' hunger for data, is vital.

The gig workers embodying living labor exhausted by location-dependent platform work are mainly migrants (Altenried, 2021; Mbare, 2023; Orr et al., 2023; Van Doorn et al., 2023). A thread of emergent critical literature on the relevance of migrants in the gig economy has demonstrated that differentiation based on legal status and race sustains and becomes reproduced in platform capitalism (Altenried, 2021; Orth, 2023; Van Doorn, 2017), even to the point of racialized difference becoming an organizing logic of platform capitalism (Gebrial, 2022). Yet, greater understanding is needed of the complexity of difference production and the gigification of work subsumed by algorithmic control in platform capitalism. Therefore, I pose the following question: what is the relationship between autonomized and entrepreneurialized workers and heterogeneously produced difference within the labor power composition of gig workers active on location-based labor platforms?

The analysis, divided into two parts, draws on ethnographic data produced together with migrant workers engaged in food delivery and cleaning gigs via labor platforms in Helsinki. First, I analyze the organizing logic of gig work mediated via platforms through what I call the *transversal entrepreneurial tendency*. By this, I mean that while not all gig workers are formally categorized as self-employed entrepreneurs, their labor is nevertheless shaped by an entrepreneurial tendency that qualitatively permeates the labor power composition of gig workers, albeit in different ways depending on power relations. I illustrate this fact by pointing to how migrant workers must invent strategies to carry out their work tasks in the best possible way, often involving competition with other workers, while operating in a setting in which knowledge about an app's structure and algorithms is asymmetrically distributed. Against the backdrop of an entrepreneurialized and individualized position inhabited by migrant workers, an enigmatic situation is produced: on one hand, gig workers must believe in their freedom and capacity to compete and perform better than others, while, on the other, the need to compete and maximize economic transactions is incentivized by the platforms (Pulignano et al., 2023) at the same time as workers are dependent on the labor platform to successfully perform their work.

Second, I analyze the forms of differentiation produced among gig workers. I demonstrate how racialization occurs in their everyday encounters with service buyers, in restaurants and on the street, and how this occurrence, in combination with the insecurities of their legal migratory status, shapes a labor force ready to accept the poor working conditions of platform-mediated gig work. Such modalities of socially and legally producing difference are co-constitutive of algorithmically produced difference, for example, when workers are rated and thereafter assigned hierarchical positions in terms of accessing new gigs or possibilities to choose work shifts.

Aligning itself with a vast body of literature emphasizing that capital is realized in a specific social context in which the human capacity for labor is differentiated in overlapping ways

(Bannerji, 2005; Maury, 2020; Melamed, 2015; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2019; Robinson, 2000 [1983]), the article argues that an entrepreneurial tendency transversally permeating the composition of labor power and the (re)production of social, legal, and algorithmic differences intensify the processes of rendering work more insecure. That is to say, the abovementioned processes help further divide laboring subjects, hence reducing their possibilities to engage in collective organizing, though not entirely eliminating such options.

The article further suggests that it is crucial to understand the production of difference in relation to the encompassing logic of digital platforms constituted around a business model for which data are key. Platforms monopolize, extract, analyze, and use copious amounts of data by functioning as *infrastructures* that help groups interact with one another and by constituting the *intermediaries* for such interactions (Srnicek, 2017: 24; Van Doorn, 2017). Thus, digital platforms generate and rely on 'network effects', meaning that the greater the number of users, the more valuable the platform becomes (Srnicek, 2017: 25). For that reason, gig workers' labor must be comprehended as significantly contributing to data production (Van Doorn and Badger, 2020), and more importantly, to enabling the convenience that digital labor platforms offer consumers.

Based on this thread of critical thinking, I finally suggest that the differentiation and fragmentation of labor power composition must be grasped as dynamically related to the interactions required and facilitated by the platforms. In referring to the *concurrent dynamics of differentiation and interconnection*, I propose that entrepreneurialized subjects are 'set free' to perform their work tasks in a social environment in which social, legal, and algorithmic modes of differentiating subjects are constantly being (re)produced at the same time as those subjects are geared toward cooperation via the platform. This dynamic builds on the multiplicity of hierarchical differentiations in society to manufacture interconnections that feed capital (Melamed, 2015), hence enabling the mere existence of labor platforms as we know them as well as the extractive logic ingrained in contemporary platform capitalism (Chicchi, 2020; Leonardi and Pirina, 2020; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2019). In this way, the article contributes to the existing literature on entrepreneurialization in the contemporary world of work and how the production of difference shapes the constitutive hierarchies of platform labor. It is my contention that identifying such dynamics can aid in opposing the aggravated precarization of work and aggressive forms of extraction and in striving for more encompassing rights and protective structures for gig workers.

I advance the analysis and the resulting theoretical suggestions by first situating the notion of transversal entrepreneurial tendency within the context of previous research and theory, after which I draw links to prior studies on inequality in the gig economy and theoretical perspectives on the social production of difference. I thereafter briefly introduce the research context, data, and methods before analyzing the heterogeneous techniques of differentiation. The two analytical sections illustrate first how the processes of entrepreneurialization permeate labor power composition, and second, the techniques of (re)producing hierarchical social, legal, and algorithmic difference within the labor power composition. I conclude by highlighting the concurrent dynamics of differentiation and interconnection as a framework for comprehending the role of differentiation in platform capitalism.

Transversal Entrepreneurial Tendency

Algorithmic management is central to labor platforms and exacerbates precarity, as it enables a spatial decoupling of workers from companies while enforcing control over those who undertake gigs (Veen et al., 2020). Gig workers are often registered as self-employed independent contractors who can be called up 'on demand'. This legal construct not only helps produce a flexible labor force and disentangle labor platforms from responsibilities pertaining to employment but also

assists in disciplining living labor (Altenried, 2019). Moreover, the mechanisms governing economic transactions generate a triangle between employers, workers, and customers, in which platforms retain authority over specific functions (allocation of tasks, collection of data, pricing of services, collection of revenues) while ceding control over work methods, work schedules, and the labor of performative evaluation (Vallas and Schor, 2020: 170).

While workers are afforded more autonomy from an 'employer', external factors shape hierarchical regimes, for example, the labor of surveillance by customers (Vallas and Schor, 2020: 162). Since their work hardly resembles that of entrepreneurs who invests in a business and enjoys both the risks and awards, gig workers' independent contracts have been framed as bogus self-employment (e.g. Woodcock and Graham, 2019) incorporating processes of worker misclassification (e.g. Gebrial, 2022; Van Doorn, 2017), which have already been judicially disputed in several national contexts (Perkiö et al., 2023; Vallas and Schor, 2020). In many ways, platformized work echoes forms of work from the past, such as piece wages (Altenried, 2021) and forms of informal work and self-entrepreneurship especially prevalent in the Global South (Marti, 2023). Thus, the view of 'free and exciting' gig entrepreneurship reflects older discourses on the potential freedom and flexibility offered by informal work activities with minimal legal regulation (Marti, 2023: 83).

To introduce another perspective into the debate on the legal misclassification of workers in the platform economy, I explore the qualitative transformations of work through the notion of *transversal entrepreneurial tendency*. The entrepreneurial tendency is evidence of a qualitative shift in working life in many parts of the Global North and reflects the increasing difficulty of distinguishing between work time and free time and of insecurity about future income (Viren, 2018). Performing work necessitates being constantly up to date with respect to ongoing transformations in the labor market, charting one's own personal strengths, and continuously strategizing (Viren, 2018: 205). Moreover, if work was previously governed more by salaries and employment contracts, now personal achievement and performance metrics have become increasingly important, and they are significantly strengthened through the algorithmic analysis of worker ratings shaping task assignments and worker retention (Griesbach et al., 2019).

From the perspective of the worker, the gig economy presupposes and creates a crude 'entrepreneur of himself' for which competition is crucial (Foucault, 2008). Such governmentality incorporates freedom as its strategy; it consumes freedom and must therefore also produce freedom accompanied by immediate forms of limitation, control, coercion, and obligation. The move away from long-term labor contracts and the reduction of social protection is an efficient strategy of subjectification, as it encourages workers to see themselves not as 'workers in a political sense', whose collective organization could result in change, but as 'companies of one', in which the desire for independence becomes locked in competition (Read, 2022: 314–316). The 'generalization of enterprise as a subjective modality' (Chicchi, 2020: 219) and the construction of the working subject as a 'precarious-enterprise worker' (Armano et al., 2022: 30) efface the 'fact of exploitation' (Read, 2022: 317), which appears suited to the productive needs of platform capitalism.

Furthermore, the notion that the entrepreneurial tendency is *transversal* signifies that it does not produce entrepreneurs vertically as a specific category of workers, nor do labor relations affect every worker horizontally in the same way. Instead, transversality points to how entrepreneurialism cuts through every segment of the workforce, engendering a tendency of labor power assuming different forms depending on varying power relations (Viren, 2018: 207–208). It is through the prism of transversality that I read the expressions of entrepreneurialism among migrant gig workers. Moreover, I highlight that in addition to critical sociological research that views entrepreneurs as vessels of individualized neoliberal subjectivity, the myth of the entrepreneur, accompanied by capitalist visions of their future-making capacity, follows the logic of colonial expansion and

Eurocentric readings of world history through which the image of the entrepreneur is racialized as white and gendered as male (Tarvainen, 2022). Consequently, I maintain that the entrepreneurship of migrant gig workers is permeated by a variety of power mechanisms that shape their entrepreneurial actions as aspirational and temporally 'not yet', trapped within a Eurocentric, singular historicist view of the present (Chakrabarty, 2008). Hence, through a process of deferment internal to the logic of capital (Chakrabarty, 2008: 65), certain subjects' entrepreneurial actions can be used solely as a subservient enabler of the so-called innovative technology associated with 'white' and 'male' entrepreneurship as the core expressions of reason, creativity, and future-making capacity (Tarvainen, 2022) within the 'international division of digital labor' (Fuchs, 2018).

The Production of Difference

I connect transversal entrepreneurial tendency, permeated as it is by power relations shaping the degrees of precarity and privilege of entrepreneurialization, to other significant forms of engendered differentiation and hierarchization of the labor power of workers active on digital labor platforms. A central driver for undertaking gig work is the difficulty in finding more stable forms of work combined with an insecurity about future income and possibilities to socially, economically, and legally reproduce one's own and others' lives and rights to reside in the country. Hence, the worker's socio-legal status as well as the institutional and regulatory landscape is important in shaping labor power composition and workers' autonomy in relation to working conditions (Vallas and Schor, 2020).

Precarious legal status, which channels migrants toward precarious work in general (Maury, 2017), also motivates migrants to undertake platform-mediated gig work, hence making the act of exiting the platforms more difficult because of a dependency on the income and the entanglement of work with the migration and border regime (Altenried, 2021; Lata et al., 2023; Mbare, 2023; Orr et al., 2023; Van Doorn et al., 2023). Precarious legal status in combination with algorithmic work control, as demonstrated in the digitalized logistics and manufacturing sector in Germany, also shapes the commodification of migrant labor (Schaupp, 2022). However, Orth (2023) has critically unpacked the notion of 'platform work as migrant labor', demonstrating how specific types of migrants (young and highly educated), with specific types of visas (e.g. student visas), end up working for different platforms because of the co-constitution of labor and migration regimes. Moreover, the production of precarious legal statuses is closely embedded with the racialization of migrants reproduced via platform capitalism (Altenried, 2021; Gebrial, 2022; McMillan Cottom, 2020; Van Doorn, 2017). For example, some scholars have argued that the data and code of algorithmic acts inherit the socio-political forces of socially produced difference (Benjamin, 2019; Dixon-Roman, 2016), by which digital tools reproduce discrimination based on gender, age, and race, both in their technological structure and in the digital–human interface, such as when workers are rated (Woodcock and Graham, 2019).

Furthermore, rather than simply permeating the gig economy, racialization constitutes an organizing logic of platform capitalism. In her study of Uber drivers in the United Kingdom, Gebrial (2022) points to two intertwined processes that facilitate the production of an on-demand cheap and precarious workforce: worker (mis)classification and algorithmic management. The legal classification of workers as self-employed contractors is addressed as a (mis)classification since worker protection is eliminated, while algorithmic management enables remote control of the workforce. Gebrial (2022: 5) concludes that 'both strategies are deeply invested in how the platform workforce is racialized', conveying an understanding of 'proxies, correlations, and inferences' of technology that are not intuitively legible as racial but nevertheless through their co-constitution reproduce racial capitalism. Also drawing on a framework of racial capitalism in

their research on food couriers in an Australian context, Orr et al. (2023: 3) suggest that platform technologies exercise necrocapitalism as a form of 'capital accumulation through which organizational structures harness the power of debility and death for economic gain'. Thus, the diverse landscapes of difference and structural vulnerability sustain capital accumulation (Orr et al., 2023).

From a theoretical standpoint, processes of differentiation provide the means for capitalist exploitation through the fracturing of the labor force (Lowe, 1996: 28), hence emphasizing the co-constitution of capital and difference (Maury, 2020; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2019; Robinson, 2000 [1983]). In other words, capital maximizes its profits by configuring the bearers of labor power not as homogeneous and abstract but as heterogeneous (Robinson, 2000 [1983]) and hierarchized via the 'social production of difference' marked by race, nation, geographic origin, gender (Lowe, 1996: 26), and legal status. In Melamed's (2015) account, capital requires inequality among human groups, achieved by perpetrating violence on collective life itself, done to separate forms of humanity so that they may be (re)connected in ways that best feed capital. Hence, power structures, which 'hierarchize and partition society' (Balibar, 1991: 39), are required to manufacture 'discrete entities' that can be inserted into 'the capital-relation that makes accumulation possible' (Melamed, 2015: 79, 80).

Following the above-mentioned considerations, I map how atomization, social separateness, and multiple forms of difference are (re)produced and made into sources to feed capital accumulation via platform capitalism. These processes of differentiation generate a variegated pattern of labor as workers are entrepreneurialized, that is, separated into entities of one, as well as socially, legally, and algorithmically differentiated in the labor process and in other associated processes, such as maintaining the right to work in the country.

Research Context, Data, and Methods

The insights presented in this article draw on fieldwork using ethnographic methods conducted in the Helsinki metropolitan area (September 2021–April 2023), with the objective of examining the lived experiences of gig work performed by migrants with various legal statuses. I have limited my focus to food delivery and cleaning (domestic and commercial), two types of service work often outsourced to precarious migrant workers. However, gig work done via one type of platform does not exclude work done via other platforms or other types of work in general, as multi-apping and the combining of distinct types of work are frequent practices (Lee, 2023). Metropolitan areas are core sites of the platform economy due to their networked character and large migrant populations. The platformized sectors, such as domestic work and taxi driving, often reflect sectors historically dominated by migrant workers and workers experiencing specific forms of racialization (Gebrial, 2022; Van Doorn, 2017). Service sectors like cleaning and housekeeping (23%), catering (18%), and service and sales work (11%) employ the highest proportions of foreign workers in Finland (Sutela, 2015), and a sizable portion of the workers in the metropolitan area of Helsinki most active on digital platforms mediating food delivery and cleaning gigs are migrants (Mbare, 2023).

The 20-month fieldwork period includes in-depth interviews with 16 gig workers as well as informal conversations with workers between gigs, ride-alongs, walk-alongs, and online observations and discussions. A few of the research participants from both platform sectors became key individuals with whom I spent more time to get a sense of their everyday reality 'at work', with all the sounds and buzzes of the mobile phone, making one's way through traffic jams and crowded metro stations with work equipment, and the overall need to please the service buyers. Rides with a food courier introduced me to the long minutes and hours of waiting and the repetitive transitions between homes and returning to the restaurant, while walking across the city between cleaning gigs

provided opportunities to discuss the job itself and the spatio-temporal particularities of organizing work. The data consist of transcribed and pseudonymized interviews, a fieldwork diary, and a multiplicity of screenshots sent to me by research participants concerning communication with the platform company, calculations of distances, earnings, and ratings, and information sheets, such as new regulations provided by the companies. Of the 16 interviewed persons, five came from south-eastern EU countries and eleven from primarily western Asian countries but also from northern parts of Asia and from the Americas. Three of them were women and the rest men, aged 25–50 years. None of them had initially opted for platform work, but as was repeated across the data, they all felt it was the only option for economically managing their lives in Finland and, in the case of the non-EU participants, avoiding an undocumented status. I have used qualitative content analysis to analyze the collected data, bringing to the forefront the individuals' expertise as subjects governed as migrants (Maury, 2021) while attempting to make a living in the gig economy.

In the analysis that follows, I indicate two central techniques through which the fragmentation and differentiation of the labor power composition of gig workers on location-dependent platforms is engendered, thereby contributing to capitalist value accumulation.

Magical Convenience through Entrepreneurialized Workers

The legal relationship between the platform company and those offering their labor in exchange for money varies based on the type of self-entrepreneurship (independent contractors in food delivery and cleaning), 0 hour, or full-time contracts (cleaning). However, all service agreements and contracts are gig-based, excluding the time in between tasks from the realm of remuneration as well as a major part of the travel time necessary to execute the tasks. The varying independent service agreements and employment contracts challenge the social regulation of employment and established forms of social protection and generate a push 'beyond the salary institution' (Chicchi, 2020: 15). However, juridical categorizations tell us little about what it is really like as a migrant engaging in cleaning and food-delivery gigs via a labor platform.

Platform-mediated services, such as cleaning and food delivery, are often advertised to service buyers as quick and convenient, in line with the larger logistified society, which strives to develop timely and convenient services. Such digitally mediated services tend to obfuscate the materiality of human labor. Despite the desire for smooth logistics, frictions arise in platform capitalism and become evident when examined from the perspective of those physically performing the services. Luka, a young and highly educated man doing food-delivery gigs to earn income, points to discrepancies in how money in the gig economy is distributed:

> You know, it's like these *Aalto Bros*, yeah, who got like a shitload of funding, somehow this is so cool and convenient you just get your food, you press [a button], and it magically comes . . . all is connected in this whole spiral, of that [sic] companies just realized that we can make money out of this because the whole business model is based on having [a] workforce with no other choices. (Luka, EU citizen, food-delivery platform)

Luka conveys an image of the iconic male figure with a business school education (Aalto University)—the 'bro'—who receives start-up funding to develop a platform business. He refers to the supposed convenience of the service, suggesting an understanding of migrant labor as those who do the 'magic' but appear as impersonal parts in the seamless social factory, while the CEOs of the platform companies are framed as 'cool' business heroes. This image resonates with research pointing to the critical relationship between delivery workers and platforms identified as exploiters (Lebas, 2019), as well as to the 'international division of digital labor' in which highly paid software engineers tend to be 'white and male' (Fuchs, 2018: 692). Those performing the physical

tasks of delivery or cleaning are, however, seen as cogs in the wheel of platform capitalism, only increasing potential future profit.

To keep up with the ideal of 'magical' services mediated through digital platforms, gig workers are set 'free' from the parameters of the working day (Chignola, 2019: 41) to decide on several issues regarding the performance of work. Being your own boss—the defining feature of entrepreneurship—was often referred to by the gig workers as the most positive aspect of their work and described in terms of freedom. However, the data reveal that the informants' ideas of freedom also contain ambivalent nuances. Alisa, both highly educated and undertaking cleaning gigs, disclosed her contractual relationship with the cleaning platform:

> The system is that you are never employed by them. That's stated in the contract very clearly, like 12 times: you're not an employee of [the cleaning company], you should not even say that you work for [the cleaning company] because you are always working for yourself, but [the cleaning company] is providing you with a database of customers, so this is the only relationship that you have with them; in the contract, like, you are using the database. In my opinion, this is a bit misleading because I am not using the database; the database is assigning me things that I can't really choose. (Alisa, EU citizen, cleaning platform)

Working as a sort of 'free'lancer in the platform economy obscures the fact that the worker is merely a user of a predefined database, through which tasks are assigned to the gig worker, often in a hierarchized order. Hence, little room is left for personal choice, suggesting that platforms only offer an 'illusion of freedom' (Woodcock, 2020). Another courier confirms the ambiguity of freedom because of the workload required to receive enough earnings: 'Even though we are kind of free, we are not free. Because we really—to do [sic] the money—we need to be working from Monday to Sunday, and a lot of hours'.

Moreover, ongoing competition with others trying to make a living in the same field shapes the social working environment, as exemplified by Ahmed:

> Once I had to ask another courier if he could help me to say a thing in Finnish, and he said he doesn't have time, but if I pay him 50 euros he can stay and help me for an hour. (Ahmed, non-EU citizen, food-delivery platform)

Ahmed, having obtained refugee status in Finland, demonstrates the crude competition over gigs, primarily in relation to the speed of the work and the ratings obtained. Nearly all steps in the work process are recorded and calculated (Woodcock, 2020). For example, fast and well-rated food couriers may have the opportunity to accept gigs before others, while some of the cleaning platforms automatically assign higher hourly earnings to those who manage to obtain a certain rating. By being quick and finding the fastest route, food couriers can earn more money, while cleaners may be able to obtain some free time by completing their task quickly. The gig workers also aim to minimize waiting time, as time in between gigs is generally not remunerated, despite the activity of waiting being crucial to the platform's promise of an on-demand service in the food-delivery business (Gebrial, 2022).

Success in the competition over speed and ratings is predicated on skills in navigating the city, making transitions, knowledge of the digital apps, and the social encounters with service buyers. The competitive framework requires innovation, such as coming up with solutions concerning the fastest routes or means of pleasing the service buyers to receive better ratings and tips, and generally score better in performace metrics. This involves calculating how to usurp as few economic resources as possible for the endeavors, for example, concerning the means of production, such as transportation.

> It's its own shitshow 'cause the scooter companies are cracking down on us; here I'm having to get creative. (Sam, non-EU citizen, food-delivery platform)

As Sam states, there is a need to be creative regarding how to use the existing urban infrastructure. Taking individual risks when organizing and investing in work and life points to the embodiment of entrepreneurship as formulated by Schumpeter (1951): one does not need to 'embody anything that is scientifically new' but instead is required just to 'get things done', which means creating new combinations among already existing resources and technologies (as cited in Hardt and Negri, 2017: 140). Such efforts require cooperation among a variety of social actors, as well as operating simultaneously on different platforms, including handling scooters, telephone subscriptions, and maps to make the transitions as cheap and quick as possible. The effort needed to find the fastest routes, the most efficient means of transport, and the best ways to obtain positive ratings demonstrates that the 'magic' of the services offered by platform capitalism is enabled and accomplished by the entrepreneurial functions of the gig workers and not by 'the bro', that is, not by the start-up entrepreneur himself.

Despite the varying legal positions between self-employment and full-time employment, the migrant gig workers' experiences articulate a qualitative shift in which entrepreneurialism transversally permeates the composition of labor power. This tendency signifies an increased orientation toward the constant follow-up on how work is best carried out in a context in which work time and free time are hardly distinguishable. This fact is illustrated in extensive discussions among gig workers on collective chat sites and Internet forums about updates to service agreements and speculations about changes in the work algorithms, as well as real-time communication about the demand for workers, shift changes, and speed and parking checks either via the platform or in communication channels organized by the company. Thus, workers need to navigate on their own in an institutional fog without definite knowledge of how earnings are distributed and tasks allocated or the results of the urban transitions and encounters with the service buyers. Furthermore, the migrants' experiences with gig work demonstrate how only a minor part of the labor is remunerated, thereby advancing the maximization of unpaid labor time in the interest of capital (Fuchs, 2018; Maury, 2020; Pulignano et al., 2023) because of platform businesses finetuning the balance between paid and unpaid activities (Srnicek, 2017).

The entrepreneurial tendency additionally complicates possibilities for building enduring social ties because of the rapid turnover of workers active on the platform and because of the limited number of common physical meeting spaces for workers (e.g. Rubert, 2023). Some of the food couriers noted that they had established contact with other couriers via quick interruptions to greet each other in the street, while others felt more comfortable hanging out together between gigs. However, since time is tracked and more lucrative deliveries depend on one's speed and efficiency, several research participants indicated that workers often tend to continue their individualized struggle with time and competition with others, despite the fact that food couriers are currently organizing all over the world, especially migrant workers (see Alberti and Joyce, 2023), including in Finland. A lack of collectivity was also expressed by workers undertaking cleaning gigs. For instance, Alina had the following to say:

> Sometimes I see other cleaners and I wonder, are they from [the cleaning platform?], like even when I met some of those cleaners in those gigs, I feel like, should I get their information, should I keep in touch? Uh, but then it's just a bit weird you know, because you don't . . . you're not colleagues, they're someone that you met once, and you will probably never meet again. (Alina, EU citizen, cleaning platform)

Alina described a cumbersome situation of, on one hand, experiencing a need to stay in contact with others doing cleaning gigs, while feeling, on the other hand, that it might come off as odd.

This ambivalent sentiment arises from the fact that workers are not viewed as colleagues but as 'individual contractors' and gig workers; hence, their potential collectivity is compromised via the entrepreneurial tendency and shaped into entities that best serve the objectives of platform capitalism. As Will, a non-EU citizen performing food-delivery gigs, said concerning the problems he experienced with the platform companies: 'they have money, and they will use all means necessary to just try to divide us'. Although Will was primarily referring to the difficulty of unionizing and creating collective resistance, his analysis speaks more broadly to the logics of separating workers in the gig economy by 'all means necessary', often resulting in experiences of loneliness and inadequate social and emotional support, which impacts psycho-social well-being (Perkiö et al., 2023).

Direct contact between the worker and the service buyer is reduced since mediation of the bought service is organized via the digital platform. In fields such as cleaning, which often involve providing services for the same household or company on a regular basis, the service agreements often forbid the establishment of direct contact, such as exchanging phone numbers, with the service buyer. However, the research data demonstrate that people doing cleaning gigs do at times exchange phone numbers to be able to influence the organization of work more flexibly outside the immediate control of the platform company. The connection established between the worker and the service buyer is an example of the platform companies' efforts at control being incomplete, as discrete forms of resistance emerge throughout the labor process (Rubert, 2023; Woodcock, 2020). The food couriers also shared that while some couriers have gone on strike, others have profited from the lack of couriers active on the platform at that precise moment, and the platform company counted on the fact that the migrants' need for income would keep them working instead of resisting. Thus, workers must be insecure, flexible, and easily interchangeable for the gig economy to operate efficiently (Altenried, 2021), pointing to circumstances beyond the immediate productive arrangements that help ensure the encounter between the platform company and the gig worker.

Even as digital platforms purportedly set workers free and make them individually responsible for their labor, income, and security, the crux of their appeal lies in the promise of bringing distinct groups together by providing the infrastructure and intermediating between groups. Thus, platforms place themselves in a position where they can monitor and extract all the interactions and the resulting data between groups, thereby exercising their economic and political power (Srnicek, 2017). Platforms extract data from disposable workers because of the potential value of such data, which might constitute a competitive advantage when attracting investors (Van Doorn and Badger, 2020). Consequently, platform capitalism runs on voluntary or involuntary cooperation via the platform. Such cooperation points to a transversal entrepreneurial tendency, which enforces a demand for seemingly opposing personal attributes: on one hand, responsibility is required of oneself as an entrepreneurialized subject, including the risks of work; on the other hand, it necessitates the capability of working in a network with others (Vähämäki, 2003), which is both mediated via the digital platforms and occurs in the informal communication between workers. This creates a confusing situation: individual workers must believe in their freedom and in their capacity to perform better than others while making use of work accomplished by others.

Socially, Legally, and Algorithmically Differentiated Labor

Platforms are not neutral actors but embody politics, and as intermediaries they control the 'rules of the game' (Srnicek, 2017: 25). As demonstrated above, gig work demands innovative capacities on the part of workers and the use of a multiplicity of apps and communication channels to complete the gigs efficiently. In addition to platform-mediated gig work being shaped by the entrepreneurial tendency, itself permeated by power relations that hierarchize entrepreneurialization,

the hierarchization of laboring subjects is also generated through heterogeneous techniques of producing social, legal, and algorithmic difference.

As initially stated by Luka, working as a food courier, 'the whole business model is based on having a workforce with no other choices'. Luka's statement highlights the role of produced difference between migrant workers and nationals with more room for choice. Will, who also does gigs as a food courier, clearly identifies the reason as having to do with the lack of possibilities in the labor market: 'my opinion is that it is because of this racism we are not getting any other jobs'. This statement suggests that the social and legal differences produced, for example, through everyday racism and an assigned legal migratory status, crucially shape a labor force ready to accept the poor working conditions of platform-mediated gig work.

Samir's experience with doing gigs through a cleaning platform provides further insight into the hierarchies among workers reproduced in the platformized service sector. The following observations are based on our conversation:

> Samir tells me about the differential treatment of cleaners. He has experienced a lot of racism from customers. [The cleaning platform] knows that the most-liked ones are 'Finnish ladies', and therefore, these cleaners are assigned 'VIP houses [in the wealthy suburbs]'. Estonians and some other Eastern Europeans get the second-best VIP houses, Samir says. Samir has had a VIP house before [in this area]. He tells me how nice it was, that they would always offer coffee, chocolate, and a lot of time, even time to watch television. (Olivia's fieldnotes, October 2022)

Samir, having a background as an asylum seeker in Finland, speaks of a certain racialized and gendered hierarchy of labor in which Finnish women are assigned large homes in wealthy areas, while Eastern Europeans get to clean the somewhat less fancy houses and supposedly the rest of the migrant workforce, both men and women, are directed to the remaining homes. While this hierarchy is not always consistently enforced, as Samir explains that he has also occasionally been assigned to clean what he terms 'VIP houses', the produced racial, gendered, and geographical differences point to a modality of hierarchizing workers and assigning tasks utilized by the cleaning platform company.

Despite the 'post-racial and gender-neutral fantasy' of digital labor platforms, incorporating the ideal of erasing contact between service workers and service buyers (Van Doorn, 2017), daily encounters between human parties occur and reveal how social difference is reproduced on an everyday basis. Such processes encompass experiences of racist commentary encountered in the street and in the restaurants that deliver food (Mbare, 2023) or when individuals buying cleaning services racialize and therefore reject, diminish, or negatively rate the gig worker. Samir described such an encounter when attempting to enter a house he was designated to clean when the owner opened the door: 'he looked bad at me [sic] and said to me, "I don't want anyone from Asia to come into my home, so just go"'.

Samir contacted the manager through the platform chat feature, asking for the day off because of the racial insult and the emotional suffering he experienced, but his request was disregarded. Samir's experiences exemplify how both the social production of difference (in particular, racialization) and the platformized organization of work through impersonal and partly algorithmic management, stripped of responsibility for the workers, 'disestablish possible relations between people that are not conducive for capital' (Melamed, 2015: 80). Moreover, several migrant workers emphasized that the ratings provided by the service buyers immediately affect their possibilities of receiving gigs impact the level of income received from each task, and are often biased, thereby contributing to the reproduction of racial and gendered hierarchies of labor (Vallas and Schor, 2020). In addition, the workers' activity on the platform, such as rejecting tasks or inquiring about

the calculation of earnings on the app, may algorithmically assign workers into hierarchically ordered groups or badges (Perkiö et al., 2023: 33), hence contributing to the algorithmic production of difference.

'A workforce with no other choices' not only emerges via the social production of difference, which is closely intertwined with algorithmically produced difference, but also ties into the laboring subjects' legal status. The legal production of difference (Maury, 2021), through which migrants are assigned different sets of rights depending on their legal status, is temporal and often interlinked with the racial politics of migration regulation, which give shape to an insecure labor force (Anderson, 2020; Balibar, 1991; Gebrial, 2022). According to Tazzioli (2021), the socio-legal production of the migrant is a constitutively racializing process, while Sharma (2020) argues that the variety of legal statuses has in many ways substituted for distinctions made based on race. Residence permits for non-EU citizens are constantly rendered more temporary, reducing possibilities for obtaining a permanent right to reside in a nation-state or to claim citizenship (Maury, 2021). For non-EU migrants, residency in Finland is in most cases tied to income requirements, to an employer, or more indirectly to the income level of a non-Finnish partner. When residence permits are issued on a temporary basis, ranging from a few months to 4 years, the migrant's ties to the source of income increases (Maury, 2022). Samir highlights this analytic by asserting the following: 'if you get sick on your back, you cannot work, and if you cannot work you cannot get a residence permit', hence pointing to the entanglement of a temporary residence permit, associated poor health, and work insurance, and to the need for monetary income to renew the permit. Neither is the residency of EU migrants secure, as precarious EU citizens who apply for welfare subsidies in another EU country may face expulsion (Simola, 2021).

A migrant's status as a non-citizen in Finland reinforces the subject's relationship to paid work, and through work and legal status to the state and capital. Consequently, the entanglement of precarious migratory statuses and negative experiences of racialization intensify competition over gigs and ratings. The analysis underscores that race and gender cannot be approached as identity categories but are instead relational processes of differentiation produced in historically situated social, legal, and geographical contexts. Moreover, given their close entanglement with migration administration, racialized differentiation must be approached as outcomes of converging processes of racialization in specific socio-historical contexts, that is, as an outcome of various racializing encounters with migration administrators and service buyers, restaurant, and house owners. Such differentiation is also enforced via algorithmic management and ratings. Thus, it becomes clear that processes of racialization do not target all migrants in the same way; rather, they depend on how the migrant worker is socially perceived in different contexts and on how the processes converge, producing multiple exclusions and hierarchical differentiations. Social, legal, and algorithmic differentiation all hinge on one another, thus helping to shape the encounter and social relations developed between the platform company and the migrant gig worker. In sum, by enforcing heterogeneous differentiation, the social and technological architecture of platform-mediated gig work contributes to 'reducing collective life' (Melamed, 2015: 78) and separating people so that they may then be interconnected via labor platform in terms that best feed capital.

Conclusion: Concurrent Dynamics of Differentiation and Interconnection

The article has paved the way for a deeper understanding of the relation between the autonomized and entrepreneurialized workers and the heterogeneously produced differences within the labor power composition of gig workers active on location-based labor platforms through an

examination of the lived experiences of recently migrated individuals engaged in platform-mediated cleaning or food-delivery gigs in Helsinki. For them, gig work was not a primary choice or even on their radar upon arrival; hence, many of the migrant workers attempted to find alternative ways of providing for themselves, often putting significant effort into finding work in line with their own qualifications, capacities, and experience. I have suggested that if visions of stable, lasting work have become increasingly frustrated of late, especially among migrant workers, the transversal entrepreneurial tendency permeating the labor power composition and the (re)production of social, legal, and algorithmic difference intensify the processes of fragmenting a shared position as workers into discreet, atomized units, desiring independence and freedom, but reduced to competing within a predefined, platformized structure.

In conclusion, I wish to argue that the analysis provided here can lend support to theoretical approaches for understanding how the ensemble of techniques for producing, enforcing, and utilizing the differentiation of gig workers is closely followed by efforts at interconnecting them in a digital platformized network, associated with the aim of incorporating a large number of users and facilitating data extraction to increase the value of the platform (Srnicek, 2017). Thus, the 'magical' chimera of platform capitalism, as described by some of the research participants, effectively relies on differentiating and separating workers by reducing their spontaneous encounters while orchestrating specific forms of cooperation by constituting the digital platform as the primary intermediary for interactions (Srnicek, 2017; Van Doorn, 2017).

To grasp the logic of simultaneously differentiating workers and channeling their entrepreneurial functions in the interests of capital, I suggest a theoretical approach involving the *concurrent dynamics of differentiation and interconnection*. The analysis has illuminated the heterogeneous techniques of differentiation by first demonstrating how labor power composition is shaped into single entities by the transversal entrepreneurial tendency, which benefits from the generalization of enterprise as a subjective modality (Chicchi, 2020) in platform capitalism, and second, by pointing to the techniques of (re)producing hierarchical difference within the labor power composition. I have thereby drawn attention to the ways in which platform companies enforce mechanisms that attempt to channel interconnections via the platform in rather stark relation to the reproduction of social, legal, and algorithmic difference and the social forces through which migrant gig workers' entrepreneurial actions becomes situated in a racialized and gendered 'international division of digital labor' (Fuchs, 2018: 692), thus positioned as subservient in relation to the Eurocentric ideal of white male entrepreneurship as the embodiment of future-making capacity (Tarvainen, 2022).

Finally, I have argued that laboring subjects are pushed into a conflicting situation of demanded collaboration, creativity, and competition to enable the extraction of value from social relations outside the immediate operations of capital (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2019). This strategy sets migrant workers free to use their creative capacities and productive power in a seemingly dynamic relationship with the modalities of limiting and enclosing such autonomy via the platform. This dynamic enables an extractive relationship vis-à-vis the migrant workers' creativity at efficiently completing gigs and simultaneously participating in data production. Consequently, migrant workers materially sustain and contribute to the development of the platform economy while suffering from the platform businesses' speculative practices based on including large numbers of workers on the platforms, extracting data, and refining algorithms. Ultimately, this effort crystallizes the fact that while platform companies are credited for their innovativeness, it is the social force of the gig workers that drives the developments of the contemporary history of capital, thus causing capital to reside on the reactive side of the game (Tronti, 2019). In short, digital labor platforms would not exist without the creative practices and solutions invented on an everyday basis by precarious migrant gig workers.

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