Los Delivreros: Labor, Platforms, and Transnational Flows of Information in Latin American Gig Workers

by

Ambar Reyes-Lopez

B.A. in Animation and Digital Art
Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, 2012

SUBMITTED TO THE PROGRAM IN COMPARATIVE MEDIA STUDIES/WRITING IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN COMPARATIVE MEDIA STUDIES
AT THE MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

SEPTEMBER 2022

Signature of Author: _____

Department of Comparative Media Studies
Aug 5, 2022

Certified by: _____

Vivek Bald
Professor of Comparative Media Studies/Writing
Thesis Supervisor

Certified by: _____

T.L. Taylor
Professor of Comparative Media Studies/Writing
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by: _____

Heather Hendershot
Professor of Comparative Media Studies/Writing
Director of Graduate Studies

Los Delivreros: Labor, Platforms, and Transnational Flows of Information in Latin American
Gig Workers

by

Ambar Reyes-Lopez

Submitted to the Program in Comparative Media Studies/Writing on August 5, 2022 in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Comparative
Media Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Abstract

This thesis investigates the transnational modes of community-building and network
formation and how these are instrumental for *delivreros* (food delivery workers) in New York
City to exercise agency, forge their own narrative, and resist platform control through their
use of digital social networks and communication technologies. Scholars such as Gray (2019)
and Rosenblat (2017) have shown how the gig economy ecosystem is underpinned by
long-standing tensions between companies and workers; I argue that migrant delivery
workers defy information and knowledge asymmetries by repurposing the technology that
has been built as a means for control. Marginalized, misrepresented, or ignored by
mainstream media and governmental actors, delivery workers use information and
communication technologies to bypass traditional channels, disseminate their own stories,
and create community. Overall, my research illuminates how the flow of information through
different spaces and times enables delivery workers to construct a place for subversion and
negotiation with roles assigned to them by broader socio-political forces.

In the first chapter, building on ethnographic fieldwork in NYC with delivery
workers, I examine the relationship between digital technologies and labor in the platform
ecosystem. I argue that a way to regulate work and workers within the gig economy is
through time uncertainty and gamification. Yet, I also contend that workers use social media
platforms as tools for resistance and subversion. To do that, I outline how delivery workers
strategize and learn through social media platforms. Much of the literature on platforms and
the gig economy has focused on the typically precarious working conditions. By shifting the
focus to workers' concern about their lack of control with their time, I seek to complement
these analyses and to understand the different factors and actors that might affect workers'
lives.

In the second chapter, I map how delivery workers communicate and engage collectively both in the physical and the digital worlds. My research reveals two digital platforms that workers use to share information: one that operates inwards (Whatsapp) and another that operates outwards (Facebook). These two forms of communication represent opposite sides of the spectrum between public and private communication as well as ephemeral and permanent information. Delivery workers use Facebook to livestream accidents, upload information about bike robberies, and document their actions. I identify three objectives to livestreaming: it helps workers construct their own narrative, it maintains transnational ties, and it establishes public credibility and reputation. And they use WhatsApp to coordinate, request help, and mobilize with one another in real-time. I analyze how public and private means of communication facilitate and constrain social forms of organization. These layers of communication synergize to form a transnational distributed knowledge network and to shape and interpret the collective identity of Latin American delivery workers. Thus, I argue that *delivreros'* use of technology provides a unique glimpse into the convergence of social networks, media culture, and social movements within the context of contemporary gig labor and migrant organization.

I conclude my thesis with insights about how delivery workers are adapting older indigenous practices to a context of urban cities and technology. I argue that migration moves ideas, memories, knowledge, stories, and forms of organization. I finish by thinking about migration as a medium and the way the social forms of organization that I observed in NYC are reminiscent of a long history of self-organized tactics, which have moved along with the *delivreros* I met. Latin American delivery workers' experiences in NYC are not unique but rather gig workers all over the world are undergoing similar organizational patterns and transformations. I strengthen my case by focusing on urban safety and millennial modes of organization; I strive to depict a bigger picture beyond labor, platforms, and workers resistance. Overall, I bridge theories of platforms and labor with media and migration.

Thesis Co-Supervisor: Vivek Bald
Title: Professor

Thesis Co-Supervisor: T.L. Taylor
Title: Professor

Thesis reader: Héctor Beltrán
Title: Assistant Professor

Acknowledgments

The process of thinking, researching, analyzing, and writing is, to a large extent, a collective action. Getting through my thesis required both academic and personal support, and I have many, many people to thank for listening to over the past two years. Thus, the first thing I did when I typed the final sentence in this document was to type a new one:

"Jun 14th 2022 10:25 pm: I want to share that I just finished writing my thesis! I made it!! :)"

This message was sent to 6 people and 2 WhatsApp groups; my support system throughout this journey. It is only because of the extraordinary people that I have in my life, that I was able to successfully complete this ride.

First, I want to thank "El Noticiero de los Delivreros" and its members: Abraham, Angel, Bona, Eduardo, El Vocho, Marco, María, Miguel, Omar Rodri, Six D, and Tony; this thesis couldn't exist without you and your stories. All of these are pseudonyms, but you will easily be able to recognize yourselves here. I hope I have been able to say what the mainstream media and policy makers are not seeing: your struggle, your needs, and your dreams. *A mis compas del puente Willis, muchas gracias!* Thank you for welcoming into your community, stories, places, experiences, and lives. *Numaa' lá'*

I am especially grateful to Eduardo and Marco since they were the first *delivreros* I met, welcomed and interacted with me in the Willis. To Miguel for pimping my bike without A/C in the middle of the hottest day of the year. And to Abraham, for teaching me how to ride an e-bike; for sharing his time and knowledge; for his support during every stage of my research; for accompanying me and taking care of me when we were biking. But more importantly, I thank him for the laughs and adventures on the streets of New York.

To my advisors and mentors, I wish to express my deepest gratitude for their guidance and support. They are some of the most generous—in both knowledge and time—people that I know, who believed in me and pushed me intellectually and personally to structure this massive research project. You have set a model of dedication and passion as researchers, mentors, and professors:

In my second semester, as I struggled deciding my research topic Vivek Bald asked me: imagine the pandemic weren't happening; if you were to choose a topic, which one would it be? I immediately started telling him about delivery workers in NYC, and the rest is history. I shared with Vivek both my interest in research as well as in practice. Thank you for reminding me why I embarked into this voyage called graduate school, for your enthusiasm

and encouragement throughout this process, and for the recommendation letters that you sent on my behalf.

If I were to summarize what T.L. Taylor taught me in just two sentences, it would be: What is a stake? Why does it matter? I've heard those two questions from T.L. countless times and throughout my research I kept asking them to myself. T.L.'s ethical care for research participants focused my attention to that issue throughout the whole process. T.L.'s sharp mind and insights allowed me to think more broadly about the macro structures and dynamics of power. More importantly, T.L.'s willingness to share with me and with all her students her own struggles in her path to academia is a testament of the extraordinary human being that she is.

It took only two words for me to hear from Héctor Beltrán to capture my attention: knowledge production. On the first day of class, he asked us to remember those words and to think about who was writing and who was missing. Héctor, *muchas gracias por creer en mí y en mi proyecto,* having you in this knowledge production space called MIT has been a privilege. Thank you for encouraging me and giving me the confidence to submit my research to journals and conferences. Your discussion, ideas, and feedback have been invaluable to me. As a Mexican woman, I can only hope that my research will attest to the importance of diverse voices in the knowledge production environment.

I would like to extend my sincere recognition to my professors, colleagues, and friends at MIT, for your encouragement, for teaching me as much as you could about media, and for creating a safe space for me to thrive.

To William Uricchio, thank you for your stimulating questions, for teaching me that everything can be media, and that nothing is new–or everything was new at some point. I realized that saying something that has been said before it's not problematic as I used to think but it actually allows us to find patterns that speak to something deeper, something that is even more fundamental to us as humans.

To Paloma Duong, *gracias por crear un espacio de diálogo basado en respeto y solidaridad. Tu compromiso como investigadora y profesora me inspiran día con día. Eres brillante; mi admiración va más allá de tu intelecto, te admiro por tu calidad como ser humano, por ser sencilla y compartida con tu conocimiento y experiencias.*

To Sarah and ODL, thank you for all the stimulating conversations that we had about storytelling, technology and its implications. Sarah, thank you for your patience, encouragement and advice throughout my time at ODL. I have been lucky to have a supervisor that cares about my work.

To my cohort, for going through this surreal experience of grad school while in a pandemic. Abby and Srushti, I'm so grateful to have had you next to me every week at ODL; Emily, thank you for our crafts group; JJ, thank you for your patience reading my tarot every time I needed it, and always finding a good outcome to my spread; Marvez, thank you for teaching me everything I needed to know about MIT; Ali, thank you for your company every Wednesdays night at T.L.'s class, but more importantly thank you for your willingness to always proofread my papers and this thesis! *Tomás, che, gracias por tu apoyo, e impulso en cada etapa de mi investigación. Tenerte como amigo es de lo mejor que me deja MIT.*

Carmen Alanis, Ricardo Cojuc, Jacob Bañuelos, and Enrique Gastelum, I cannot begin to express my gratitude and appreciation for your taking the time to write me a thoughtful recommendation letter and your support of my application to MIT. Without your letters, I couldn't have been writing these acknowledgments. I truly appreciate the time and effort you spent helping me. I would also like to thank Mariel García-Montes, because of her disposition to help me in my application process. Mariel, *gracias por compartir todo tu conocimiento sobre MIT y motivarme a aplicar.* And thank you to Chris Cohen for helping proofread my writing sample.

I would like to extend my sincere recognition to my friends beyond MIT, who have always been there for me, who listen to me, and who have motivated me to apply to grad schools. I'd like to thank Myriam Cacho, for the love and support that she has given me since I was a teenager. I have had many friends throughout my life, but I'd like to specially thank Cielo, Ly, Héctor, and Rebeca. Thank you guys for always being there for me in the laughs and cries.

Lastly, in every decision I've made, in all my victories and losses, and in all the in between, those who have been supporting me, trusting me, encouraging me to pursue my dreams, and more importantly loving me: *mi familia*. None of this could have happened without you. Rosario y José, thank you for all your patience teaching me every skill I needed to make it this far in life. *Papá, gracias por enseñarme a andar en bicicleta. Mamá gracias por siempre acompañarme "a lugares peligrosos" en cada proyecto que he hecho.* To my grandma, Trufita, *gracias por todo tu inmenso amor, te extraño todos los días.* To my brother Jo, thank you simply for existing. Thanks for holding me up every time I doubted; you always motivate me to continue… Thanks for always believing in me and telling me that whatever path I end up choosing everything will be fine. I know this is true because I'll have you next by my side. This thesis stands as a testament to your unconditional love, support, and encouragement. *Y pos' a darle!*

After 2384 miles traveled with an e-bike, here I am… in the last mile of the journey.

Table of Contents

Introduction

It is impossible to truly understand *delivreros* [1] reality until one actually delivers a food order, on a bicycle, under the pressure of time, on the streets of New York City. Imagine, you are on an Arrow-10 e-bike, a forty-four pound electric bike that speeds up to 28mph. You are riding down Second Avenue, surrounded by trucks, buses, and cars. Though there is a bike lane, there are parked cars or trucks obstructing it; thus, you need to circumvent them. At any time, the doors of the parked cars might open with no warning, or other bikers will speed to outrun you. At intersections, pedestrians cross when they see an opportunity even if it isn't their turn. Meanwhile, the app is already sending you messages telling you that you're running late to deliver the food, something that you already know. In the winter this scenario gets even worse; add freezing temperatures, snow, and icy roads.

My interest in delivery workers began the first time I rode a bike in the city. Every time I stopped at a streetlight while riding my bike in New York, I could understand the conversations that were happening around me because the cyclists and I spoke the same language. My curiosity grew more and more, and I started wondering: who were they, how did they get to NYC, and why are they delivering food under such brutal conditions? In the pages that follow, I present some of what I found after a year riding side by side with New York City's *delivreros*, accompanying them on deliveries, attending courtrooms, government offices, consulates, restaurants, lawyers' offices, churches, delis, public parks, as well as participating in baptisms, birthdays, and other family celebrations and social events; speaking to them about their working lives, daily experiences, and long-term dreams, and – crucially -

---

[1] A Spanglish word that delivery workers from Latin America invented. It stands for delivery and adding a Spanish ending.

documenting the ways that they utilize, resist, push, and extend a variety of digital technologies in order to gain greater control and agency over their imposed role, by societal forces, that the play in society.

*   *   *   *   *

Nov 14, 2021 4:49 pm

The first time that I ride with Abraham, a *delivrero* from the Me'phaa region of San Juan Puerto Montaña in Guerrero, Mexico, he tells me: *Wait for me here with the bikes so we don't have to lock them, I'll go and pick up the order quickly.* From that moment, I start to see the complications that characterize this work, such as finding a place to lock your bike every time you pick up or deliver an order, not to mention the pressure that the app inflicts on you by sending alarms when the order is ready to pick it up and you haven't confirmed that you have it. In a video I record with my phone to document this first-time experience, one can see Abraham approaching me holding his phone in his hand and the package in the other walking at a fast pace. I ask him excitedly, while holding my phone: *do we have the order?* To which he answers: *yes*. He explains to me that the order wasn't ready on time and that that's why it took so long to get back to me. Aware that I am recording, because I previously explained to him that I wanted to understand how the app worked, Abraham points his screen to my camera, and starts explaining the interface: *First, you tab on the button to confirm and now he [the app] sends us the address where we need to go*. It occurs to me that he is used to people asking to follow him and he knows what people want to see. Over the past few months, his Facebook page, which he opened with his brother, two nephews and his roommate, has become popular and therefore, journalists, students, and enthusiasts have all contacted them to interview them, take photos and document their job. Having outsiders

follow him is not something that Abraham enjoys, because, as he later confesses to me, he isn't able to do his job; again and again he has to stop and wait for the people following him *because they are not familiar with what the fast pace it entails to deliver*.

Abraham wants to test me, so he asks me: *so where are we going now?* I look at the address but I cannot recognize it and I say that I don't know. He tabs on a button to obtain the directions. The app takes us directly to Google Maps. When Google Maps opens, an address pops up. Although I don't realize it, this is the address where Abraham told me to meet him earlier, which is still close to where we are. I mistake it for our delivery address and in the video, one can hear in my voice a tone of relief, but then, a second later, when the new address loads, this quickly changes to surprise and distress. We are twenty minutes and three miles away from the client, and we have to cross Manhattan from west to east. By the time we reach the address and deliver the food, I am exhausted. While Abraham is riding an e-bike, I am riding a regular bicycle and we still have another four hours of deliveries to go.

Abraham is part of an estimated 65,000 app-based delivery workers in New York City. My ethnographic research focuses on Abraham and nine other Indigenous Mexicans: Angel, Bona, Eduardo, El Vocho, Marco, Miguel, Omar, and Rodri, as well as two Guatemalans: Tony and Six D.[2] In addition to being *delivreros*, this group of young men are also the driving force behind a self-organized solidarity network of food delivery workers in New York City. I met Abraham and the rest of the group in 2021, on the corner of 125th St. and 1st Ave.: the corner that they have established as their base for their community watch.

---

[2] These workers are real people, yet I have changed all names, and identified details of people and places to protect their anonymity.

While they differ in their beliefs, working strategies, life goals, and plans, they have common

experiences and interests that bring them together. More importantly, they are friends, and

some even family, who ride along with the rest of the couriers every day through the city

streets. Their stories illuminate the lives and struggles of countless other delivery workers

who are working within the app-based labor ecosystem. According to a report published by

Cornell University and Workers Justice Project, Latin Americans account for almost 50% of

food delivery workers in NYC.[3]

New York City and its food platform ecosystem

While my thesis ultimately focuses on the flow of information and modes of social

organizing facilitated by digital platforms, it is important to contextualize the delivery

workers' experience. Peters argues that Mexican migration to the US is parallel to the growth

and development of infrastructure, agriculture, and critical economic sectors in the United

States.[4] For decades New York City has been known as the epitome of a city of migrants; and

they have played a crucial role in its economic development. There are two characteristics to

understand the structural context in which the experiences of Abraham and the rest of

delivery workers in my thesis are located. First, global cities[5] like New York, attract highly

educated and skilled workers, and with them there's an increasing need for workers in

low-skill service-related jobs.[6] Second, there's a need for labor flexibility. In his ethnography

about Mexican janitors in Silicon Valley, Zlolniski[7] argues that globalization and

---

[3] Figueroa, Maria, et al. "Essential but Unprotected: App-Based Food Couriers in New York City." Workers' Justice Project and Cornell University's ILR School., 13 Sept. 2021.
[4] Peters, "Recent Structural Changes in Mexico's Economy," 56.
[5] See Sassen, 1991.
[6] See Gray 2004; Sassen 1988; Smith-Nonini 2007.
[7] Zlolniski, *Janitors, street vendors, and activist,* 3.

international migration have created a new class of low-skilled workers, the contemporary proletarians of a postindustrial economy.[8] Overall, traditionally, researchers have understood Mexicans' presence in the city as a direct response to NYC's socio-economic ecosystem and its need to carry out low-skilled-physically-demanding jobs that no one else is willing to do.

Latinx[9] participate in NYC's labor force at a higher rate than other migrant communities.[10] Among them, Mexicans and Guatemalans have the highest rates of labor force participation at 76 and 75 percent respectively.[11] Restaurants are, traditionally, the main source of employment for Mexicans as dishwashers or delivery workers since these tasks are perceived as 'unskilled' ones. Mckinsey[12] reports that the stay-at-home policies imposed during the pandemic catapulted the demand for food delivery services. Yet, with restaurants unable to maintain their workforce, platforms entered the market. The service became mostly mediated by apps which altered and entrenched this low-wage work. For instance, Marco and Rodri shared with me how they felt that they had a ghost boss instead of a human one whom they could talk with and understand if they encountered a problem. Marco told me: *The app doesn't care about you; if something happens to you he doesn't know, either he cares. You could die, that actually happened to Francisco, and he [the app] will just block you without you being able to give him [to the app] an explanation.*[13]

In contrast to traditional labor, this workforce is often portrayed as lacking agency and devoid of any organizing. Press and media have portrayed delivery workers as "a

---

[8] Zlolniski, 3.

[9] I use Latinx to refer to a person of Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative to Latino or Latina).

[10] NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, "A Demographic Snapshot," 10.

[11] NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, "A Demographic Snapshot," 10.

[12] Ahuja, Kabir. et. al,. 2021 "Ordering in: The rapid evolution of food delivery."

[13] Marco, Conversation with the Author, 11/03/2021.

vulnerable workforce with no collective power, and with no choice but to continue

working."[14] Similarly, scholars such as Sassen-Koob and Smith-Nonini[15] have stated that

low-skilled workers, largely lacking union protection, are highly vulnerable to repressive

work conditions and low wages. While those observations resonate with the sentiments of

some of the couriers I met, they tell only half the story. In fact, I observed during my

ethnography how within these conditions, people organize and find ways to resist.

Hierarchies: Labor and racial

Restaurants kitchens[16] are a unique ecosystem to explore labor hierarchies and a place

in which Latin Americans negotiate and transform their identities, since it is where their

stories as workers in the US often start Abraham and Miguel's stories aren't the exception.

With limited or no English, they started working in a restaurant kitchen as dishwashers and

built up their way to become chef's assistants. In his PhD dissertation, Macías-Gamboa

describes labor's hierarchization in NYC's restaurants as a kind of internal labor market, in

which it is possible to develop ascending careers.[17] To ascend, though, as dishwashers they

generally needed to help in other tasks such as delivering food, and that's how they learned

those skills.

It is not only labor's hierarchization that Latin Americans experience in the US but

also a racialized one. The darker one's skin, the lower one's place in the social hierarchy.

Beltrán argues that "when migrants integrate into the social and labor structure of the US,

they must negotiate not only their identities but subjugate their bodies to powerful

---

[14] The New York Times. 2021. *The Delivery Workers Who Risk Their Health to Bring You Food.*
[15] See Sassen-Koob 1981; Smith-Nonini 2007.
[16] See Gomberg-Muñoz. 2010. "Ethnography about Mexican busyboys in Chicago."
[17] Macías. 2004. "Transmigrantes en Pueblayork."

stereotypes and subjective constraints to align themselves with pre-existing categories of labor."[18] Throughout my ethnography, the kitchen was a recurrent topic that *delivreros* would always use as reference. For instance, when I asked Abraham why he thought delivery workers were always trying to deliver as fast as possible, his answer was not one that I would have expected: *I believe that we [delivery workers] are always in a hurry and we want to deliver as quickly as possible because we all come from (sic) the kitchen. We had to make everything as fast as possible because the work never ends, and if you're not fast enough you won't be able to advance. Working in a restaurant is hard.*[19] Kitchens, thus, are a snapshot of larger societal structures and hierarchies that affect the delivery workers' experiences described in this thesis.

Abraham and the rest of *delivreros* that I met work on average 50-70 hours per week. Whereas Miguel works fully with delivery apps, Abraham splits his time between delivering for a restaurant during mornings and working with an app during evenings and weekends. Abraham is committed to using only one app, whereas Miguel has accounts in different platforms and works interchangeably depending on which one is more "busy." Abraham told me that even though he knew he could be making more money working only with food delivery apps, working as a *delivrero* in a restaurant, gave him other benefits such as free food, a place to sit, and access to a bathroom.

On November 3rd 2021, I was supposed to attend a legal hearing regarding the murder of a Mexican delivery worker, that ended up being postponed. That was the first time that Abraham invited me to eat at the restaurant he was working at.When the news about the hearing being postponed were disseminated through their WhatsApp groups, he called me

---

[18] Beltrán. 2012. "Echándole Ganas Across Borders," 19.
[19] Abraham. Conversation with the author, 23/10/2021.

and told me: *Hey Ambar! instead of waiting in the street, come to the restaurant. Here you can rest, eat and I'll give you the password for wifi.* This small conversation, to me, captures a broader phenomenon about the problems and anxieties that delivery workers encounter everyday and the way their life is mediated in NYC.

Context: Demographics, statistics and culture of migration

This group of self-called *delivreros* are part of the people that each year move from rural Latin American communities such as Mexico to the US, hoping to find a stable source of income and the potential for upward social mobility. They perceive themselves as transient workers; they go to the US to make money and then return back home. Yet, as their stories and circumstances reveal, their return date continually gets postponed. For instance, in a conversation I had with Miguel, he shared with me: *My mother tells me that it's enough, that I should go back. I tell her that I won't, that I still have a third floor to build. I don't know when I'll be back home; I still have a lot of things to build before I leave, but I'm not in a hurry.*[20]

Thinking and planning are recurring themes that I heard in the conversations I had with the *delivreros*. These concepts are perceived by Abraham, Eduardo, and Miguel as synonyms of progress. For instance, Abraham started working in a deli when he arrived. He was making 200 dollars per week and he knew, he told me, that at that rate he wouldn't go back to his family anytime soon. Miguel's conversation with his mom, and the conversation that Abraham had with the community's leader at the beginning of this chapter, illustrates the polarization of positions that people have in regards to when is the time to return. Both Miguel and Abraham are thinking about how to build a future for themselves beyond

---

[20] Miguel, conversation with the author, 11/09/2021.

building a house and buying a car; and, they criticize others who think that those goals are enough. This is both important and interesting to consider when we think about the different perceptions that workers hold regarding basic needs and what matters in life and the future.

Back in Mexico, Miguel was a construction worker and Abraham a bus driver. Their salaries are low for NYC's standards, but by relocating, their earnings multiplied. What they earn in a couple of hours in the US corresponds to the income that they would earn in Mexico per month working twelve hours or more. They make on average 150 - 200 dollars per day, while the minimum wage in Mexico is $172.87[21] Mexican pesos (8.32 dollars) per day—that is, they earn 18-25 times more in the US than they would earn in Mexico. *I wouldn't have been able to build my house if I had stayed in Mexico*, Miguel told me. To put it in context, in the US they are earning around the same or sometimes more than what a professional in Mexico with a high-education degree is making.[22] The difference between Miguel and Abraham's labor experiences and incomes in the US and in Mexico point to the magnitude of the work-pay disparities, social inequalities, and labor conditions that exist that push labor migration.

The culture of migration is pervasive in rural Mexico. One day while biking, Abraham shared with me:

> I came like everyone else, looking for a better future. Leaving one's country is like looking for new horizons to bring wealth to one's family. I have three children in Guerrero [Mexico]. In December it's going to be six years since I arrived. I have eight

---

[21] Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, 2022.

[22] According to the Labor Observatory of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare in Mexico, the average professional salary is 12,931 pesos per month (646 dollars). And while, I'm aware that there's a lot of disparity in salaries, a less official, but more accurate data, my friends in Mexico, who graduated 10 years ago from a top private University in Mexico, are earning from 2500 to 5000 dollars per month. This amount is similar to what delivreros are earning.

brothers; two of us are here right now but some have already returned back to Mexico, and I also have several nephews here.[23]

As Abraham's accounts shows, migrating is seen as a path toward economic well-being. The term reveals the sociocultural dimensions and historical implications. Delivery workers belong, as Gonzalez argues, to the many communities whose traditional means of livelihood had been disrupted by neoliberal policies, industrialization, and the mechanization of agriculture.[24] This culture of migration, thus, uncovers an environment in which "migration becomes deeply ingrained into the repertoire of people's behaviors, and values associated with migration become part of the community's values,"[25] and the decision to migrate becomes part of the families' everyday experience. The back-and-forth movement of family members and friends facilitates a flow of information between these places. Thus, intricate and intimate networks have developed over the years between NYC and rural communities in Mexico and Latin America at large.

Migration is not just the one-directional flow of people. As Portes and Börökz propose: More than a movement from one place to another, labor migration should be conceptualized as "a process of progressive construction of networks."[26] According to Abraham, *when you arrive to this country [the US], you have to have someone to receive . If you don't know anyone you can't get here.*[27] As established in migration studies, social networks determine one's migration pattern.[28] Most of the *delivreros* I met belong to transnational families. By this I mean that they are part of a family whose members are located in at least two countries. For Smith, transnational life is embodied in identities and

[23] Abraham. Conversation with the author, 09/18/2021.
[24] González. 2000. *Harvest of Empire,* 27.
[25] Massey et al. 1993. "Theories of International Migration," 452–53.
[26] Portes and Böröcz. 1989. "Contemporary immigration: theoretical perspectives," 614.
[27] Abraham. Conversation with the author, 09/18/2021.
[28] See Goss and Lindquist, 1995; Castles and Miller, 1998.

social structures that help form the life world of migrants and is constructed through relations among people, institutions, and places. People will relocate to follow friends, family, or neighbors. This was Abraham's (and the rest of the delivery workers I met) case. Because as Abraham explained, without established networks, the US is not an easy destination to reach. This indicates delivery workers' dependence on social networks and the support they need to relocate. Furthermore it reveals how different communities find their niche in NYC's labor market.

Remittances are the largest source of income in rural Mexico. *The [Mexican] government isn't supporting the community, so we are the ones who have to do it,* my interviewees recurrently told me. According to Smith, this "produces both a remittance bourgeoisie, who live more comfortably because of the flow of dollars, and a transnational underclass, who receive no remittances. This underclass includes the very poor, who cannot afford to migrate and must earn locally in pesos but pay for goods in the dollarized local economy, and the elderly, who have no kids sending them remittance or income at all."[29] Interestingly, in contrast to their underclass place in New York, now economically fruitful, delivery workers have positioned themselves and their families at the top of the community's social hierarchy, becoming the power elite.

2812 miles from NYC, in the *Me'phaa* community in Guerrero, Mexico, one can clearly see the traces of the remittances from New York. Palm and adobe houses have been transformed into brick and cement ones. My conversation with Miguel illustrates how Mexicans, such as delivery workers in NYC, through remittance, are actively transforming rural Mexico:

---

[29] Smith. 2006. *Mexican New York,* 50.

Miguel: I already have everything planned. I'm going to build rooms that I'm going to rent to teachers. My property is next to a high school, and teachers are always looking for rooms. I've everything planned. I'm going to make individual rooms with their own bathroom so that people have privacy. I don't want them to live like we live here, where six or more people share one [bathroom].

Ambar: But Miguel, according to what you're making, you could be living in a better place on your own in NYC? Why don't you do that?

Miguel: Because I'm sending all my money back to build my future. As I was telling you, that's why each room will have its own bathroom. The rooms are going to be on the second floor and on the first floor I'm going to put a deli so that teachers can buy their food there.

Ambar: Sounds like you have everything figured out Miguel.

Miguel: Well, I also want to use the basement as a bar, but my wife doesn't want to. I have already invested a million pesos (50k dollars) to build my house.[30]

Miguel's house materializes his dreams, experiences, hard work, and upward mobility. For Lopez, the remittance houses are "an alluring trap for migrants and their families: it is both a house form and a crystallization of the inequalities that underpinned migrant's lives."[31]The fact that he's thinking about building rooms with private bathrooms is testimony of his own experiences in the US—Mexicans and Guatemalans are more than twice as likely to live in overcrowded housing (48 percent and 43 percent respectively).[32] Each remittance house tells its own story. Some are occupied but others, though finished, remain uninhabited, because their owners' plans changed. Houses in rural Mexico, thus, become a physical symbol of transnationalism.

---

[30] Miguel, Conversation with the author 02/18/2022.
[31] Lopez. 2010. "The Remittance House," 34.
[32] NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, 2021. "A Demographic Snapshot," 11.

Technology: connecting spaces

Technology facilitates the flow of information. Scholars have suggested that the Internet constitutes an intermediary transnational social space: a liminal site,[33] diasporic contact zone,[34] and diasporic resources that establish diasporic space through social media.[35] According to Ponzanesi and Leurs, migrants are digital natives, early adopters, and heavy users of digital technologies.[36] The use of video calls and livestreaming has become standard practice in transnational life and enables both people in the US and in Mexico to document their everyday life and effort towards the good of the community in both places. For instance Eduardo, Miguel, and Abraham recurrently would share with me videos from events such as parties at their communities. In them, I was able to see how on the streets, one can see trucks and vans and people wearing caps or t-shirts from Mexicans' favorite US brands such as American Eagle, Gap, Nike, and Adidas. Between two geographically distant social spaces, with their social networks and their comings and goings, Latin Americans have created a flow of communication that connects both spaces; and by maintaining their ties with their countries of origin, *delivreros* continue circulating information back and forward.

Fundraising in New York has become increasingly important for the community's entertainment events back in Mexico. Scholars,[37] such as Cohen, Stephen, and Smith have shown that migrant workers boost their social status in communities of origin through remittances and participation in transnational projects. Members of the community traditionally support these festivities in one way or another. Interestingly, since delivery

---

[33] Nedelcu, 2012.
[34] Gillespie, Herbert, and Andersson, 2010.
[35] Mainsah, 2014.
[36] Ponzanesi and Leurs. 2014. "On digital crossings in Europe," 6.
[37] Cohen, 2001; Stephen 2007; and Smith 2006.

workers are not physically present in communities of origin, instead of engaging directly in

the *faena* (community service) labor they send money to continue asserting their place in

their community's everyday life. In a phone call I had with Abraham, he told me:

> Today was the community party. Bona [Abraham's brother] along with other friends
> here in NYC cooperated to hire a musical group. Do you know how much they spent?
> 90,000 pesos ($4,500 dollars). It's a lot! I wouldn't, but he was very happy. We spent
> the whole morning on a video call greeting our people. His friends called him and I
> was there listening. I wanted to go to work…. but then I would hear them and I
> wanted to say hello, and well, [sighs] I decided to stay.[38]

I asked Abraham why he thought Bona was sending money for the party, and he told

me that he believed that it was an act of love, an act of affection and care for the community.

Altogether, remittances and social links to their community are important to help delivery

workers gain respect in their hometown, but it is also crucial to build a reputation and

narrative in the US

Mainstream narratives: The Latino Threat and The Hard-Working Migrant.

In the US there are two seemingly opposite mainstream narratives about Mexicans:

"The Latino Threat Narrative"[39] and the "hard-working migrants" narrative.[40] Scholars such

as Santa Anna and Abrajano and Hajnal have shown how the rise of illegal migration

allowed the cultivation of a politics of fear, framing Latino migration as a threat to the US

This narrative stigmatizes Latin American migrants as lawbreaking, unclean, and threatening

interlopers who paradoxically steal jobs and leech public assistance.[41] "By framing them as

aliens, lawbreakers, and criminals, the Latino Threat Narrative distinguished migrants from

mainstream Americans by a well-defined social boundary."[42] Because of this, for some

---

[38] Abraham. Phone call conversation with the author, 03/15/2022.
[39] See Chavez, 2008.
[40] See De Genova 2005; Gamio 1971; Gomberg-Muñoz, 2010.
[41] See Coutin and Chock 1997; De Genova 2005; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 1995.
[42] Massey. 2015. "A Missing Element in Migration Theories," 54.

scholars, Latin Americans in the US have become especially vulnerable to social alienation, exploitation, harassment, and hate crimes.[43] Omar one day arrived from work particularly angry because, he explained to me: *a Puerto Rican just passed by and called me Mexican, as if it were a bad word. "You don't have the courage to defend yourself, you always remain silent and you bow down." That's what he told me, "you Mexicans are cowards," and then he just left.[44]* This narrative of Mexicans being cowards is used and reproduced in both their work environment and their everyday life. Thus, it is not surprising that Latin Americans in the US seek to distinguish themselves from that narrative.

Mexican workers have often been considered a diligent, tractable segment of the US workforce.[45] This narrative about Mexicans willingness to work hard, emphasizes their religiosity, family orientation, and work ethic. They even emerge as "model minorities."[46] Many employers express their approval of Mexicans' apparent willingness to do low-wage and low-status work.[47] However, cultivating a reputation as hard-workers allow migrants to balance out the Latino Threat Narrative. For instance, Marco reproduced this hard-working narrative when he told me: *Many abandon their apps because their time to select their shift starts at 4 pm, and they say I won't be able to find availability to work. But for example, right now that I have mine at 3 pm; I always work and finish my hours. And believe me, a good worker always has to finish his hours.[48]* By demonstrating their "willingness to work," performing extra work without complaint and with enthusiasm, they differentiate themselves from other marginalized communities and enable themselves to find employment niches in

---

[43] Pew Hispanic Center 2007; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 1995.
[44] Omar. Conversation with the Author and other delivery workers, 09/21/2021.
[45] De Genova 2005; Gamio 1971.
[46] See Wortham and Allard 2009.
[47] De Genova 2005; Zlolniski 2006.
[48] Marco. Conversation with the author, 12/02/2022.

the low-wage job market. It is within this context that Mexicans in the US make sense of who they are and what they are doing.

In the process of writing my thesis, I got a WhatsApp from Abraham with a photo titled: 38 deliveries! In the photo one can see all the tickets that he collected during the day. With a single photo two things are clear to me: first the amount of physical work he did during the day to deliver all those orders and second, the degree of accomplishment he felt about it, as he explained to me afterwards:

> It was suuuuper busy today. I was the one who made the most deliveries. The general management congratulated me. It is very clear to them that I am the best delivery worker in NYC. 🤣 The person in charge of assigning the orders to us told me that she was amazed by how fast I did it. I'm exhausted, but I have another 6 hours with QuickDelivery[49] [delivery app] which starts in 30 min but anyway… guess how much I made?[50]

Abraham's text reveals the workload that this community is doing and the value he ascribes to being the best. Moreover, it illustrates how gaining respect and self-esteem for being a hard worker is particularly important for him in constructing his identity in the US

In NYC, Mexicans are just one of many marginalized communities that must negotiate social and racial hierarchies. Bald's[51] research shows how Indian Muslims formed networks embedded in working-class Creole, African American, and Puerto Rican neighborhoods and entwined with the lives of their residents. Many married local women, had children, and even as they maintained ties to one another, developed Puerto Rican, African American, and West Indian extended families and friends. What I am seeing with Latin American delivery workers, however, potentially because of a language barrier, is that

---

[49] I chose to use a pseudonym for the platform to protect the participants of my research.
[50] Abraham. WhatsApp message to the author, 4:24 pm, 17/05/2022.
[51] Bald. 2013. *Bengali Harlem.*

their community is not entwined with others nor do they have partners from other nationalities, but rather they aim to differentiate themselves from other communities in a similar situation. Throughout my thesis I aim to reveal how social hierarchies are simultaneously reproduced and resisted in delivery worker's everyday experiences.

Delivery workers reproduce stereotypes and accept social classes. Latin Americans often invoke their work ethic to contrast and differentiate themselves from Blacks, reinforcing racist stereotypes and economic marginalization. The following WhatsApp conversation retrieved from a private group of delivery workers exemplifies this:

> [10/19/21, 4:25:32 PM] The police is abussing, to those of us who work hardly, they give us a ticket and they let the criminals free 😡👎
>
> [10/19/21, 4:27:05 PM] That is corruption my friends, they screw those of us who work hard and those who are subsidized by the government are the scourges 😡😡
>
> [10/19/21, 4:34:10 PM] Blacks say that we are stealing their jobs and that America belongs to them… North America… Mexico, Central America and South America that is all America, not Africa, not Europe, not Asia, that is not America. [52]

As the conversation shows, Mexican delivery workers grapple with racialization and construct a sense of belonging. The last comment, in which someone talks about having more rights than others because of a geographic justification, unconsciously reproduces the Monroe Doctrine.[53]

Delivreros position themselves as hard workers and recurrently promote this narrative. Competitors in the low-wage job market develop economies of dignity and "deservingness" that denigrate the most proximate competitors—African-Americans or other

---

[52] WhatsApp message in a delivrero's private group, 10/19/21.
[53] The Monroe Doctrine was a US policy that opposed European colonialism in the Americas. It held that any intervention by foreign powers in the political affairs of the Americas was an act against the US.

minorities— as "lazy."[54] Furthermore, workers develop complex and contradictory perceptions of themselves as they respond to hegemonic narratives. Some even want to differentiate themselves by portraying themselves as not from rural towns. For instance, in a public Facebook group I found a comment that said: *All the paisanos do not respect the traffic lights, they think they are in their rural towns.*[55] Altogether, I want to point at these identity imaginaries and public discourses that circulate through different platforms and spaces and that attest to the hierarchical socio-political world in which delivery workers immerse themselves and the way they reproduce it.

Where it all started: a pandemic and a Facebook group

Delivery workers have self-organized and mobilized to protect themselves and their peers from the perils of NYC's streets. Abraham started planning, talking with other *paisanos*, and learning ways in which he could build his house as fast as possible to get back home. He shared with me: *In previous years, I only focused on work, but I knew there were injustices.* Yet, his interest changed when the pandemic hit.

> I saw the injustices. My friends told me about them… they would text me saying "hey they just robbed me." They stole Marco's [his nephew] bike twice, so one feels helpless inside, and I started thinking "what should I do?" While I was biking, I would be thinking how to organize and that's when we decided to create the page, and it has given results.[56]

These struggles speak of the conditions, opportunities, and limitations that this community has experienced in both the US and Mexico. As Gomberg-Munoz argues, "denying workers agency risks reducing them to mere pawns and diminishing their capacity

---

[54] De Genova and Zayas. 2003. *Latino Crossings,* 75.
[55] Facebook message from a follower to the digital community, 06/21/2021.
[56] Abraham, Conversation with the author, 10/14/2022.

to affect social life."[57] Conversely, emphasizing agency at the expense of structure can mask political and economic realities and obscure relations of domination and subordination. When I asked Abraham if he imagined what *El Noticiero* would become when it started, he told me:

> It's not good to be conformist. One needs to keep and keep looking for opportunities. I didn't think that we and El Noticiero de los Delivreros would be like this. I thought, let's just open a Facebook page to explain the good things that we do… but you see, it took momentum and people started to contact us and look at us for help. There are times that even I am surprised by the things I am achieving because it is something important.[58]

What began as a Facebook group to self-document the everyday life of delivery boys in New York has quickly evolved to serve different purposes: to circulate news and report real-time information, for community-based sousveillance, as an educational tool, as an organizing and mobilizing channel, and as a place to share both their work and leisure time, a place to celebrate successes but also to mourn their losses. Thus, from where do we start telling the story or the stories that are being layered on and interwoven with one another?

Research Questions

After getting to know delivery workers' life several questions puzzled me: who chooses food delivery over other types of work such as dishwashing? What factors determine that choice or attract them to this particular work? What are the problems, both physical and technological, that they are facing everyday and how do workers resist? What are the communications channels that they use and why? And what can specific forms of organization and network formation tell us about migration as a medium? At the core of my

---

[57] Gomberg-Muñoz. 2010. "Willing to Work," 297.
[58] Abraham. Conversation with the author, 12/02/2022.

research I wonder, how does network formation occur? Who organizes, how and why do they do it, if so, how is it sustained over time?

Methodology and positionality

> *You left me speechless... A little more practice and you would pass as a delivrera. Look there are three delivreros, why don't you turn on your camera and follow them. We can still reach them. You can reach them, speed in, you can reach them.*[59]

> *This is literally a ride or die thesis Ambar.*[60]

I originally heard about a self-organized group called *El Noticiero de los Delivreros* through Facebook's recommendations algorithm. Since I was already interested in the community, I immediately started following the page. I initially contacted the moderators (who ended up being Abraham, Marco, Eduardo, and Bona) through Facebook DM (direct message), but it wasn't until I physically went to the entrance of the Willis Bridge at 125th St. and 1st Avenue, that I gained entrée to the community.

I met the founder members of *El Noticiero* and found out that most of them were relatives. They progressively introduced me to more relatives and friends working as *delivreros*. I selected the stories and characters in this thesis from the delivery workers I met. I sought a collection of people that would illustrate delivery workers' heterogeneity that I encountered. Yet, I'm aware that I only focus on a specific group and community and that there must be other stories and experiences within other communities that I'm missing. However, even though each *delivrero* has a unique story, altogether, I believe that I have been

---

[59] Abraham. Conversation with the author while biking, 10/20/2021.
[60] Vivek Bald. Conversation with the author, 02/16/2022.

able to illustrate the common anxieties, questions, dilemmas, and situations experienced by this community.

Generally, it is an environment and industry predominantly occupied by men. More critical than spending my time accompanying them while they would deliver food was the non-work time I spent with them. It was during social gatherings and other off-work events that I got a sense of the know-how of being a *delivrero*. I gained respect and established my presence in the community by several means: I started taking photos of them that I would send them right away so that they could use it as profile photos or send them to their families; I translated information from English to Spanish; I helped them organize events; and other matters that contributed to establish my presence and build a strong bond. There are two actions in particular that I believe were key to gaining their respect: One day I was sitting on the floor, cleaning my bike, with my hands all covered in oil. Angel approached me and told me, *You're the first woman that I know that does this. Unlike the rest who feel entitled, I have never seen a woman who does the dirt work; they always want men to do it*. On other occasions I received similar comments from Abraham: *I was amazed that you were there with us, helping Angel without worrying that you were getting dirty; another woman wouldn't do that. Look for instance at María [Francisco's wife]. Francisco is here but she isn't. You didn't have to come, but you decided to and I really admire that*. I hold that what made me gain respect within this community was how different I was behaving compared to traditional conceptions of how a woman behaves and gender dynamics in Mexico.

This thesis is based on an ethnographic fieldwork that I carried out among Indigeneous Mexican delivery workers in NYC. I was guided in this process by the past work of my advisors T.L. Taylor and Vivek Bald and my reader Héctor Beltrán. I chose

ethnography as my research method for two reasons: First, it offered me access to collect

detailed information about the lives and experiences of a community who is difficult to reach

with traditional research techniques, such as surveys and structured interviews. And second,

it allowed me to bring the human dimension of delivery workers' experiences to the

forefront.

In the field, I maintained an informal approach and an open mind. I didn't immerse

myself with a preconception of what I wanted to find. I conducted participant observation,

hundreds of informal conversations, and several semi-structured interviews as my main

techniques to gather my data. I spent most of my time interacting with, observing, and talking

with specific *delivreros*. I visited them at their work, accompanied them to deliver food, and

participated in many of their social and leisure activities. During social gatherings, I would

conduct "group interviews" to allow the participants to engage with each other and not just

me. Interviews allowed me "to grasp the relationship between what people say they do and

what they do." [61] When I had saturated responses, meaning that I started hearing the same

information over and over again, that's when I knew my data was completed.

During the course of my fieldwork, delivery workers I came in contact with were

aware of my research. I immersed myself as much as a researcher could in this community. I

wasn't viewed as an outsider. I was, however, viewed as a friend, and ally rather than a

fellow *delivrera*. I acknowledge that I will never be able to fully experience what they live

and that my research is biased and limited to my experience. For instance, I cannot know

how they interact when they are alone at home or how they talk to each other when they text

---

[61] Taylor et. al. 2012. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds*, 92.

privately. What I offer here are not facts but interpretations.[62] Thus, this isn't an objective story but an in-depth research one.

Taylor et. al, argue that culture is not simply a series of memorable events; it exists above all in the minutiae of everyday life,[63] and that is why beyond just documenting key events, I spent the past months traveling from Boston to NYC every weekend to interact with the community on a daily basis. As Nelson claims, ethnographers can only understand actions through successful participation in those actions.[64] For instance, I remember when a journalist came to the Willis bridge; she had just been there for about one hour and she asked me, *so, when will the action start? When are they going to recover a stolen bike? Or is it all just an invention?* I told her that everything was true, and that robberies were happening at high rates everyday yet, of all the time I had spent with them (at that time it was three months) I had only experienced two bike's recovery so the chances that she would experience it were low. She said that she didn't have time for this and just left. I describe this example to demonstrate that by actively participating in *delivreros'* everyday life I gather more data than someone who did not live through these experiences.

The ethnography includes two levels of observation. At the micro-level, I examine the diversity in individual use of technology and platforms, and at the macro-level, I analyze gig workers' struggles with wider societal phenomena. Overall, their life stories were contextualized in a specific moment and place.

I had a multi-methodological approach, combining ethnographic research with content analysis of conversations, comments, videos, and interactions in online spaces. My

---

[62] Geertz. 1973. *Interpretations of Culture.*
[63] Taylor et. al. 2012. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds,* 81.
[64] Nelson. 1969. *Hunters of the Northern Ice.*

main data was complemented with secondary data gathered from census, government, and

nonprofit organizations reports to contextualize delivery workers' experience. I additionally

collected data from text messages, WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups, Youtube videos,

legal documents, delivery app texts to workers, and press articles. As Taylor suggests, I went

where the community led me to, both in online and offline spaces.[65] For example,

conversations that started in the context of a public Facebook group were extended through

private group chats, phone calls, or face-to-face conversations. My thesis builds upward from

all my field notes. I aimed to connect the dots, find patterns, and discover unexpected

takeaways. I strived to find pieces of media that help me tell a larger story. For instance,

while reviewing my field notes from June 27th when I had just started to explore the

Facebook public group I wrote: *I'm missing the conversations that are happening in the*

WhatsApp groups. My research led me to diverse places such as courtrooms, government

offices, consulates, restaurants, lawyers' offices, churches, delis, public parks, and houses of

delivery workers' relatives and friends. I also attended baptisms, birthdays, and other family

celebrations and social events. This intimate interaction with them enabled me to collect

detailed information about their lives: my research's core data.

During the first phase of my fieldwork, I collected detailed information about twelve

delivreros. In a second phase of my fieldwork, I focused on two of them with whom I spent

most of my time in conversations and interviews, to develop an in-depth understanding of

their individual stories. With the quotes I selected for this thesis, I made an effort to

document the constant flux of information and knowledge that characterizes *delivreros'* lives

and the role that technology and media play in it. While in the field, I used a recorder and a

---

[65] Taylor. 2006. *Play between worlds,* 9.

camera as my principal tool. I would always ask first if I could record the conversation, and if there was a sensitive topic that they wouldn't feel comfortable sharing I would stop recording. I transcribed all my recordings and coded them in a spreadsheet to identify key themes.

My ethnography led me to broaden the scope of my research. For instance, at the beginning I didn't know about the relationship between the solidarity network and rural communities in Mexico. That discovery brought me up a series of questions about trying to understand migration as a medium, a connection that, if had I not made at that time, I would have likely never thought about. As I started to dig more and more into this connection, the story got more and more intertwined and complicated.

As Taylor argues, "it is crucial to understand, as, with many such projects, [that] it is deeply situated in a particular historical moment."[66] The fieldwork for my thesis took place during a pandemic. I attribute to the pandemic the exponential growth of the gig economy, and therefore the creation of groups like "El Noticiero de los Repartidores*"* as a way to resist and empower workers to raise their voices against work injustices. Moreover, while I am aware that transmedia organizing[67] exists across platforms and communities, my research focused on a single group as a way to limit my scope. Yet, I followed any lead to other platforms to get the whole picture. Overall, I decided to focus on a specific case to dig deeper, in the hopes of finding specific patterns that explain broader contexts at the intersection of labor, media, platforms, and solidarity networks.

---

[66] Taylor. 2018. *Watch Me Play,* 45.
[67] See Costanza-Chock. 2014. *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!.*

To establish trust and security, I offered delivery workers that I interacted with the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. Most of them didn't mind using their real names, mostly because they feel proud of their actions and wanted the world to know what they did. However, safeguarding confidentiality and protecting my participants is fundamental as part of my research ethics and asked them to choose a name. I want to state that these workers are real people, yet I changed all names, nicknames, and identifying details of people and places to protect their anonymity. Each pseudonym refers to the same person respectively throughout the thesis. Thus, I trace the same person through different spheres of his life from work to social networks and beyond. I have tried to capture the scale, pace, economy, and social networks of delivery workers, but identifying details have all been changed.

Ethnographic data collection took place between October of 2021 and June of 2022. All data was in Spanish and interviews were conducted in Spanish. I have translated quotations into English. I only left the words *compa(s), compañero(s), primo(s) y paisa(s)* in Spanish since they are colloquial words used between delivery workers to refer to other delivreros. Scholars can choose different words to describe foreign-born people in the United States.[68] Each term addresses a particular nuance in the relationship them to the nation-state. I use the term Latin Americans or Mexicans when I describe my ethnographic participants because my research focuses on *delivreros'* labor and life experiences, not on their migration experience or status.

Outline

In my thesis I focus on three main areas—labor, solidarity networks, and transnational modes of organization—to provide a complete picture of *delivreros'* life. Rather

---

[68] See De Genova 2005; Stephen 2007.

than present only a snapshot of this community through the labor lens, I stress the importance of taking a step back and looking at the whole picture. I start my thesis with a contextualization of the community of *delivreros* that I met. I aim to highlight the socio-economical and political forces that constantly position them at the lower level of the social class hierarchy. In doing so, my intention is to reveal the tensions and contradictions delivery workers experience and the way they pushed to change the narrative that positions them in that class. For instance, as they struggle with racial, and class stereotypes, they cultivate identities as hard workers, and are willing to help their community, making them worthy of respect, a value that is praised in indigenous communities. Yet, by establishing a reputation as hard workers, they continue reproducing racial and class stereotypes towards other marginalized communities.

In the first chapter, I discuss ways in which QuickDelivery (a food delivery app) introduces structure into a job that would seem unstructured and flexible from the outside. I argue that a way to regulate work and workers within the gig economy is through time uncertainty and gamification. For instance, QuickDelivery is playing with uncertainty, by keeping workers connected and interacting with the app all day long, even when they're not working. These interactions occur before work starts, when delivreros wake up and attempt to schedule hours to work. They occur during work, as delivery workers monitor the system constantly to see if there are orders, if they can log in, or if there are hours to work the following day. Lastly, they occur as the work day comes to an end, when couriers face uncertainty regarding the time the system will end their shift. Yet, workers have found ways to cope with this app by understanding the rules and playing the system. I argue that delivery workers defy information and knowledge asymmetries by repurposing the technology that

has been built as a means for control. During the time I spent with them, I asked them what issues they had with the app and working as *delivreros*. Wages were not an issue as mainstream media and policy makers think. We talked about the general things such as stolen tips, the danger of the roads, deactivation of accounts, and so on. But they all agreed that what they wanted the most was to be in control of their time.

In the second chapter, I map how delivery workers communicate and engage collectively through digital platforms. I trace two forms of communication, one public and one private. I focus on the way delivery workers livestream to establish public credibility and reputation. Delivreros learn and improve their livestream skills by first, receiving feedback on their own work. Second, they learn by giving feedback to others, which produces a peer-to-peer learning community. And lastly, they learn by watching their own livestream to make sure everything goes right and to determine ways they could improve. I then explain the use of WhatsApp to coordinate, request help, and mobilize in real-time. Moreover, I argue that by asking what to do, delivery workers are assigning or legitimizing the group as a moral agent capable of choosing the best option. I analyze how public and private means of communication facilitate and constrain social forms of organization. I state that distributing the information through both physical meeting points (delis and parks) as well as WhatsApp and Facebook groups are central to building and organizing a solid network, and a way to visualize *delivreros* both in the digital and physical space. Overall, I demonstrate the importance of media and technology as ways to build solidarity networks to understand how delivery workers are transforming their community and, in doing so, they are attempting to have an impact in the larger socio-political and economic structure of NYC.

I conclude by thinking about the ways in which these layers of communication form a transnational distributed knowledge network and shape the collective identity of Latin American delivery workers. I trace the way delivery workers are organized back to Mexico. I argue that the group of delivery workers in NYC is reminiscent of a collection of self-organized tactics with a long history in Mexico that have moved along with them. The community watch is one of their most successful strategies. This initiative is not an invention within this community, nor is it an adoption from local organization practices in New York. Rather, it is the implementation of a form of organization dating hundreds or even thousands of years that resembles the communitary police implemented in indigenous communities in Mexico.

Overall, my ethnography provides critical insights that help to conceptualize migration not only as the physical movement of people but rather as a medium that moves ideas, knowledge, and form of organization between countries.

CHAPTER 1: Game and work, from Fordism to Gig Economy

> *If you really want to learn, I'm going to teach you everything you need to know about how to deliver food.*[69]

T he gig economy is a market wherein companies contract independent workers for fixed-short-term and on-demand basis making labor sensitive to fluctuations in demand. Abraham's sentiment is evidence of it. At the end of "my first time delivering" with Abraham, he shared with me: *For the apps we are nothing. Today we are working and tomorrow we are not.* One of the main promises of this economic model is the illusionary freedom of work. Champions of the gig economy tout that independent workers have control of their time and are not tied to a nine-to-five work shift. Yet, as I'll explore in this chapter, app-based services that attract delivery workers with that promise, perpetuate the same behaviors that workers hoped to escape. In fact, control of their time is what delivery workers are fighting for. For instance, a conversation that occured between Abraham and Six D exemplifies it. Abraham started: *He [the app] continued sending me orders after I finished my shift.* To which Six D answered*: He [the app] wanted me to take more orders too, and I sped up. Come on! He [the app] wanted to send me to ninth ave and I was in first ave.*[70]

Although gig jobs are by no means new and they pre-date the Internet-era, with the advent of the Internet, smartphones, and platforms, the way people interact, communicate

---

[69] Abraham. Conversation with the author 11/12/2021.
[70] Abraham and Six D. Conversation between each other January 7, 2022.

and work has changed dramatically. The uniqueness of gig work within this ecosystem is that it is mediated by online platforms. An app-based platform enables providers and consumers to make direct transactions.

Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) suggests that any network can most effectively be approached if we look at all of the parts.[71] These networks can include humans, things, ideas, concepts—all of which are referred to as actors in the network. According to ANT, each human or technology has an equal part to play in the system, and therefore it must be considered. Interestingly, delivery workers coincide with Latour when they call the app "he" as if the app were a human, since it is acting as one for them. Thus, from a Latourian perspective, first, these apps are replacing or delegating the work that human managers used to do to connect consumers and producers. And second, a less obvious, or sometimes obfuscated, function of these apps is to regulate an "unregulated" job. Here,—the application of game-design elements and game principles in non-game contexts.[72] Yet, I also contend that workers use play 'to hack the system' as a tool for resistance and subversion.

I focus on an specific case of a gamified element in the delivery app QuickDelivery and the way it resembles the ludic loop[73]. I explore two ways in which the company is using the ludic loop to control the workers and one tactic that workers use to resist. I conclude with a reflection on how gamification of gig labor, both implemented by companies and workers, is a byproduct of long-standing tensions that emerge from control and surveillance managerial practices, as is the consequent worker resistance.

---

[71] Latour. 2005. *Reassembling the social.*
[72] Deterding, et. al. 2011. "Gamification: Toward a definition," 12-15.
[73] See Schüll, Natasha. 2012. *Addiction by Design*."

Game, time, and work from Fordism to the Gig Economy

Neither past nor present is static, nor are workers and consumers passive (nor necessarily discrete), and even the most hyperbolic claims for the newness of gig work have antecedents in the past.[74]

During the Fordist era, leisure and work were split into separate spaces: home and workplace. Playfulness happened outside of the workplace, since factory life required discipline and control. This dichotomy was a consequence of practices and ideologies such as mass production, assembly lines, standardized products, and Taylorization (breaking down production into specialized repetitive tasks). Fun and leisure, through consumption, were a means of incentivizing labor. The promise of modern luxuries lured many laborers happily and voluntarily into a cycle of work-and-spend.[75] People worked so that they would subsequently have fun and access the means of consumption.[76] Thus, leisure became the means to control the masses and secure the stability of the workforce.

Yet, workers have always found ways to resist; and play was one of them. The adoption of games in work was first observed by Burawoy. Burawoy wanted to understand why factory workers worked so hard. Studying the Gear Allied Corporation, Burawoy[77] found that to resist workers' daily lives structured by the company's piece rate system and daily production quotas, workers construed their jobs in terms of a game. The goal of the game was for workers to compete with their peers rather than achieve the quota level. Though production over quota received some financial reward, Burawoy describes how the game itself became the workers' focus. Burawoy found something interesting: when work

---

[74] Strangleman. 2007. "The Nostalgia for Permanence at Work?," 10.
[75] Schor. 1991. *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline Of Leisure.*
[76] Baudrillard. 1998. *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures.*
[77] Burawoy. 1979. *Manufacturing Consent.*

takes the form of a game, workers come to see their fellow workers as competition, and therefore conflicts exist between workers rather than between workers and their boss.

The widespread playing of games during work did not go unnoticed. In fact, the popularization of playbour[78]—a work activity that feels like a play and leisure—highlights these cultural changes and exemplifies how both work and play are being transformed. The premise that games can turn monotonous and routine work, fun and engaging, is what lured companies to change the rhetoric and practices of the workplace and to utilize fun. For instance, Fleming describes the shifts in managerial philosophy and corporate culture: "Through informal dress codes, office parties, games… organizational members are encouraged to loosen up and find more pleasure in their roles."[79] And according to Rey, "fun has been fully integrated into the circuits of capitalism,"[80] eroding the work-play and labor-consumption dichotomies that were dominant in the Fordist era.

Post-Fordism marks a shift from the industrialized Fordist economy, a time in which standardization, mass production, and assembly lines evolve into flexible and on-demand production and reliance on technology. The internet changed the way we live and think about our daily lives, including labor. "The 21st century has witnessed a transformation in both technological advancement and the nature of the employment relationship."[81] Changes in corporate culture were coupled with the emergence of a new economic model: the gig economy; the US department of Labor defines a gig as a "single project or task for which a worker is hired, often through a digital marketplace, to work on demand."[82]

---

[78] See Kücklich. 2005. "Precarious Playbour."
[79] Fleming, Peter. 2005. "Workers' playtime? Boundaries," 286
[80] Rey. 2014. "Gamification and Post-Fordist Capitalism," 281
[81] Dunn. 2018. "Making Gigs Work," 1
[82] Dobler et. al. 2021. *The Gig Economy: Workers and Media,* 3

The gig economy emerged during a moment of a global financial crisis. Dobler and Ceisel argue that in 2008 with fractured faith in the neoliberal project, entrepreneurs and investors promised that digital technologies continued to offer possibilities for democratization and economic growth.[83] According to Woodcock and Graham, platform work represents a shift in the organization of work for three reasons. First, there is an attack on working-class organizations and the deregulation of capital. Second, new forms of connectivity facilitate recruiting and managing workers at scale. And third, workers are looking for work flexibility.[84] "Platforms promised opportunities for entrepreneurship, offering hope to professionals and small business owners who feared proletarianization."[85] In 2015, Travis Cordell Kalanick, founder and former CEO of Uber, stated: "the future of work is about independence and flexibility."[86] Typically illustrated as a "drastic and abrupt transformation in work and the economy,"[87] the promise of this economic model is freedom. Yet, Bartholomew contends that gig workers' daily practices are governed by "black-boxed" algorithms.[88] For delivery workers, this economic model demands self-management that is not confined to a specific time and space but rather it occupies their whole day.

Scholars[89] such as Gray and Rosenblat have shown how the gig economy ecosystem is underpinned by long-standing tensions between companies and workers. For Tarnoff "the discourse about the gig economy implies a convergence between "platform" and "gig" that

---

[83] Dobler and Ceisel. 2021. In *The Gig Economy: Workers and Media,* 108.
[84] Woodcock, and Graham. 2020. "The Gig Economy."
[85] Dobler and Ceisel. 2021. In *The Gig Economy: Workers and Media,* 108.
[86] Mason. 2018. "High score, low pay."
[87] For example, Mark Magnacca, in *The Gig Economy: Things You Should Know to Make Your Business Grow* describes it as a "seismic shift in the way we work," 485.
And Olga Mizrahi, in her book, *The Gig Is Up: Thrive in the Gig Economy, Where Old Jobs Are Obsolete and Freelancing Is the Future* posits that it as an "amazing force that normalizes all types of project and temporary work," 101.
[88] Bartholomew. 2021. *Cold and Callous.*
[89] See Gray, 2019; Rosenblat 2017.

elides labor relations and forms of exploitation."[90] It is, under these techno-utopian promises

of the freedom to work "anytime, anywhere," according to Rodino-Colocino, that tech

companies justify exploitative practices that are as old as capitalism itself.[91] Marx and Engels

published the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. In it, Marx set out his theories on both the

means of production[92] and how by owning these means, the bourgeoisie was able to extract

surplus value from the labor of their workers. One hundred and seventy-five years later,

Briggs in his master thesis posits that "instead of owning the means of production, the new

bourgeoisie seek to dominate the customer interface and generate their income either by

taxing transactions conducted at these interfaces (as in the case of Uber) or by selling

advertising space at the interface (as in the case of Facebook).[93] Thus, though the interests

and medium has changed, this model continues to reproduce patterns from the past.

Academics, policy makers, and media discourses

Academics, the industry, gig workers, and the general public hold different opinions

about working conditions, wages benefits, terms of employment, state regulation, algorithmic

control, human resource support, information and transparency, and frequency of policy

changes within the gig economy ecosystem. Some debate whether workers have flexibility

and autonomy; others care about algorithms' control; and others wonder if workers in fact

have any power within this economic model. For instance, whereas Rodino-Coloncino states

that people turning to gig work represents less their preference for flexible over secure

employment and more as a means to survive in an exploitative economy,[94] Gray argues that

---

[90] Tarnoff, Ben. 2019. "Platforms Don'T Exist"

[91] Rodino-Colocino. 2008 "Technomadic Work"

[92] "Capital has one sole driving force, the drive to valorize itself, to create surplus-value, to make its constant part, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus labor." (Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*)

[93] Briggs. 2019. *Smartphone compatible?*.

[94] Rodino-Colocino et. al,. 2021. *The Gig Economy: Workers and Media,* 6.

"a sizable percentage of workers stick with on-demand ghost work precisely because it does not demand a full-time commitment."[95] However, throughout my research, while Abraham kept testing me to evaluate how much I was learning about the app and the job, he challenged me to find a good schedule to work the following day. In this interaction, it is clear that he prioritizes getting a specific morning shift. He gave me his phone, grabbed mine, and started recording:

> Abraham: Ambar is going to schedule her shift. Her time-window [to schedule a shift] opened late because she got an 87 yesterday. And now she's doing her best to find a time and area to work tomorrow.
>
> Ambar: FiDi [Financial District] at 7:30pm, is it too late?
>
> Abraham: No, it's already too late. I want office hours please: I want a shift in the morning.[96]

De Stefano posits that since legally, gig workers are classified as independent contractors, this leads to an increase in flexibility of when and where a worker works.[97] Along these lines, Gray holds that "the trade-off for the worker is that they don't have to stick with the same job any longer than it takes to complete the task. They can fit work around the demands of their lives rather than hand their lives over to the long commutes or hostile environments that come with some nine-to-five jobs."[98] One would argue that flexibility would be beneficial for Latin American *delivreros*, but what I found is that they prefer a fixed schedule, as my conversation with Abraham evidenced; in a non-set schedule, they end up spending the whole day trying to work without certainty of hours or pay.

---

[95] Gray., and Siddharth. 2019. *Ghost work,* 51.
[96] Abraham. Conversation with the author 01/20/2022.
[97] De Stefano. 2015. "The Rise of the 'Just-in-Time Workforce."
[98] Gray., and Siddharth. 2019. 55.

Gig workers are a heterogeneous group of people that differ in the immediate challenges and needs that they encounter in their occupation. "For some [gig workers], these arrangements represent the deterioration of regular work, whereas for others, they appear as prospects of growth and employment."[99] In this regard, Schor argues that to understand these diverse opinions we must consider platform labor's difference, which is the workforce diversity. Schor states that this diveristy happens because "the platform model reduces barriers of entry and there's no fixed schedule"[100] Thus, the gig economy cultivates a heterogeneity in working hours, where some workers might work only for 2 hours and others might work for 40 or even 70 hours per week.

Heterogeneity generates a different level of workers' dependence on the platform to cover their basic needs. While some workers like their independent contractor status, most of the *delivreros* I spoke with mentioned that the promise of working in your free time was a fallacy to them because delivering food was their main source of income. Rodri, for example, told me that the job could be good for people in school wanting to work part time, but for him, he would work eleven to thirteen hours everyday. Then, autonomy and satisfaction vary tremendously depending on whether or not workers are dependent on the platform to fulfill their basic needs. I argue that this diversity within delivery workers and also in apps generates a hierarchy and that that hierarchy affects the demands of each of them. A conversation that I had with Jenny, a *delivrera*, illuminates these hierarchies: *They [those who work with Uber or Doordash], choose the orders, and leave us all the garbage, the leftovers are what we grab. We cannot choose, we have to accept it even if they give us .50*

---

[99] Venäläinen. 2021 *The Gig Economy: Workers and Media,* 75.
[100] Reshaping Work. 2018. "Interview with Juliet Schor."

cents or even 0 dollars as tip, because otherwise QuickDelivery will punish us. Therefore, I hold that the delivery worker community provides a vantage point to examine tensions that emerge within the gig economy. The case of Mexican delivery workers is unique because while gig labor degrades working conditions, it also offers them an opportunity: an easier, not-so-bureaucratic way to work.

Los Delivreros in New York City

On September 16, 2021 the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs and Workers Protection approved a slate of bills that would improve the working conditions for app-based food delivery workers. Among the laws that the city established were: Apps must notify Deliveristas how much the customer tips for each delivery; apps must inform Deliveristas the route details before they accept a delivery; delivery notification must include address for pickup, estimated time and distance for trip, tip if known, and total pay; Deliveristas will have better access to restaurant bathrooms when you pick up orders; and apps must pay Deliveristas the new minimum pay rate that the City will set. This package of bills is based on the needs that were listed as the main issues in a report published by Cornell University and Workers Justice's project.[101]

One *Cornell Chronicle* headline reads: "NYC food delivery workers face a 'harrowing world.'" The article begins: "New York City's app-based delivery workers—a lifeline to city residents during the COVID-19 pandemic—regularly face nonpayment or underpayment, unsanitary or unsafe working conditions, and the risk of violence according to a new report released Sept 13. By Los Deliversitas/Workers Justice Project and the ILR

---

[101] Figueroa, et al. 2021. "Essential but Unprotected."

School's Worker Institute."[102] Similarly, the media's headlines focused on the way delivery

workers were advocating for more rights. For instance, *CBS News'* headline reads: "New

York's food delivery bicyclists and drivers demand more workplace rights."[103] *ABC News'*

headline posits: "Food delivery workers, ride-share drivers demand more rights."[104] And the

headline from *The City* celebrated that "Delivery workers cheer restroom access and tip

transparency alongside AOC and Chuck Schumer. Regarding using the bathrooms, State Sen.

Diane Savino said: They're coming in and allowing your business to continue to exist in

some ways, and delivering food to your customers, and you won't let them use the toilet for

God's sake? That's just human decency—we shouldn't have to legislate that." On the other

hand Lander, who is running for city comptroller, was advocating for establishing a minimum

wage by forcing companies to pay an hourly wage based on the workers' time spent on the

clock, rather than by each pick-up. "We set the rules of the economy and we have the power

to change them," he added. "Someone needs to regulate the industry."[105]

Academics, government officials, and the media were all celebrating this new bill;

everyone seemed to see it as a triumph–everyone but the delivery workers themselves. When

an artist that was working on a project with delivery workers asked me why the group never

celebrated this big triumph, I knew exactly why, since Abraham and I talked about it. He told

me: *Me and what most of the delivery workers wanted was security and that's it. What we*

want is protection to do our job. It was everything we were looking for… we don't want them

[society, government] to give us anything, so many laws that they passed are worthless.

Those are minor problems. They introduced laws that do not help us.[106] This sentiment was

[102] Olszewski. 2021. "NYC Food Delivery Workers."
[103] Ivanova, Irina. 2021. "New York's Food Delivery Bicyclists."
[104] Caina Calvan. 2021. "Food Delivery Workers."
[105] Irizarry. 2021. "Delivery Workers Cheer Restroom Access."
[106] Abraham. Conversation with the author 10/20/2021.

shared in digital spaces. In a private WhatsApp group a *delivrero* sent the following message:

The Delivery Association[107] *does not represent us. The laws they pushed are not the best! I'd like someone to explain to me how the working conditions have changed since they achieved that great labor victory? The rules are actually going to affect us, don't they realize it?*[108]

Counter to mainstream academic and mediatic discourse (living wages, secure, dignified work, and transparent management) for Latin American *delivreros*, the greatest tension that I observed did not revolve around the unfairness of wages and tip allocation (although I don't mean to imply that these don't exist). Rather, I encountered an ongoing battle for agency, certainty, and time. During the time I spent with them, I asked them what issues they had with the app and working as *delivreros*. Though, we talked about the general things such as stolen tips, the danger of the roads, deactivation of accounts, and so on, they all agreed that what they wanted the most was to be in control of their time. Wages were not an issue. My finding was something different from the ideas I encountered in other academic papers.[109]

The app and its strategies to control workers

QuickDelivery is a B2B platform that connects delivery workers to restaurants in NYC. Since QuickDelivery pays by hour, it needs to balance order demand and worker supply to minimize the cost for the company. To do so, QuickDelivery provides two models within which couriers can work. In the first model, the company pays workers $12.50 per hour (plus tips) for up to 38 hours each week. However, this option is contingent on the

---

[107] Pseudonym.
[108] Unknown delivrero.WhatsApp Message in a private group 11/11/2021.
[109] See, for example, Ferrari and Graham, 2021; Ping 2019; Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020; Timko and van Melik 2021; van Doorn, and Chen 2021.

availability of slots to work within a particular neighborhood and time. In the second option,

workers can attempt to login and start working at any time and place, contingent on work

availability in that particular instance. However, in this model, a *delivrero* may be taken out

of the online system at any given time and will be pushed to restart the process all over again.

Thus, QuickDelivery differentiates from its competitors by offering two models of labor

scheduling with which couriers can interact with the app. Throughout this section, I will

analyze how QuickDelivery implements gamification in these two models and the strategies

that couriers have devised to counteract exploitative practices.

Gamification is the use of game design elements—competition, rewards, point

scoring—in a non-game context[110], such as work, to foster motivation, loyalty, and

engagement. The promise of gamification is to make the hard work fun. Among the most

common game mechanics are: achievements (experience points, levels, bonuses); levels

(highlighting the level of engagement); points (frequent flier points, store reward cards);

badges (for completing specific goals); leaderboards (rankings); notifications (drives users

towards certain actions); time (countdown, speed); and luck (lottery, random achievements).

Gamification is prevalent in the gig economy ecosystem because it "does not attempt

to transform work into play; rather, it tries to create the conditions for a play-like activity that

is, ultimately, still productive."[111] Rey argues that gamification is gaining currency, because

"it fits well with post-industrial capitalism ideologies and benefits those who already occupy

a position of privilege within this system."[112] Companies implement gamification because it

can spur production and consumption and therefore make more profit. Gamification has

---

[110] Deterding, et. al, 2011.
[111] Rey. 2014, 287.
[112] Rey. 2014, 287.

found a fertile ground in the current labor ecosystem as another card in the deck of strategies used by companies to minimize costs and maximize profit.

The implementation of gamification in the workplace is an instrument that obfuscates work through the lens of challenges and games. This is problematic to Woodcock because it "represents the capture of 'play' in the pursuit of neoliberal rationalization and the managerial optimization of working life and labor."[113] For Nichols, the mechanisms of gamification incentivize leisure-as-production: badges, points, statuses, but rarely, if ever, is there anything that resembles actual compensation.[114] Thus, gamification might mask underlying exploitative practices. I argue that the system that QuickDelivery has implemented resembles strategies used in gaming and gambling to keep workers constantly engaged with the app for the longest time possible, with uncertainty of end times.

QuickDelivery knows that control is what is at stake within the food delivery platformization ecosystem. It promises to both delivery workers and restaurants that they will regain control. "Regain control over your work hours" is the promise that its website makes to couriers, whereas to restaurants it offers "a way to regain control of your deliveries, while continuing to leverage third-party platforms for your marketing." Thus, by acknowledging that they know that the promise of time freedom is a fallacy, and deploying empathetic narratives towards workers and restaurants, the people behind the app aim to position it as a 'better' or 'more attractive' option to both delivery workers and restaurants. Yet, QuickDelivery's discourse only continues promising them a neoliberal myth wherein they are in control of their time and revenue and free of exploitation.

---

[113] Woodcock and Johnson. 2018. "Gamification: What it is, and how to fight it.", 1.
[114] Nichols. 2021. "This is Gig Leisure," " in *The Gig Economy. Workers and Media* 185.

The *delivreros* I met, largely use QuickDelivery to work as independent contractors.[115] QuickDelivery differs from other food delivery apps mainly in two respects that makes it more attractive to them. First, it offers the possibility of hourly payments, as opposed to per-trip compensation. In fact, on their website they highlight; "Get paid by the hour as a courier: Being at the mercy of demand can be stressful. Instead of logging onto an app and hoping that you'll be able to make money for the time you put in, QuickDelivery pays you by the hour." Yet, its User's agreement says another thing. "4.1 Fees: in consideration for providing food delivery services via the QuickDelivery App, you shall be paid a fee of twelve dollars and fifty cents ($12.50) per hour active on the QuickDelivery App providing food delivery services." But by acknowledging the stress that delivery workers encounter and using words like "mercy," QuickDelivery positions itself as a human-center company.

The second reason QuickDelivery positions itself as an attractive option is because the platform is more lenient with documentation required to join the app and start working. This partly explains why it was the most widely used platform among the delivery workers that I met. For instance, Abraham told me: *When QuickDelivery was new, this guy called Alex would go to the parks and would speak to them in Spanish and ask them, do you want to work? They would say yes and that was it; he would register them and they would start working immediately without papers, questions, or anything.[116]* This suggests to me that the owners of the app started by specifically recruiting Latin Americans as their main workforce.

---

[115] Regardless of the employment status that platforms claim, I hold the position that platform-based delivery workers are workers (See Cherry and Aloisi 2016; De Stefano and Aloisi 2018).

[116] Abraham. Conversation with the author 10/27/2021.

The gig economy counts on technology to optimize and manage labor. QuickDelivery promises to provide a seemingly automatic and instantaneous service to consumers and restaurants. In an interview, the CEO emphasized how QuickDelivery was designed to optimize time for food delivery. "We are pretty obsessed with efficiency, just how quickly we are delivering… An empty-handed trip, it's inefficient… If someone places an order through the restaurant's website or any third-party service, we will automatically dispatch the nearest bike courier to pick up and fulfill that order." In the interview, he highlights how the company is obsessed with efficiency and how it depends on having many workers available at any given time so that they will be able to dispatch workers as orders arrive. He talks as if the system were a machine, with only one mention of who is doing the labor.

Algorithms and other sociotechnical features of platforms reinforce yet obscure social inequalities by purportedly removing the element of human bias.[117] Platforms claim neutrality but create hierarchies by design.[118] However, Gray reminds us that "there are humans behind seemingly automated systems that we all take for granted. The great paradox of automation is that the desire to eliminate human labor always generates new tasks for humans."[119] Delivery workers are providing the services that platforms claim to be doing. No matter how complex the system is, there is always going to be a human behind it.

Tensions, discourses, and the User's Agreement

> *I got it, Ambar, I got the User's Agreement![120]*

---

[117] Safiya. 2018. *Algorithms of Oppression.*
[118] van Doorn. 2017. "Platform Labor," 907.
[119] Gray., and Siddharth. 2019. "Ghost Work," 11.
[120] Abraham. WhatsApp text to the author 03/10/2022.

QuickDelivery's user agreement is in English. Yet, curiously, the only part in Spanish is the section where they ask for one's name and signature and the general description of the agreement. Workers don't know what they are signing, nor do they care about it, but when Abraham shared with me the document, after a few hours he texted me and asked me: *so… what do we know now?* This is what we learned:

In alignment with mainstream accounts of the gig economy, QuickDelivery's User Agreement strategically positions itself as a technology company, as the rest of the platforms, rather than a food delivery company one: "…the Company is a technology service provider and does not provide the delivery services itself." The discourse of technological innovation enables these companies to hide behind technology, masking their true relationship to customers and the workforce.[121] Thus, framing the company this way allows the owners to hire workers without their being technically 'employed.'

In its User's Agreement, QuickDelivery categorizes its couriers as self-employed contractors meaning they are excluded from the employment and labor law protections:

> 3.2 Your Independent Contractor Status. It is your express intention to perform services pursuant to this Agreement as an independent contractor, on a non-exclusive basis. Nothing in this Agreement shall in any way be construed to constitute you as an agent, employee or representative of the Company or to create a partnership, joint venture or employment relationship as between you and the Company.

Moreover, according to Butler, "Deliveroo provides managers with a document that outlines the adequate vocabulary: 'Do say: Supplier agreement, e.g.: Your supplier agreement may be terminated if you continue to fail to meet the service delivery standards. Don't say: Employment contract, e.g.: You are obliged by your employment contract to hit certain

---

[121] Dobler. 2021. *The Gig Economy: Workers and Media,* 9.

performance targets."[122] Gajjala argues that these strategies are a way to produce a context in which workers' exploitation escapes criticism; "displaced bodies are absorbed into a consumer base and also made available for various deskilled (and underpaid) forms of labor, while their forced mobility is characterized as progress."[123] In this app-based model, workers are algorithmically matched to customers, with the terms of service, set by the intermediary. And workers do not negotiate any part of their contract.[124] Although QuickDelivery states in its user's agreement that workers are not their employees, the relationship that it establishes with them is an employee-employer one.

QuickDelivery's User Agreement also emphasizes the fact that gig workers are free to work or stop working as they will:

> 3.3 Your relationship with the company. You acknowledge and agree that you are an independent contractor, and as such, the Company does not, and shall not be deemed to, direct or control you generally or in your performance under this Agreement specifically…. You retain the sole right to determine when, where, and for how long you will utilize the QuickDelivery App and QuickDelivery Platform. You retain the option, via the QuickDelivery App, to accept or decline or ignore a request for food delivery services, or to cancel an accepted request for such services, subject to then-current cancellations policies… the Company shall have no right to require you to a) display the Company's names, logos or colors on your bicycle, or b) wear a uniform and agree that you have complete discretion to provide service or otherwise engage in other business or employment activities.

Yet, consistent with traditional employment, delivery workers are encouraged to display the App logo on their bags; wages are set by the company; and the company has a code of conduct delivery workers are expected to abide by. Thus, QuickDelivery has a double discourse: what is legally said ('I am not your boss') and what actually happens ('A boss without having legal obligations').

[122] Butler. 2017. "Deliveroo Wins Right."
[123] Gajjala. 2017. "The Problem of Value."
[124] Tandon and Ratti. 2021. In *The Gig Economy: Workers and Media,* 49.

Then, what tensions emerge at the intersection of these two promises of the gig economy? On the one hand, there is freedom of time management; on the other, the company provides a highly optimized, seemingly automatic and instantaneous service to consumers and restaurants. How platforms' can ensure their fleet of riders at a specific time and place so that all orders will be delivered–even the ones that riders would decline, suspecting for instance that they will not pay well, are too far, or live in a "dangerous" area?

I argue that QuickDelivery has implemented a system that minimizes uncertainty to restaurants, customers, and the platform itself, by transferring such uncertainty to gig workers. It does so both incentivizing and demanding. There is a ranking system, presumably automatic, that determines whether the worker will be able to schedule a shift the next day to work. This is not specific to QuickDelivery, but it's a general tactic that platforms implement. For instance, Griesbach et al. pointed out that "Instacart (...) constraints workers' choices, forcing them to commit to schedules in advance and exerting more pressure on them to accept particular orders, minimizing autonomy over their time and tasks."[125] In an exchange of chat messages between QuickDelivery and a delivery worker, the worker asked the company: "Hi Do you know why the system doesn't let me pick up early shifts?" To which QuickDelivery responded: "Hello - reservations are completely automatic. We suggest using the app frequently and achieving high grades to lower your time (sometimes, you're able to log in during the lunch and dinner rush hours even if you don't have a reservation)." QuickDelivery is subtly suggesting to the worker how to behave to ensure that the company always has enough workers. That's why Abraham and the rest of *delivreros* I interact with constantly told me *I don't log out; I'll wait until he [the app] logs me out. Delivreros*, thus,

---

[125] Yu, Treré, and Bonini. 2022. "The emergence of algorithmic solidarity," 13.

must maintain a high rate of accepting orders to get an early time-window to schedule their shift in a window during which the app offers guaranteed hourly wages.

When I translated to Spanish part of the User's agreement conditions ("You retain the sole right to determine when, where, and for how long you will utilize the QuickDelivery App and QuickDelivery Platform."), Abraham laughed and told me, *are you kidding me? That's a lie! We are never sure about anything with QuickDelivery*. Delivery workers are supposedly free and independent. Yet, QuickDelivery enforces significant control over how delivery workers behave on the job. Abraham's comment demonstrates how delivery workers notice the tension between the promise of freedom and the reality of platform's control.

Uncertainty, gamification, and strategies

Uncertainty is manifested both in time and space. First, *delivreros* do not know if they will be able to leave their work at the time that was indicated or not. The delivery workers that I met told me that they have received texts from the app asking them to stay longer such as the following one: "Hello! we have a lot of orders in the zone, can you please stay until 10 pm?"[126] Six D, told me: *QuickDelivery doesn't respect anything if you've already finished your shift and it doesn't have more delivreros. It won't let you go, and if you log out, it screws your score even though you're overworking.* Abraham agreed with Six D: *Several times I have confirmed that. For example when it is 11 o'clock and he [the app] no longer has delivery workers, he writes to ask you if you can help him with one more order or two, and if you do it he promises to help you by lowering your time-window to book your schedule the following day.*[127] As Abraham mentioned, this request sometimes comes accompanied with a

---

[126] Text message from the platform to a delivery worker. 02/13/2022.
[127] Abraham and Six D. Conversation with the author 10/24/2021.

reward, such as a better slot of time to schedule your shift or extra tip, but at other times it is expected that workers remain "helping" the app during busy times without any recompense.

A gamification strategy implemented by QuickDelivery is reminiscent of the ludic loop proposed by Schüll. The ludic loop is a game element that creates a feeling of progress towards a certain goal that is in fact unreachable for the player. According to Schüll, "slot machines are designed to lock you into a 'ludic loop' — doing something over and over again because every once in a while you get a reward."[128] The following conversation with Rodri and Marco, illustrates delivery workers' overall sentiment and evidences how the people behind the app implement a similar strategy to the ludic loop:

> Rodri: I accept all the orders, whether they are small or large, or even if they are far away because I feel that when I accept those small deliveries, the time will come when they [the app] will give me a delivery big, a prize, a big one. Every time I accept an order even if I know it is not worth it [financially], or that it is far away, but in the back of my mind I am always hoping that the big order arrives; that after I accept all the orders I will get a delivery of 200, or 150 or 100 [dollars].
>
> Ambar: And has it arrived?
>
> Rodri: No, that's why I keep holding on, hoping it will arrive.
>
> Marco: To accept an order we have little time. He [the app] sends you an alert, you don't accept it and he [the app] sends another one, if you don't accept he [the app] silently punishes you and then you have to wait for a while. He tells you [that's what they think, not that the app actually sends this message], I already gave you several orders and you didn't accept. Do you want to work or not?[129]

In the case of QuickDelivery, having a schedule does not guarantee having an order to deliver. Couriers still need to wait for incoming delivery orders to ping their phones. Under these circumstances, couriers are faced with questions such as: When will I get my first order? Why am I not getting orders while others are? What happens if I reject the offer—will

---

128 NPR. 2021. "Cookie Consent And Choices."
129 Marco and Rodri. Conversation with the author 01/27/2022.

it affect the amount of orders that the app will offer me during the rest of my shift? If I reject the offer, will the next offer be better or worse?

Another way in which QuickDelivery implements the ludic loop is through the apparent unpredictability of work slots made available for couriers that weren't able to secure a schedule the day before. When workers don't have a fixed schedule, they try their luck by going to the streets, finding a good spot to *ir a picarle* (start tapping the button 'start working'), with the hope that the app allows them to work at least a few orders. My interviews with workers revealed that they often wonder: When will it let me in? And for how long? This mechanism mirrors slot machines rewards. *Delivreros* never know when they are going to experience gratification (in this case, allowing them to work), but they know that if they are patient enough it will eventually come. According to Mason, this unpredictability is addictive, and it is also widely exploited in gambling games of chance to ensure players place just one more bet.[130] For van Doorn and Chen, the constant evaluation that couriers face becomes a game-like experience that they call 'Deal or No Deal.'[131]

Though, according to QuickDelivery's User Agreement, there is a promise of agency and freedom to choose whether to accept an order or not, rejecting an order comes with a price. *Delivreros* risk the chance of experiencing delayed access to the scheduling system the next day, therefore jeopardizing their ability to work under an hourly wage. Therefore, their behavior is restricted and tamed by the rules of the game: one must accept every order if one wants to secure a good schedule the following day.

---

[130] Mason. 2018. "High score, low pay."
[131] van Doorn and Chen. 2021. "Odds stacked against workers."

Finally, the ludic loop is not only implemented during the scheduled shift but is present even as the working day comes to an end. When their shift is over, couriers never know what is going to happen. If QuickDelivery is busy—meaning it has a lot of orders and few workers—it will continue sending them orders. Otherwise, they receive a message thanking them for coming to work and telling them that there are no more orders to deliver. If their shift is over, it is up to them to continue accepting more orders or not, yet, this decision may impact their ranking. Overall, workers then monitor the system constantly throughout the entire day to see if there are orders, if they can log in, or if there are hours to work the following day.

When Abraham finished his shift at 11:20 pm, he was disappointed that he got a bad score. He immediately sent a text message through the app's chat and asked: "Excuse me, why this score?" to which the worker in charge of responding to the chat answered: "hi abraham. we saw that you took a lot of time to deliver orders and also you ignored one order at the end of your shift." This explanation, to me, confirms what workers already know, which is that ignoring an order, even if your shift has ended, will have consequences.

Through my own interviews, I found that many *delivreros* believe that if they are willing to accept and continue working, especially at night, their time-window to schedule their working hours the following day would improve by twenty minutes. Conversely, they believe that rejecting it would result in a penalty by QuickDelivery, by adding twenty minute to their scheduling window. In either case, penalties and rewards do not happen deterministically, and QuickDelivery seems to incorporate the element of randomness into its system. Thus, QuickDelivery uses uncertainty as a strategy to control how workers interact with the company and the app.

Structuring an unstructured economy

QuickDelivery sets the maximum time that a delivery worker should take to deliver the order—regardless of the distance. The delivery workers are expected to hurry the restaurant if the order is not ready in 5 minutes from the time they arrive to pick it up. One day at a deli, where the group was having dinner after work, El Vocho, who had just started working with QuickDelivery, started sharing his experience working with the app:

Oct 24th 2021

El Vocho: Another paisano asked me, if I had been waiting for a long time? And I told him no, because it was just like 20 minutes. And he told me "no, tell him [the app] that you're leaving because QuickDelivery sends messages to the paisas because they're only in one place." Is that true? How long do I have to wait at the restaurant?

Abraham: He [QuickDelivery] has told me that you have to wait a maximum of 5 minutes. If it's not ready, and he [the app] sets the clock for you, what he [the app] wants is for you to go in and pressure the restaurant and tell him "hey, I need the order." And if the restaurant tells you I don't have the order, write him [the app] and tell him[the app]: "hey QuickDelivery, the restaurant told me that he doesn't have the order ready" because if you don't you say anything and leave without the order and without notifying him, it will affect your score you.

This conversation, beyond talking about the time delivery workers should wait, also reveals two other key characteristics for QuickDelivery to function: the ranking system and the geographical distribution networks.

QuickDelivery depends on a geographical distribution network of delivery workers throughout the boroughs to ensure that at any time, anywhere there is someone nearby to pick up the order and achieve its goal of efficiency. A message from QuickDelivery to Bona illustrates the aforementioned: "Hello Bona, this message is to inform you that our system detected long periods of inactivity; this may affect your scores and time-window. We recommend you change your zone if you do not receive orders for an extended period;

repeated warnings like this can lead to the suspension of your account."[132] QuickDelivery's interest in efficiency explains why it is counterproductive for the company that workers remain in one place and why, then, workers are penalized for remaining idle.

During dinner, El Vocho, who usually works with Uber or Doordash, continued asking Abraham more questions: *Which area gets better?* he asked. Abraham told him: *You know that QuickDelivery moves you everywhere. I bike all over Manhattan. But choose Midtown as your starting point. If he [the app] sends you up either to the Upper West Side or Upper East Side,[133] that's fine, stay there. Those are good areas to work, and if he[the app] sends you higher up and doesn't give you orders, get down as fast as possible.* In this conversation, it is interesting to see how the system's distribution functions, but at the same time how workers find ways to disturb it. Bucher writes, "while algorithms certainly do things to people, people also do things to algorithms."[134] Moreover, Abraham's comment about the good areas to work speaks to a deeper context; it speaks about geographic racialization and gentrification.

Delivery workers accept, reproduce, and reinforce racial hierarchies, social classes, and geographic segregation. When they publish either on Facebook or WhatsApp groups photos of bikes stolen from areas that allegedly are "dangerous," members or followers start scolding the owner or relate to the owner of the stolen bike. For instance, the following message is one that someone wrote in a private WhatsApp's group; "Over there they stole an arrow 10 from a friend. The same ones who live there, are the ones who steal the bikes.

---

[132] QuickDelivery text message to Bona through app's chat 02/23/2022.
[133] They are among the city's wealthiest neighborhoods.
[134] Bucher. 2017. "The algorithmic imaginary," 42.

Never go to the projects, not even for a *peso*, it will be expensive, do not go there, it is a

dangerous area."[135]

During the same dinner at the deli, Miguel took out his phone and started sharing his

earnings with me and explaining his strategy to work. His narration only accentuates the way

in which delivery workers accept and reproduce hegemonic narrative of social hierarchies.

> Miguel: In Downtown, they give good tips of 20, 18, and 15 [dollars].
>
> Ambar: Where? Around SoHo?
>
> Miguel: At the end of Manhattan
>
> Ambar: Ah! As in Wall St?
>
> Miguel: Yes (showing me his phone and demarcating a specific zone) here (pointing with his finger) where there are rich people, from here (moving his finger and pointing again) to Brooklyn Bridge. Down Canal, because here (showing other areas) are the projects.
>
> A: Oh around Tribeca?
>
> Heh: Aha (nodding) around this area, because over there (pointing to another area) there's other people (working-class). I'm not going there. When I get a delivery over there, I'll deliver, then I pause the app[136] and I come back as fast as possible to this area (the one with good tips).[137]

As Miguel's account exemplifies, delivery workers do not know how far they will

have to go before accepting the order. In an interview QuickDelivery's CEO stated that the

hourly wage is one reason his workers do not get to choose which destinations they can

deliver to in advance.[138] In an interview I had with a cashier that uses the system from the

restaurant side I asked her whether she knew if QuickDelivery limits delivery distances. She

answered me, *That is very interesting because one would think that it does, but I have noticed*

---

[135] Unknown delivrero.WhatsApp Message in a private group.
[136] Miguel works for Doordash where couriers are allowed to pause the app at any time since they don't have an hourly pay model.
[137] Miguel. Conversation with the author 10/24/2021.
[138] Fertig. 2021. "Pandemic-Scarred Restaurants."

that it does not. One time, when the temperatures dropped a lot and QuickDelivery stopped working, there was an order and the owner of the restaurant said "well, if it's not too far we can go and deliver it ourselves," so we checked and saw that it was 40 minutes by public transport. I guess there is a limit, but I don't know how broad it is. It might be limited by boroughs… who knows![139] The restaurant was able to ask the customer to cancel the order; yet, had QuickDelivery been functioning, a delivery worker would have had to deliver that order regardless of the weather conditions or distance.

The weather affects the number of people willing to work, and QuickDelivery knows it. QuickDelivery employs several strategies to ensure that enough delivery workers are available to fulfill its services, especially under bad weather conditions. Couriers receive texts and push notifications to keep them working. QuickDelivery explicitly sends a text message to its workers the day before bad weather is forecast to hit, to encourage them to go out: "End your week strong! Tomorrow will be very busy with many opportunities to earn good money! Come prepared for the rain." On a rainy day, in the Facebook group I read a comment from a follower that said: *It's raining, daddy QuickDelivery says to get out because it's going to rain money!* The rhetoric that QuickDelivery uses, "it will rain money" is clear: don't stay at home, continue working, it will be "worth it."

When there is bad weather, QuickDelivery offers a bonus of 2 dollars extra per order delivered. According to Glickman, bonuses encourage riders to work at certain times, in certain areas, and to accept orders that they generally wouldn't. She contends that delivery workers value these incentives and that there is a win-win logic.[140] Schüll, points out that bonus pay schemes can be understood as secondary incentives that function as a

---

[139] Ana. Phone call with the author 02/21/2022.
[140] Glickman. 2019. "What The Apps That Bring Food."

game-within-a-game, operating in dynamic concert with the payout schedule of the base game, serving as a second layer of reinforcement.[141] Thus, as in games, workers are driven to behave or perform certain tasks when QuickDelivery wants them to do so.

Yet, what I observe with the Latin American community working with QuickDelivery is that they did not care about the extra money; rather, they hoped the app would reward them with a better time-window to schedule their working hours if they work during a rainy day. Abraham texted me on a rainy day, and I asked him if he was going to work in the afternoon (It was pouring outside). He answered me: *I have to continue working because I worked with Ismael's account in the morning, and Abraham [his other account] hasn't worked yet. QuickDelivery will punish him if he doesn't work today.[142]* In his message there's nothing that makes reference to wanting to work because of the bonuses but rather, because he doesn't want to get punished for not working that day.

However, working under bad conditions does not always assure getting a better time-window the following day or not getting "punished." Martin, a frustrated delivery worker, sent this text to QuickDelivery after a hurricane hit NYC: "working yesterday with a flood everywhere; getting wet even though I was wearing a raincoat, to get up today and see that my time-window went up twenty minutes? With this, I don't even want to work when there's bad weather. And I don't ask you to lower my time-window, just keep it! I risked my bike, it got wet and spent eighty dollars today to repair it, it's not fair!"[143] Here Martin was not happy because there were bonuses (extra money), but rather, he felt frustrated and disappointed with the way the app responds to an action that he thought would benefit his

---

[141] Schüll. 2012. *Addiction by Design,* 113.

[142] Abraham. WhatsApp message to the author 05/07/2022 4:32 pm.

[143] Martin. Text to QuickDelivery through the system's chat. 08/02/2021, 8:12 am. Retrieved from a public Facebook group.

time-window to schedule his shift. Throughout the aforementioned examples, there is a recurrent theme: getting a good score to have a good time-window to book their schedule and secure work the next day on an hourly-based model, is the main goal. *Delivreros* constantly struggle with the uncertainty about whether they will be able to work the next day or not.

Another way in which QuickDelivery applies gamification is through a ranking system: a game mechanic associated with surveillance and worker management in the context of the workplace. In a Lautorian reading, the app is taking the role of a manager. Couriers get a daily score based on their performance and efficiency (number of orders delivered per hour and willingness to accept all available orders). In a conversation I had with Abraham after work, the first thing he told me was *I don't want to talk about QuickDelivery, okay?* I asked him why. He explained to me what had happened during the day and how as a consequence he got a bad score:

> Ambar [looking at the score; it was 84, a bad one] You didn't do that bad. How many hours do you have left this week?
>
> Abraham: Ten hours [it was Tuesday so he only have one day left to work],[144] Ambar, but you know that my time-window is at 12:20 at the moment and with that score, do you think I'm going to be able to finish just picándole (tapping the button and trying to start working)? You know I won't; at most I'll be able to work five hours.[145]

The ranking determines a specific time in which they can book their work schedule for the following day. Workers' ranking fluctuates daily, and they never know whether they will be able to find work availability. To maintain a good ranking, get priority to schedule work, and guarantee an hourly wage, couriers must accept every order. If the system

---

[144] Every Thursday QuickDelivery workers start 38 hours that can work throughout the week until Wednesday.
[145] Abraham. Conversation with the author 12/03/2021.

determines that a worker was not efficient, rejected an order, or encountered any other inconvenience, it adds increments of twenty minutes to their schedule. If their time-window is too late on the day, most of the areas and times will be full. In such circumstances, a worker's only option is to try his or her luck by tapping the 'start working' button, hoping that QuickDelivery is busy enough to let them work.Taken together, QuickDelivery's ranking system uncovers the constant monitoring and control of workers in order to enforce strict standards and to maximize profits.

The people behind QuickDelivery aim to control delivery workers, managing information or lack-of. They do not reveal to delivery workers when the system is going to open; it does not tell them when they are going to leave work, when they are going to be able to start working, or at what time they are going to be able to schedule their shift. Delivery workers are in constant uncertainty. Abraham, who spends most of his time while biking thinking about QuickDelivery, called me and told me: *I have been analyzing and I think that QuickDelivery has a mechanism to force one to work even if one doesn't want to. I realize that many people ask me every day, hey, at what time did your schedule open? So we are constantly comparing each other.*[146] Therefore, information management is a form of control.

In reflecting about these tensions, I noticed that there are multiple actors with multiple question marks in this system. Restaurants wonder who is going to deliver the food. Platforms ask if there is a person nearby to deliver the food, and the customer demands to know the exact time in which their food will be delivered. For instance, when I asked Ana, the cashier I interviewed, about the difference between each platform she told me: *The biggest difference is that QuickDelivery gives you flexibility; it doesn't speed you up. That's*

---

[146] Abraham. Phone call with the author. 03/14/2022.

very convenient when the restaurant is busy because sometimes you don't have time to prepare all the orders. The orders that come through QuickDelivery give me the flexibility of not rushing myself or the kitchen workers.[147] Thus, QuickDelivery is the best option for restaurants because it doesn't impose a set time on when they have to have the food ready.

The system is designed to remove all these question marks from the actors, and it does so by transferring those question marks to a new actor, the worker who will then wonder: Will I be able to leave work? Am I going to be able to work tomorrow? Where will I be? Delivery workers do the "last-mile delivery," which is the point at which the product is delivered to the end customer. As the final step, workers are held responsible for any mistakes. *The food arrives incorrectly, who is to blame? The delivrero. The address is wrong, who is to blame? The delivrero. The pizza arrived upside down, who is to blame? The delivrero. Anything that happens, who is to blame? The delivrero! Who is to blame? The delivrero.* Abraham's frustration in a livestream, because a restaurant didn't allow him to stay inside while he was waiting to pick up the order during a snowstorm, exemplifies how delivreros are accountable for everything.

Collectively, these strategies result in transferring uncertainty from platforms, consumers and restaurants onto gig workers. For example, consumers get certainty over the time and place in which they will receive their food by imposing uncertainty on the time and place in which a delivery worker will be. This effectively introduces a structure into a laboral activity that is regarded as unstructured, both in public discourse and in contractual relations between platforms and workers to control the time and location of workers (or as the model would argue, its users).

---

[147] Ana. Phone call with the author 02/21/2022.

Platforms are shaped by socio-technical structures. "They are not neutral, but instead designed, made, used, and reused by people within particular social relations."[148] Marx argued that "it would be possible to write a whole history of the inventions made since 1830 for the sole purpose of providing capital with weapons against working-class revolt."[149] Thus, new technology arises as a response to workers' resistance. For Marx, machines were the weapon employed by the capitalist to quell the revolt of specialized labor.[150] Woodcock states that the introduction of digital technology is understood as a response to the working-class struggle; Platform work is a response from capital to workers.[151] Workers then aren't seen as passive players but rather as active forces changing work's ecosystem.

Until now, I have shown QuickDelivery's strategies and its implementation of gamification. But gamification can be both a means for control and a mode of resistance within labor ecosystems. Caillois distinguishes between '*ludus*' (gaming, guided by rules) and '*paidia*' (playing, free play, spontaneity).[152] Based on this, Woodcock and Johnson differentiate two types of gamification: gamification-from-above (ludus*)*, and gamification-from-below (paida*),* the latter serving as an act of resistance against control and surveillance at work.[153] For Woodcock and Johnson, gamification-from-above regulates, controls, surveils, and standardizes one's actions.[154] Generally, this type of gamification is the one imposed by the system (company). Gamification-from-above imposes game elements onto the workers and consumers. It is a "way used to enable exploitation and control,"[155] [156]

[148] Woodcock. 2021. *The Fight Against Platform Capitalism,* 12.
[149] Marx. 1867. *Capital,* 563.
[150] Marx and Engels. 1963. *The poverty of philosophy*.
[151] Woodcock. 2021. "The Fight Against Platform Capitalism," 12.
[152] Caillois. 2001. *Man, play and games*.
[153] Woodcock., and Johnson. 2018. "Gamification: What it is, and how to fight it," 2.
[154] Woodcock., and Johnson. 2018. 4.
[155] Dragona. 2014. "Counter-gamification: Emerging tactics," 237.
[156] For example, Bogost (2014) coined the expression "exploitationware" as a synonym for gamification, while Escribano (2013) states that gamification is a "ludictatorship."

replacing older forms of surveillance with playful ones. For Woodcock and Johnson *"the understanding of play as a *subversion* of work, rather than a *reinforcement* of work, is therefore still alive, and the concept of gamification-from-below is urgently needed to offset the neoliberal ideological entanglements of what is currently called gamification."*[157] Thus, gamification-from-below provides an outlet for resistance through subversion, manipulation, and mockery. Then, how are delivery workers coping with uncertainty?

Collective resistance: decoding black boxes

Research suggests that collective resistance is unlikely to occur for two reasons: First due to the atomized nature of the work,[158] and second, because platform companies obfuscate the precarious and exploitative nature of work,[159] partly by integrating dimensions of gamification in their platforms.[160] However, other researchers have shown labor activism and solidarity in the platform economy. For instance, Tassinari and Maccarrone[161] explored how algorithmic control leads to shared grievances among workers and collective action against platforms in Europe.[162] Zizheng, Treré, and Bonini Found that Chinese riders use four tactics to resist: (1) working for multiple platforms, (2) refusing to follow the delivery routes set by the platforms, (3) "Shuadan" (meaning "to create fake orders," or "brushing orders"), and (4) refusing to accept orders from certain regions.[163] My research's findings align with the latter research line of thought.

---

[157] Woodcock., and Johnson. 2018. 13.
[158] See Collier, Dubal, and Carter 2017.
[159] See Rosenblat and Stark 2016.
[160] Deterding. 2019. "Gamification in Management."
[161] Tassinari and Maccarrone. 2020. "Riders on the Storm."
[162] Lei. 2021. "Delivering Solidarity: Platform Architecture."
[163] Zizheng, Treré, and Bonini. 2022. "The emergence of algorithmic solidarity."

Delivreros are not passive players and are aware that the technocratic promise that the algorithms are fair and automatic is a fallacy. Abraham has thought about it for a while and told me: *Supposedly it is automatic, but there are always people who can modify the system. There are many things we don't know about the app. There are knowledgeable workers [inside the company] and when they leave, they take all the knowledge with them.*[164] Abraham's thought reveals to me three things: First, that delivery workers know that there are people working behind the app, second that they understand the importance of knowledge-transferring, and third that they are finding ways to get more information about how the platform works from the inside to understand how the people behind the app aim to control them.

Delivreros have found ways to understand, navigate and play within the system while maintaining their flexibility and freedom of time and location. For Ferrari and Graham, through manipulation, subversion, and disruption, workers bring fissures in algorithmic power into being. They define fissures in algorithmic power as "moments in which algorithms do not govern as intended… Fissures in algorithmic power entail serious risks such as deactivation from the platform, a deepened normalization of gamification and quantification, but on the other hand it also encourages the erosion of solidarity and trust between workers."[165] To create those networks, delivery workers use new communications technologies to resist, adapt, and forge collective power. According to Rodino-Colocino, while Silicon Valley elites used "algorithmic management" to hide how they exploit workers, rideshare drivers talked back collectively, with the help of new media technologies.[166]

---

[164] Abraham. Conversation with the author 03/20/2022
[165] Ferrari and Graham. 2021. "Fissures in algorithmic power," 2
[166] Rodino-Colocino. 2021. *The Gig Economy: Workers and Media,* 3

Mackay and Gillespie hold that "people may reject technologies, redefine their functional purpose, customize or even invest idiosyncratic symbolic meanings in them."[167] This is not specific to NYC, nor delivery workers, "faced with the material reality of being squeezed to work long, unpaid, and underpaid hours, gig workers across the globe are coming together to organize and change conditions." [168] In fact, resistance and collective power goes beyond the gig economy.

Woodstock states that workers' inquiry is a militant process of trying to understand work in order to fight against it. He reminds us that "workers go through this process whenever they enter work. They try to comprehend work's structure through their everyday experience to search and understand the rules and norms that govern it, to learn how they could respond."[169] Delivery workers look for different sources and places, both in real life and digitally, with humans and non-humans, where they can find traces of how the system works. For instance, *delivreros* look for allies in restaurants who can illuminate the way the platform operates for the other users. Abraham once shared with me:

> Abraham: I'm sure that if you're a pizza's restaurant [sic], QuickDelivery will tell you: "look, I'm short on staff who want to deliver pizza,[170] but if you pay me eight more dollars, I'll find a way to assign you another 5 delivery workers."
>
> Ambar: Are you sure about this?
>
> Abraham: Yes 100%
>
> Ambar: How are you so sure?
>
> Abraham: Because there is this guy who works in Nona Pizza[171] and he told me that they assign them ten delivreros. I would be interested (kept thinking)… That's why I

---

[167] Mackay, and Gillespie. 1992. "Extending the Social," 698.
[168] Rodino-Colocino. 2021. *The Gig Economy: Workers and Media,* 6.
[169] Woodcock. 2021. *The Fight Against Platform Capitalism,* 12.
[170] Delivery workers believe that pizza is not worth it, the tip is bad and it's difficult to transport; that's why they avoid those orders.
[171] I use pseudonyms for the restaurants.

have told Santa [Abraham's friend who works in a restaurant] to learn how the system works. I found a guy at Bagels.Co the other day and he told me that there used to be a girl who knew how to manage the system and that every time he would go, he'd ask her to give him five stars and that that helped him keep a good time-window. The restaurants can rate you, the restaurant can rate you, and if it's a good score to QuickDelivery that means that you are a worthy worker.[172]

Abraham's stories shed light on different actors that conform a distributed knowledge network. Until this conversation, I didn't know, nor had I thought, that delivery workers working for QuickDelivery could get scored by restaurants. It never occurred to me that as with Uber or Doordash in which clients give stars directly to couriers, in the case of QuickDelivery, restaurants are the clients.

I argue that Latin American delivery workers defy information and knowledge asymmetries by repurposing the technology that has been built as a means for control. For instance, an important element in the app is the section in which couriers can see their score and earnings. The logic behind these metrics, from the perspective of the company, is that they stimulate couriers and create competition with their fellows, as in games. "The interactive feature of apps that show workers work status (hours, earnings, rides, etc.) in game-like formats, are known for their power to keep players at the game console, and, presumably, drivers at the wheel."[173] However, this information also serves to build community among couriers. Since the algorithm is constantly changing, couriers gather together online or in the streets to speculate how these evaluations are made and share tips, tricks, and ideas about how the algorithm works. They play with the system and experiment to see how the system reacts.

---

[172] Abraham. Conversation with the author 02/20/2022.
[173] Süsser, et. al,. 2019. "Online manipulation: Hidden influences."

Human–Computer Interaction (HCI) researchers have employed "folk theories" to understand the way people perceive and make sense of algorithms. A folk theory approach focuses on the formulations that people hold or their theories of how the media/algorithms work. For instance, Eslami et al.found out that half of their informants didn't understand algorithms, and formulated ten folk theories of how people understood automated curation of work.[174] Rader and Gray studied how people made sense of their Facebook newsfeed, arguing that the users use different theories to explain the behavior of the feed.[175] DeVito et al. conclude that algorithms are confining, practical, reductive, intangible, and exploitative.[176] In addition to folk theories, there are algorithmic imaginaries. For instance, Bucher used tweets and interviews to understand "algorithmic imaginaries," defined as "the way in which people imagine, perceive, and experience algorithms and what these imaginations make possible."[177] Toff and Nielsen argue that folk theories differ from algorithmic imaginaries by being rooted in experience, rather than mapping abstract explanations of how technology works.[178] I argue that delivery workers are using both folk theories and algorithmic imaginaries to make sense of the platform.

November 4th, 2021 - 10:55 am

(Showing his cell screen to my camera) Every day we have to schedule our shift for the next day. There are many paisas who do not know how to schedule it, but as time passes, one learns the tricks. When the app is new, it opens at seven am and curiously the same app without you making any mistakes starts adding twenty min by twenty min to your time-window to schedule your shift. So it starts at 7, the following day 7:20, and so on until you have it at 4. I think it's like a test; I imagine because it happened to many friends. Since I've been using the app for a long time, I already passed that test and right now, I'm able to schedule my shift at 11:00 am. It's bad but

---

[174] Eslami et al. 2016. "First I 'like' it, then I hide it."
[175] Rader, and Gray. 2015. "Understanding user beliefs."
[176] DeVito et al. 2017. "Algorithms ruin everything."
[177] Bucher. 2017. "The algorithmic imaginary," 31.
[178] Toff and Nielsen. 2018. "I Just Google It," 639.

we'll see what we find [he told me this to warn me that I might not be able to record and see how he normally schedules his shift].
I already saw in which area there is availability. I can't remove the robot until it's 10:59 so we need to wait.

Ambar: What is the robot?

Abraham: The robot is this thing [pointing at the screen]… What is it called? reCAPTCHA? It is a robot that protects the schedules so that no one takes advantage of them.

Ambar: Do you think the robot controls the schedules?

Abraham: Yes, I am sure because I remember that before when I started there was no such thing, one could work anywhere, there were no areas. As time passed by, the app got better but for the benefit of the owners because for us it got worse.

While folk theories and algorithmic imaginaries do not provide complete understandings of how the platform works, they do provide insights into what someone could do. As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, being able to schedule a shift is workers' main concern. In the previous conversation Abraham explains the process of scheduling his shift, and speculates about how the system works. Abraham's conception of "the robot" as someone that protects the working hours and schedule, resembles Latour's Actor Network Theory. Here "the robot" is replacing a task that managers use to control workers. Lastly, his speculations about reCAPTCHA are part of delivrero's folk theory about their work.

Many of the strategies that *delivreros* implement result from learning the functioning of and deciphering algorithms (algorithmic imaginaries), despite not having access to the underlying code.[179] Some people argue that for APIs and algorithms people are interchangeable and that they are just another number. For instance, Gray and Suri argue that "the API gives each individual requester and worker their own unique identifier, a string of seemingly random letters and numbers such as A16HE9ETNPNONN. From the

---

[179] Seaver, 2017.

programmer's perspective, it makes the humans seem interchangeable, as each worker is represented by a worker ID, and everything that makes a human a person, such as their beliefs, attributes, and experiences, is stripped away from this identifier."[180] I found out that, in the case of QuickDelivery this is not necessarily true. For instance, the system cares that a delivery worker is not behaving as the company expects and someone personally texts him.[181]

From a message that a delivery worker received and shared with the community, delivery workers get information about the algorithm and how it works without having to see the code. The following message is similar to the one that I previously showed that Bona received, yet, whereas Bona got a first warning, this one is an ultimatum: "Hello, this message is to inform you that our system detected long periods of inactivity, this may affect your ranking and slot of time to schedule your working hours. We recommend you change zones if you do not receive orders for an extended period. This is your last call for attention. If our system detects more inactivity, your account will be suspended."[182] What the system identified is that he is systematically inactive for long periods of time. The message is evidence that if "resources" (workers) were actually interchangeable, someone shouldn't have sent him a message. The algorithm is not treating delivery workers like irreplaceable numbers; it is treating them like people.

Social media channels facilitate and incentivize communication among people who may have little to no in-person contact, but have something in common. Liking, clicking, commenting, and sharing content, therefore, has become a way in which individuals express

---

[180] Gray and Suri. *Ghost Work*, 55.
[181] I know that some of those messages are sent personally and they are not a template because of the way they are written, the words they use and the grammatical and orthographical errors they contain.
[182] Text message from QuickDelivery to an unknown worker 7:28 pm. Retrieved from a private Facebook Group of Delivery Workers 17 March 2022.

their values, demonstrate their sympathy or dislike with the behavior that is communicated,

become part of a larger group, and recognize their peers.

Delivery workers strive to understand how the ranking and scores work. Here

someone asks in the Facebook group (March 13th 2022 at 10:38 AM): *One question: how

true it is that if you work until very late, QuickDelivery will better your window to schedule

your working hours? Thank you.*

> Memo: that's bullshit, even if you work when it's raining or snowing like yesterday it doesn't help you.
>
> Iván: That doesn't matter, it increased from 12:00 to 12:20 my time window yesterday, and I worked with the rain.
>
> Adrián: That was before, now he doesn't care. What he cares about is that you work when he's busy and has a lot of orders to deliver. He has become rude, he threatens you and gives you ultimatums for anything.
>
> Tony: To improve your time window you have to work during golden hours, when it rains, when it snows or when it is very cold. And if you manage to improve your time window, when you work accept all orders and do not close the application. Do not take more than 10 minutes to pick up the order and deliver it as quickly as possible. Also, if you work in bad weather, do not use it the next day so that it goes down another 20 minutes. The problem is that if you do something wrong, it will add time to your time-window.[183]

There are long, long conversations about this topic in which *delivreros* theorize what

the outcome of an action will be. What I found interesting is that through their collective

experience and the unpacking of those experiences, workers are trying to decode an

algorithm that they don't have access to. For instance, Zizheng, Treré, and Bonini found out

that "the stream of conversations that is being reproduced in the chats literally represent the

hidden transcript of the practices of resistance that Chinese riders will then implement on the

streets."[184] Using apps, smartphones, social media, and text messaging as organizing tools,

---

[183] Unknown user posted on a private Facebook Group. March 13th 2022, 10:38 AM.
[184] Zizheng, Treré, and Bonini. 2022. "The Emergence of Algorithmic Solidarity," 120.

Latin American delivery workers come together to resist platform control over their work, fair hours, and fair pay. Thus, the processes of collective knowledge-making amongst *delivreros* shape their beliefs and expectations *vis-à-vis* their everyday labor experience.

In the Facebook groups, there are other types of expeculations;t even though they are not about the algorithm, they are rumors about how to improve one's time-window to schedule one's shift. I found three types of users that coexist within the Facebook Group. Those who want to understand the system, those who complain about the platform, and those who criticize the ones who either complain or want to understand it and who aim to maintain the *status quo*.

In addition to the conversations happening on Facebook, the conversations continue on the streets. At an event on October 27th 2021, Abraham was giving away some bike lights, and to get them, he asked some questions to the audience, all of whom were delivery workers:

> Abraham: Can someone give us a tip on how to lower our time-window to schedule our work hours? Does working every day help? Yes or no? No, my friends, I work 7 days a week and it doesn't go down even 20 min. That doesn't work, another idea?
>
> Random man in the crowd: Work in cold weather
>
> Abraham: Yes, but then you have to wait until the cold weather arrives. Another one?
>
> Another random delivery worker: Punctuality
>
> Abraham: Punctuality works? You have to be punctual because if you're late after 15 minutes he [the app] will remove all your scheduled hours.
>
> Abraham: Now if he sends you an order and you reject it, is it good or bad?
>
> All: It is bad!
>
> Abraham: It's bad right? We already know it's bad. We all have to accept them even if it's 50c of tip. We are working so hard only so that he gets richer. I want us all to agree that the only ones who have the solution here, are us.

When delivery workers understand how the system works, they begin to implement tactics to be more efficient. According to Ferrari and Graham, subversion addresses the attempts of workers to bend platforms' rules without breaking them. Subversion occurs through opportunities built in the labor process itself.[185] For example, Abraham has found a way to deliver "faster" in the eyes of the algorithm without being rushed:

> If the order is ready, you don't confirm it right away. They give you the order and even though your phone is vibrating because the app is sending you messages, ignore it. I have always adapted to the app very well. So what I did to be the fastest is not confirm the order. Many orders have the receipt so you can get an idea of where you are heading. Without confirming the order, you start moving forward and when you are close to the building, then you confirm it.

It became clear to me that Abraham had many, many things to say about his work, his strategies, and his plans. He understood the work far better than I did–or anyone interested in documenting delivery workers' efforts and everyday life. When Abraham isn't delivering food, he spends his time talking with other *delivreros*. He, his family, and roomates created WhatsApp groups with other workers, chatted with them at meeting points, and spent time in between deliveries thinking about work. This thinking about platform control is not based on a set of research questions but rather based on his experience: How can I get the most deliveries completed? How can I improve my time-window to schedule my hours? What happens if I agree to continue working even if my shift has ended? What happens if I don't work? These sorts of questions emerged as Abraham was trying to understand platform work.

Workers select the apps that offer them the best deal. If *delivreros* understand how the system works, they can also use different accounts or work with different apps. For instance, in a private Facebook group for *delivreros* someone said: *Doordash is fucked right now, I*

---

[185] Ferrari and Graham. 2021. "Fissures in algorithmic power," 823.

better go and work with daddy QuickDelivery.[186] Niels van Doorn argues that "instead of

thinking of them as working for companies, workers are treating the apps like slot

machines:[187] Which one is working for me today? Which one is hot? This, for van Doorn,

causes couriers to prevent building loyalty towards a single company. In the following

conversation El Vocho, Abraham, Six D, Miguel, and Eduardo shared with me their favorite

app to work depending on the time, day, and place:

> El Vocho: I only work with Uber when it rains. There are good tips 15, 20, 18.
> [dollars] Doordash is the one I use the most. Right now, I'm going to give it a try to
> QuickDelivery the whole week because I just opened it, let's see how it goes.
>
> Abraham: Yes, right now your time window to schedule your hours is good, so work
> on it. Don't schedule early hours. And if you want to rest, rest from 2 to 4 pm because
> orders spike around 5pm.
>
> Six D: In the morning it [QuickDelivery] sends you far away and with low tips.
>
> Eduardo: With doordash there are no longer worthy orders. It's good until 10 pm.
>
> Abraham: I suggest you work with QuickDelivery at night and doordash during the
> day. QuickDelivery will give you orders in the morning but only with two dollars of
> tip, but in the afternoon it gets better.
>
> Six D: That's why I have other apps, if I can't schedule a shift with QuickDelivery... I
> work in another one. If you don't work for QuickDelivery for 3 or 4 weeks, it will
> lower your time window little by little and now I work for the asshole again.[188]

The previous conversation speaks about the way in which delivery workers make

sense of their experiences collectively. Yet, they also shared information one-on-one. At

times, the information that they share as a group and the information that they share

one-on-one differs. Whereas the first one is about general knowledge, the second are rumors

that delivery workers only share to those who they trust. Abraham for instance told me:

---

[186] Comment found in a private Facebook Group July 23, 2021.
[187] van Doorn, and Chen, "Odds stacked against workers," 1352.
[188] Abraham, El Vocho and Six D. Conversation between each other 10/24/2021.

Abraham: There are many things we don't know about QuickDelivery. The other day Tony told me that he heard some rumors that there's someone from inside the company that can help you. Of course you need to pay. Supposedly he meets you at the park, you pay him 500 [dollars] and he gets into the code, he lowers your reservation to 9:20 am and keeps it there fixed

Ambar: Seriously? For how long?

Abraham: Tony told me that it's forever unless he [QuickDelivery] realizes and blocks you. Someone told Bona that there was someone in the Upper East Side. Apparently if you get two more delivreros you pay 400 instead. They freeze your time-window. Is someone who works inside QuickDelivery. But we've never confirmed that this is true. Imagine that it is not true and you lose 500 dollars![189]

This information goes beyond folk theories or algorithmic imaginaries; this sheds light on rumors about real people manipulating from the inside the system.

Delivery workers feel frustrated by the fact that the company has all their information, but they work for a "ghost boss." The following comment is one response in the private Facebook group in which one *delivrero* uploaded the screenshot that he got as an ultimatum: *It's unbelievable that any stupid who answers your text [in the app's chat] can block you. They need rules, they are playing with our lives and they don't even give you a chance to explain. Another thing that seems ridiculous to me is that the person behind the computer has all our data but we have no idea who we are dealing with. They have responded to me rudely and they have threatened me when I have a technical question or when there is an error in the system. When I ask for the name of the person, they stop answering me... I have also asked for an email to process them legally and they do not answer.* This message is threefold: first, we started to see how knowledge networks and technology intertwined to learn more about how the platform works; second, it speaks to delivery workers' frustration about how the company has all their information but they don't

---

[189]   Abraham. Phone call conversation with the author. 03/14/2022.

know who are they talking or interacting with; and lastly it reveals how delivery workers push back against platforms and actually consider legal action against it.

Delivery workers in private Facebook groups post questions to get feedback from texts that they receive from the platform. On 14th June 2021 a worker asked: *Does anyone know if being at the same spot without moving during your working hours is bad if there are no deliveries? Or do you have to be moving even if it is raining and there are still no deliveries? (I ask this because in the mornings there are practically no orders, nor after eleven pm)*. From this entry, we know two things: one that the worker already received the messages that QuickDelivery sends when the system detects that someone is idle for long periods of time. Second, this reaffirms the need that QuickDelivery has to create a distributed network. The post was followed by several comments. Some claim that it doesn't matter, but others claim that it does. These answers are algorithm imaginaries since they are based on their experience.

> Lalo: you have to keep biking if there are no deliveries. You have to keep moving; you don't have to stop because they will see that you don't want to work.
>
> Tony: You have to be biking like crazy for them to see that you're fast and give you orders. 😂 I'm just kidding, usually now that it is summer there are not many orders, we are many drivers and if you don't use the autoclicker, the ones that are using it will win most of the orders.
>
> Richard: Excuse me what is the autoclicker?

Throughout the comments that I have shown, it is evident how the work-hard-ethic narrative is prevalent in these groups and conversations. Tony's comment elucidates on two important aspects: First, the fact that an overpopulation of workers affects their likelihood to get orders; in other words, that "lack of regulation and oversaturation of drivers has led to further problems that exacerbate the precarity of such work causing drivers to work more

hours for less income.[190] The second aspect focuses on one way in which workers play the system. Ferrari and Graham, found that "workers break the rules of the platforms, often through digitally-mediated practices. Examples of the manipulation of geographically-sticky platform work include the use of third-party software to automatically reject or accept job requests."[191] This is not specific to Latin American delivery workers. Sun and Chen showed that some riders would install bots to bypass certain platform-imposed restrictions.[192] Chen found that about 40% have reported installing bot apps.[193] Overall, as a way to resist imposed tasks, delivery workers have found in technology an ally: an autoclicker app.

Here Abraham's recounts the first time he learned about the autoclicker and what he have learned throughout the years about it:

> Abraham: Four years ago when I started working with QuickDelivery, I didn't know about the autoclicker until a friend told me. In fact, he wanted to charge me 100 dollars to teach me how to use it because many people didn't know about it… so those who used it were the ones who would take all the orders.
>
> Ambar: And did you pay him?
>
> Abraham: No, I didn't. I kept asking and asking until someone told me "oh you do this and that and that's it." It was the only way you could work. In fact Bona at first didn't want to use it and I told him that we needed to, because otherwise we weren't going to be able to get any orders. With the auto-clicker it is a more efficient way to get orders because although you are looking at the street to see where you are heading, the phone continues working to get you orders. The problem is that many times when you have the autoclicker, it depends on who has the best phone, which one has the best processor.[194]

Here I want to highlight two things about Abraham's information. First, the impact that technology has on being able to work, which starts another social and labor

---

[190] Koonse et. al, 2021. *The Gig Economy: Workers and Media,* 36.
[191] Ferrari and Graham. 2021. "Fissures in algorithmic power," 821 .
[192] Sun and Chen. 2021. "Platform labour."
[193] Chen. 2018. "Thrown under the bus."
[194] Abraham. Conversation with the author. 05/20/2022.

hierarchization within the same group: the worker who has more data and a better phone is the one who will be able to get the orders. Additionally, it is also important to notice the fact that the autoclicker is not compatible with Apple. Thus, many do not own an iPhone because it does not support it. However, on private Facebook groups there are users that shame workers that use the autoclicker, accusing them of being lazy. Abraham continued explaining me why the autoclicker was useful,

> With the autoclicker, instead of being with your finger clicking and clicking [sic], you program the autoclicker while you're driving and the autoclicker is doing your work.
>
> The autoclicker is an app designed for games or I don't know for what purpose, that it automatically c licks on specific places on the phone. You can choose a point, two or three… the number that you want. We [delivery workers] adapted it to use it with QuickDelivery because it is safer to drive. You program it as fast as possible because others are using it just like you and the fastest is the one who gets the order.
>
> Ambar: I see… by the way why are people complaining about QuickDelivery's new system and that they can no longer use the autoclicker?
>
> Abraham: The new system is designed for iPhones, I think QuickDelivery strengthened the system. The new system is slow, very slow, so if you turn on the autoclicker it's so fast that it logs you out. But I already discovered how to continue using it; you just have to slow it down. If you see my autoclicker [showing me his phone screen] is already programmed, this option is for catching hours, this to get orders…[195]

This strategy deals with the difficulty of simultaneously interacting with the digital app and the physical world. It is almost impossible to accept an order while riding a bike. Moreover, when trying to work without a schedule, it is a tedious process to tap and reload until the app lets them in. Couriers install an autoclicker and are freed from the monotonous task of tapping. The autoclicker is an automation tool that lets you automate taps. They can accept orders while actively traveling, thus potentially improving their rankings in spite of

---

[195]   Abraham. Conversation with the author. 05/20/2022.

the QuickDelivery app's limitations. By finding innovative ways to resist, delivery workers are challenging the underlying reasons for the use of gamification in their workplace: control and surveillance.

Conclusion

Gamification promotes a new way of working. Therefore, its use in the workplace reveals important conflicts and challenges. Yet, although masqueraded as play, what we observe in gig labor ultimately resembles long-standing tensions that characterized relations between companies and workers, including those that emerged within labor models of the Fordist era. I discussed two ways in which QuickDelivery uses gamification to introduce structure into a job that would seem unstructured and flexible from the outside. The first one is a ranking system that rewards and penalizes workers by modulating the time that couriers are allowed to access the online scheduling system to secure a shift. The second one is a collection of strategies that use uncertainty to ensure that workers are constantly connected to the app. Some authors (e.g., Schüll, 2014) argue that gamification and the ludic loop are responsible for keeping workers at their disposal. QuickDelivery is playing with uncertainty; It keeps workers connected and interacting with the app all day long, even when they're not working. These interactions occur before work starts, when couriers wake up and attempt to schedule a time-window to do work, or when couriers that failed to secure a spot try their luck to catch an opening spot to work. They occur during work, as delivery workers remain uncertain regarding the number of orders that they will receive. And lastly, they occur as the work day comes to an end, when couriers face uncertainty regarding the time the system will end their shift. Yet, workers have found ways to cope with this system by understanding the rules and playing the system.

When I started my research, I thought that the problems I was going to find were those that are described about gig workers both in academia and in public policy discourses like: precarity, low wages, stealing tips, lack of job security, lack of rights to medical insurance, and platform control. However, as I started interacting more with the workers, I began to understand the problems that they face, the strategies that they are using to contend with the platform, and the role that the media plays in those strategies. Here I showed how platform politics are continually negotiated within complex socio-technical relations that directly affect the livelihood of platform workers. Taken together, the major challenge Latin American gig workers face far more than their status, monetary compensation, and living conditions is a constant battle for personal autonomy and the control of their own time. I do not mean that the others challenges are not problematic, but in their day-to-day, this is the challenge that they pay the most attention to.

Altogether, *delivreros* in NYC build community and resist platform control through their use of digital social networks and communication technologies. This expertise represents a knowledge-base shared through social networking sites. And while all of what I have just described are problems that they face in their working relationships with QuickDelivery, in the following chapter, I will discuss another problem that has a huge impact on their experience in the US and that has shaped the way they organized as a community.

OK, this is good, but what about insecurity, Ambar? That's our main problem on the street.[196]

---

[196] Abraham. Conversation with the author, 05/27/2021.

CHAPTER 2: Porous boundaries between public and private

Text me, we have a group of 200 people who are on the streets, whether we are in danger or you are, let me know and we'll see what we can do. [197]

2/7/22 9:13 PM I found the bike!!
2/7/22 9:13 PM A boricua is selling it at 183 st
2/7/22 9:14 PM Record a video and follow him!
2/7/22 9:14 PM 183st and which one?
2/7/22 9:14 PM If you recover it, take it to the 125th and I'll go there with my *carnal*.
2/7/22 9:14 PM Where are you?
2/7/22 9:14 PM 183 and morris
2/7/22 9:15 PM Follow him *primo*. Go Go Fast…
2/7/22 9:16 PM Who's coming?
2/7/22 9:17 PM Me!!! I'm on my way… Chase him!!
2/7/22 9:17 PM I'm on 116st… Where are you? What street?
2/7/22 9:18 PM Follow him and see which building he enters. I'm almost there.
2/7/22 9:18 PM 183 and grand concourse
2/7/22 9:19 PM Moderators of the Facebook page, share this information so people know.
2/7/22 9:21 PM It is my *carnal's* bike. Please grab him [the thief] and give me the address.
2/7/22 9:24 PM *Compas* we need support!!
2/7/22 9:27 PM Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10468 (photo showing bike's GPS location)
2/7/22 9:28 PM *Paisas* record everything, we got him!
2/7/22 9:34 PM We are already here. 2337 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10468
2/7/22 9:34 PM We are here in the building where the thief got into
2/7/22 9:35 PM Ok *compas*, my *carnal* is on his way
2/7/22 10:07 PM *Compas* call the police!!
2/7/22 10:07 PM Who has the video? It is the proof that he stole it, and the police can act
2/7/22 10:50 PM The police will arrive soon
2/7/22 10:51 PM We are still here.
2/7/22 10:53 PM Kike, do you still see the thief or has he already left?
2/7/22 10:54 PM He left but the bike is inside the building
2/7/22 10:55 PM Ok then, hang in there… If you can…We called the police
2/7/22 10:56 PM We are only three, the others are leaving
2/7/22 10:57 PM Don't let them go!
2/7/22 11:14 PM We are still here but the police do not arrive
2/7/22 11:21 PM 2 hours have passed and nothing has been done!!!
2/7/22 11:22 PM The police isn't coming
2/7/22 11:22 PM We are still here… waiting

---

[197] Abraham. Conversation with another *delivrero*, 03/01/2022.

The previous conversation is an example of the daily messages that I read in private WhatsApps groups of delivery workers. I start this chapter with it because the adrenaline and excitement at the beginning is evident how it starts to fade out, while impotence and frustration start to arise. Moreover, it points out to the strategies and tools that delivery workers use to recover their bikes: for instance, recording a video, installing a GPS and tracking it, following the thieves and seeing where they hide the bike, and asking for help in real-time. Lastly, it challenges mainstream narratives that Latin Americans fear engaging with the police or asking for help. In this chapter, I examine how indigenous Latin American delivery workers in New York City exercise agency, build community, and protect themselves from unsafe streets through their use of digital social networks and communication technologies.

Overall, scholarly research on delivery workers' resistance to food delivery platforms have pointed out the importance of private social media groups for workers. For example in China, couriers use WeChat for this purpose.[198] Moreover, Yu and Bonini explain how riders can build solidarity networks through these chat groups.[199] Yet, they focus on solidarity networks created to resist platform control within the gig economy. My research goes further, and explores how solidarity networks are created, not only to resist platform control but also to contain the violence that is experienced on the streets.

In 2020, after the pandemic hit, bike robberies intensified. Attempted robberies on delivery workers rose 65%; about a third were violent and some became fatal.[200] According

[198] See Sun, 2019; Sun and Chen, 2021.
[199] Zizheng, Treré, and Bonini. "The Emergence of Algorithmic Solidarity."
[200] Towey. 2021. "New York Delivery Riders."

to Zlolniski, "beyond the workplace and the family, the local community constitutes a major arena around which everyday lives revolve."[201] He argues that people actively participate in grassroots organizations in part because of their precarity. Abraham remembers he and his nephews had been wanting to organize with other workers when the robberies rose. *In previous years, I only focused on work,* Abraham told me, *but I knew there were injustices. I saw the injustices, my friends told me about them… like hey they just robbed me. They stole Marco's [his nephew] bike twice, so you feel frustrated and I said uff... What should I do?*[202] At first he thought about supporting The Delivery Association,[203] an organization that is supported by a non-profit. After learning more about the way it works and (according to him) how the organization would take advantage of the community to get funds but would not help, he decided that his values did not align with those of the group. Instead, he decided to self-organize with his community. *While I was biking, I would be thinking how we could organize, and that's when we (Abraham with his brother Bona, his nephews Marco and Eduardo, and his roommate Olaz) decided to create the Facebook group and soon afterwards the WhatsApp groups.*[204]

In my interactions with them, I quickly discover that the biggest of their problems is the insecurity in the streets and the lack of response from the police. In the streets, at delis, or during protests, Abraham started meeting people interested in organizing, but not everyone would truly commit. While in the field, I was invigorated by the devotion, courage, and strength with which delivery workers not only help each other, but would help the Latinx community at large. And this commitment does not go unnoticed by their fellow delivery

---

[201] Zlolniski. 2006. *Janitors, street vendors, and activist,* 10.
[202] Abraham. Conversation with the author 10/20/2021.
[203] This non-profit organization exists but I decided to use a pseudonym to protect the participants.
[204] Abraham. Conversation with the author 10/20/2021.

workers. During the one year anniversary event, a delivery worker approached Abraham, Marco, and Eduardo and told them: *You are the ones behind El Noticiero de los Delivreros right?* To which they responded affirmatively with pride. The *delivrero* continued: *I just came to thank you for your time. Every night I watch the livestreams. I thank you because you don't cross the bridge, but you are here giving your time. I tell all my roommates [who are also delivery workers], why don't we give our time as they are giving it? So, I just want to thank you.* Here, I strive to describe why and who are the *delivreros* behind all these actions? What motivates them? And where did they learn how to organize?

In this chapter, I argue first that by distributing the information through different media artifacts such as Facebook and WhatsApp, delivery workers prevent or avoid forms of control and surveillance, and second that both physical meeting points (delis and parks) as well as WhatsApp and Facebook groups are central to building and organizing a solid network, and a way to visualize *delivreros* both in the digital and physical space. Physical points, where delivery workers interact with each other and share their experiences are tantamount to the real-time community's forum that happens online. It is only when communicating with others in a similar situation that people understand collective power. My ethnographic work with Latin American *delivreros* shows that by strategically creating public and private means of communication across different media channels, as well as in the streets, workers are able to mobilize historical practices of organization in the face of the platform economy and related urban violence.

Merging physical and digital spaces

Delivery workers live their everyday lives in physical and virtual spaces. Adey and

Bevan posit that space has become reorganized, (re)combined and permeated by technologies

of extended virtual connectivity through telecommunications and ICT development.[205]

Aligned with them, I found that media and technology play a crucial role in delivery

workers' communities by helping members traverse between spatialities; maintaining

connections with their place of origin, and at the same time building new ones in their new

place. Moreover, digital spaces have allowed users to encounter people from outside their

social and work spheres—restricted by place of living or area where they are working. For

Taylor, one of the biggest lessons from Internet Studies is that the boundary between online

and offline life is messy, contested, and under constant negotiation.[206] Thus, the confluence of

Abraham's effort in the streets and Eduardo's one in the digital resulted in the establishment

of a communication network for *delivreros*.

Delivery workers have self-organized and mobilized to protect themselves and their

peers from violence in the streets. And their efforts should not be overlooked. As

Gomberg-Munoz argues, denying workers' agency risks reducing them to mere pawns and

diminishing their capacity to affect social life. Conversely, emphasizing agency at the

expense of structure can mask political and economic realities and obscure relations of

domination and subordination.[207] The online space *El Noticiero de los Delivreros* illuminates

how Latin American workers' life-making enables them to construct a place for subversion,

---

[205] Adey and Bevan. "Between the Physical and the Virtual: Connected Mobilities?," Mobile Technologies of the City, 44.
[206] Taylor. 2006. *Play Between Worlds*, 153.
[207] Gomberg-Muñoz. 2010. "Willing to Work," 297.

and negotiation of their imposed roles, vis-à-vis their everyday life experiences, and the way a digital space enables community-building and network formation.

Public spaces are ideal to create a dialogue. I accompanied Abraham to deliver on several occasions. The starting point would always vary, but wherever we were, there were specific places, normally a park or delis, where *delivreros* would gather together to wait between deliveries. Abraham told me that delivery workers normally gather when they don't have a fixed schedule and they are trying to work, if the app is busy and it allows them. Every time we stopped at a street light, we would encounter several fellow *delivreros*. Abraham spent his time chatting with them, regardless of whether he knew them or not. There's a sense of community, belonging, and solidarity on the streets. In public spaces, delivery workers talk about the importance of the community, of being united. In the streets, decisions are made.

I rapidly discovered that there were networks within networks; this is that depending how well connected one is, one's role or participation in the organization, or how big one's network is, it influences what information one gets. For instance, whereas Abraham, Eduardo, and Marco as moderators of the Facebook group and managers of four WhatsApp groups would get a lot of information from different sources, there are other members who only get the information through one channel. Finally, there are *delivreros* who aren't part of any group and therefore rely on their friends who are members when they need help or to get information about when and where they need to be cautious. Thus, the information one gets and the speed at which one gets it depends on one's position within those networks.

Even though I knew that it was important to explore what was happening in the WhatsApp groups, I didn't ask to join one the first time I asked about the groups. Eduardo complained about all journalists that would ask him to join a WhatsApp group, and he told me, *I tell them to follow the page if they want; that it is open to the public but WhatsApp is internal. See right now, a delivery worker is asking me to add him, and I can't even do it because the group is already full. Ambar, it doesn't make any sense, right? It's as if I would ask you to join your cohort's WhatsApp group. Why would I want to be there?* At that time his point made sense to me, and I even questioned whether I should ever read the conversations in those spaces. After all, I wasn't a delivery worker nor did I want to take a space from someone who would actually need it. However, as I spent more time with them, they started to see me less as an outsider and more as a friend, and I ultimately got added to different groups without asking.

From the outside the infrastructure and organization that *delivreros* have built looks structured and united. When I asked Abraham about why he thought they got this momentum, he told me, *I think it's because the organizers, we are family; I think that's why we haven't had problems.* This explanation is not necessarily true, since I heard other members complaining and challenging Abraham's leadership.

Participatory culture and media production

Technology mediates our everyday life (e.g. mobile phone, laptop, transport). Miller et al. argue that smartphones are no longer devices we use, but rather they have become the place where we live.[208] In the context of delivery workers, the use of mobiles and their significance for everyday communications is worth paying close attention to. Smartphones

---

[208] Miller et al. 2021. *The Global Smartphone.*

are "transportal homes,"[209] a portable medium for communication, affordable, and a place to easily save and retrieve information. Mobiles help delivery workers while working and during challenging times. Interestingly, specific apps such as WhatsApp, have played a crucial role in diasporic communities. In fact, for many users, a single app is all they require to fulfill their communication needs. Delivreros' everyday life takes place on, with, or in their mobiles.

Delivreros use social media platforms to disseminate their own stories. Unlike in the pre-digital epoch, when the audience relied on mainstream media to get information, within participatory culture[210] the audience produces and consumes their content, the so-called "produsage."[211] "A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created)."[212] Oiarzabal points out that implicit in social media is the assumption that people want to share information.[213] And new ways of documenting, publishing, and communicating information have turned media production into a regular activity in everyday life.

Minority groups, such as *delivreros*, use different media in order to counter structures of power and hegemonic narratives that erase or distort their stories. Ginsburg explains, many

---

[209] Miller et al. 2021. *The Global Smartphone.*
[210] See Jenkins, 1996. *Textual poachers.*
[211] Bruns, Axel. 2008. *Blogs, Wikipedia,* 275.
[212] Jenkins. 2009 *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture, 4.*
[213] Oiarzabal. 2012. "Diaspora Basques," 1470.

members of minority groups become "cultural activists" when they use new media to build and transform their communities. This is in part because mainstream media does not cover their problems.[214] A user's comment in *El Noticiero* illustrates their sentiment: "Why do TV stations only care for other people, and not for us Mexicans who work very hard here in New York? If this were a protest from blacks, all the networks would be there #telemundo#Univision."[215] More broadly, Marcus coined the term "the activist imaginary" to describe how subaltern groups turn to media not only to "pursue traditional goals of broad-based social change through a politics of identity and representation" but also out of a utopian desire for "emancipatory projects… raising fresh issues about citizenship and the shape of public spheres within the frame and terms of traditional discourse on polity and civil society"[216] Marginalized, misrepresented, or ignored by mainstream media and governmental actors, information and communication technologies allow Latin American delivery workers to bypass traditional channels, disseminate their own stories, and create community.

The Facebook group that has established a good reputation and has more followers (40K) is *El Noticiero de los Delivreros*, the one that Abraham, Eduardo, Marco, and Bona created. According to Eduardo, who regularly checks the statistics, sixty percent of the page's followers are delivery workers. However, they have followers from all over the US, Mexico, and Latin America, he told me. Tony manages another group with more than 11,500 followers, mostly Guatemalans, on Facebook, and another was launched by Angel and Rodri. When I asked Angel why he decided to open a Facebook group, he shared with me that one day a group of people tried to assault him while crossing the Queensboro Bridge, but the

---

[214] Ginsburg. 2008. *Rethinking the Digital Age*, 139.
[215] Comment 04/21/2021. Retrieved from a public Facebook group.
[216] Marcus. 1996. *Connected: Engagements with Media*, 6.

thieves let him go. However, the following delivery worker wasn't as lucky as him and the thieves stole his bike. *It was a chamaco* [young boy], Angel told me, *and I felt sorry for him.* Angel told him to get on his bike so they could follow the thieves. Although they couldn't recover the bike, it did have an impact in organizing the people crossing that bridge. Contrary to Abraham and his family, Angel first opened a WhatsApp group, and it wasn't until Eduardo encouraged and taught him how to open a Facebook page that he did it. When I asked Angel what the objective of the Facebook page was, he told me, *For people, the general public, to find out what is going on here.* What I want to highlight with this story is the way in which *delivreros* are supporting and teaching each other how to produce and tailor their own content.

Researchers[217] hold that spaces with a participatory culture represent ideal learning environments for people to train themselves. For instance, Gee argues that those spaces are helpful because people can participate according to their skills and interests; because members are constantly motivated to acquire new knowledge and those spaces allow participants to feel like experts while sharing their knowledge with others.[218] For Jenkins, participation implies some notion of affiliation, collective identity, membership.[219] Through their own experience with technology, delivery workers have come to learn not only communication strategies but also video techniques such as point of view and camera perspective to get their message disseminated. Thus, *El Noticiero* allowed delivery workers to grow as content producers, understanding how to transfer their ideas both visually and verbally.

---

[217] Black, 2005; Gee, 2004.

[218] Gee. 2004. *Situated Language and Learning.*

[219] Jenkins. 2009. *Participatory Culture*, 14.

However, it is important to remember as boyd posits, that "the rhetoric surrounding social media often highlights that technology is an equal opportunity platform; "everyone" supposedly has the ability to have their voice heard"[220] might be deceptive. For instance, Gillespie describes user agency as a mixture of technical capacities (being able to "act with a tool and on that tool") and social capacities ("the user's perception of their ability and right to do so").[221] In the context of delivreros, it is clear that not everyone has access to make their voice heard, and the voices that are predominantly being heard are the ones from Eduardo and Abraham.

On Oct 21, 2021, I accompanied Eduardo, Abraham, and the rest of the group to livestream a funeral to enable the family to ask for financial help from the community. The following conversation exemplifies how Eduardo has acquired expertise both in setting up shots and audio, as well as, the way he manipulates the camera but also the politics of livestreaming a funeral and how he has learned how the audience behave and what they want.

> Eduardo (giving instructions): We have to accommodate five chairs. Those who are outside keep quiet; the microphone cannot be used because there is a low signal. (Approaching the delivery worker that he was going to ask for help) I am with you to support you, to make the transmission.
>
> (continued giving instructions) When I finish recording, I'm going to bring the camera closer to you and you're going to say, my name is so-and-so, I'm the brother of so-and-so and I ask for your help, and I'll pan to the others so they can thank you. As I told you, we have already worked with 10 families or so, who unfortunately have lost a loved one. Basically you have to tell who he was and what the help is for.
>
> Abraham: Yes because the followers are going to say, well, what happened? It is important to say it so people know and help. After the livestream whether you want it or not, people will start calling. It always happens in these cases. That is why we wanted to speak with you before to organize everything and get you prepared.

---

[220] Jenkins. 2009 *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture,* 21.
[221] Gillespie. 2006. "Designed to Effectively Frustrate," 661.

Eduardo talking Facebook live: Good afternoon friends and followers of El Noticiero de los Delivreros... well, here we are again, with Javier's family who lost his life last night. I ask all followers of the page to share the post respectfully…

Eduardo learns and improves his skills by first, receiving feedback on his own work; for instance, I frequently saw how while he was live-streaming, other delivery workers present would start watching the video and if something was wrong, such as the audio, they would tell him immediately. Second, he learns by giving feedback to others, which produces a peer-to-peer learning community, such as in the case of Angel who learned to livestream and what to say thanks to Eduardo. And lastly, a finding that I wasn't anticipating, Eduardo learns by watching his own livestream to make sure everything goes right and to determine ways he could improve. When Eduardo finishes his livestream, he rides back home while watching what he just recorded. He analyzes follower's engagement, hears how he pronounces certain words, analyzes parts where he hesitates, and what he did correctly: the shot, the angle. He is proud of the community he has that reinforces his own experiences and personal narrative. Thus, livestreaming is like a ritual, a way to reinforce that something happened.

Delivery workers are producers of knowledge and culture; they are storytellers making sense of how delivery workers portray and perceive themselves and navigate their everyday life. Some of these posts have little engagement, but others draw thousands of likes, shares, and comments. Some are ephemeral, lasting only a couple of hours, whereas others last a month or are constantly remembered. Potential motivations for why members consume this content are: aspirational, educational, inspirational, for entertainment, or a sense of belonging. In her book, *Watch Me Play*, Taylor argues that there is no single reason why audiences tune into a game live streaming. However, she distinguishes six motivations

(aspirational, educational, inspirational, entertainment, community, and ambience)[222] why people watch live streams, that are almost identical to what I encountered in my research. The similarities in the motivations that Taylor and I encountered in different contexts and communities, speaks to me about the intrinsic nature of live video streaming to connect individuals. Thus, Social Network Sites (SNS) weave together the contributions and responses of different users, making them active audiences of media content that challenges hegemonic narratives, mainstream media representation, and stereotypes.

Accidents and Insecurity

SNS and digital technologies play a crucial role in delivery workers' efforts to contend with problems that affect their lives and livelihood. Delivery workers are affected by road accidents, many of which are fatal, and theft of their bikes. In a gathering celebrating the Facebook's page anniversary and their efforts, Marco, with a microphone in his hand, started sharing with other *delivreros*, *They rob us and what do the police say? 'We can't do anything because there is no camera. They took your bike and they did nothing to you.' What they want is to see another delivrero dead to do something.* Jenkins defines "citizen journalists" of the YouTube-era as the ones who are documenting and sharing with the world situations that otherwise might not be recorded if it were not for new technologies.[223] Through their SNS, delivery workers are circulating livestreamed videos and security cameras footage that they get from workers at delis or superintendents of buildings, that evidence the way in which their bikes are stolen in the street while people and the police are passing by.

---

[222] Taylor. *Watch Me Play, 39.*
[223] Jenkins. 2007.

While accidents and insecurity in the streets are problems that are not unique to the gig economy or the Latin American population in the US, they do disproportionately affect the delivery workers with whom I interacted with for two reasons. First, due to the nature of their work, they are in the street all the time, even late at night, and this increasingly exposes them to the dangers on the streets. No matter how experienced delivery workers are, the more time they spend on the streets, the higher the likelihood that something happens. And second, they do not receive a response from the authorities. Rodri shared with me the answer he received when he reported his stolen bike: *Some time ago I had a problem, and the police didn't want to solve anything for me. They said "It's just a bike, nothing happened to you." And I told them, "But it is my working tool." And they answered "The truth is that you're not from here and you don't own anything here, so we can't do anything."*[224] In a conversation that Abraham had with a woman during *El Noticiero's* one year anniversary gathering, the woman started sharing with him that in Corona the people had an intense response when the government did not want to make a bike lane. She further explained: *In a meeting a woman told us that based on the way we dress, she could tell that we were not from here and she asked us why we were fighting for a bike lane if at the end we were going to go back to our country.*[225] The previous two examples show that on some occasions it is explicitly stated that it is because of the workers' nationality that they are not receiving any help.

Paradoxically, some delivery workers and followers of their Facebook page justify police's actions with racialized narratives of other historically marginalized group in the US: *They [black community and allies] took the power away from the police 🤷 if they [the police] show up they [black community] accuse them of being racists and police risk losing*

---

[224] Rodri. Conversation with the author, 12/13/2021.
[225] Abraham. Conversation that a woman had with Abraham, 11/05/2021.

their jobs. Now the only thing left is precisely what these delivery workers do. Organize and defend yourself.[226] This is a comment from a follower, congratulating delivery workers' efforts, and while I did not see a lot of comments like this one, this comment points out to how marginalized communities accept and reproduce broader socio-economical narratives.

Delivery workers are outraged by the lack of response from authorities whenever someone runs over them or assaults them, and they are hurt by the idea that their lives and private property are not regarded as important as those of someone from another community or social class. To counter the lack of response from the police, they have found ways to organize collectively by establishing a solidarity network that operates throughout the city.

Platform workers are increasingly connected to each other, often via WhatsApp. Amid a system that ignores marginalized communities, this network has been essential in organizing a community-led strategy. A delivery worker now knows where to reach out for help every time an e-bike is stolen. Eduardo shared with me that they used to have WhatsApp groups but only with their family or friends. *If we needed help they were the ones who were going to help us but now with the groups… I'm very happy with what happened today. Just for being part of the WhatsApp group, a paisa*[227] *went and helped another one. All of the effort is worth it because I'm starting to see results.*[228]

If the bike has a GPS, a group of three to five *delivreros* will organize to look for it. Otherwise they will circulate the bike's photo on the Facebook page and request that members pay attention on the streets to see if someone tries to sell it. Marco and the rest of

---

[226] Comment from an unknown follower 07/05/2021. Retrieved from a public Facebook group.
[227] The politics of the use of the word paisa is worth analyzing it. Here Abraham uses it as a synonym of friend, partner. But in other contexts it is used in a derogatory sense as for someone in the US who has just arrived. It is important then to understand who is saying it and in which context.
[228] Eduardo. Conversation with the author. 02/22/2022.

the moderators recurrently describe in their livestreams how to proceed in case of an emergency: *I urge you all, if you see something strange in the streets, do not face it alone. Send us an alert on the different WhatsApp groups or Facebook pages so that one of us can post it. Today there are many ways to communicate and help each other.*[229] In these mundane actions like texting, calling, posting a photo, or commenting is where resistance and empowerment take place.

This network has become the first responder to assaults and robberies to accidents, and involves solidarity actions. The network of information is dynamic and spread throughout the city and different platforms. Their organization leverages the dynamic and comprehensive spatial distribution of delivery workers throughout New York City. It is a network of distributed perception, knowledge, and action. During my ethnographic fieldwork, I started noticing how workers communicate and engage collectively and with each other through digital platforms and how platforms allow them to connect in the physical space. Interestingly, the network that platforms aim to create to distribute workers on the streets is the same that *delivreros* are using to defend themselves. To do so, they use an app to track their friends and see who is around when they need help. The figure 1, is an example of a map where a group of workers are tracking each other. We can see that at any given time eight workers are covering the entire map. It is difficult to even visualize how this map would look like with 65,000 delivery workers connected at the same time.

---

[229] Marco talking with the followers on a live-stream video. 12/10/2021
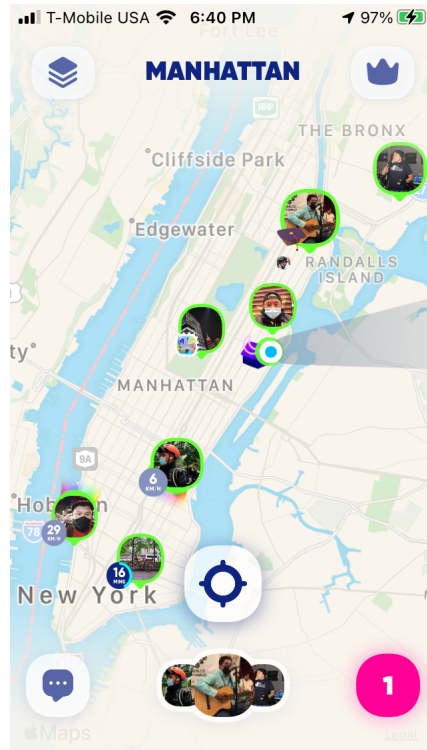
Fig. 1: Map of NYC in Zenly App

Public and Private Communication

Workers communicate and engage collectively through digital platforms. Taylor argues that social connections, collective knowledge, and group action are central to the individual's experience.[230] In the course of my field work, I've identified the use of digital technologies as an important player in the process of formation and maintenance of delivery workers' social networks, individual and collective identity, as well as their movement. Online communication has become particularly valuable to transnational and diasporic communities as it creates a meeting place of the private and the public, the interpersonal and the communal.[231] During my research, I came to appreciate how *delivreros* use two distinct

---

[230] Taylor. 2006. *Play Between Worlds,* 9.
[231] Georgiou. 2006. *Diaspora, identity and the media.*

platforms to share information: one that operates outwards (Facebook livestreaming) and one that operates inwards (Whatsapp groups). Overall, I argue that public and private communication channels play a fundamental role in the formation of social networks and movements.

Both of these platforms fulfill multiple roles: from places of leisure to civic and political spaces, and from media spheres for humor to open arenas to talk about taboo topics. Yet, these two forms of communication represent opposite sides of the spectrum between public and private communication and between ephemeral and permanent information; they have unique and complementary roles. For instance, in WhatsApp there is an option to make messages disappear for more privacy and storage. I found that the reason why delivery workers activate this function is for the latter reason. Yet, I discovered that the group strives to have everything stored and documented in one place: Facebook.

Information oftentimes permeates from the public to the private, and *vice versa*. For instance, the way to access the private communication channel (WhatsApp groups) is through the public channel (Facebook) or in person by meeting the moderators. Marco explained this to another delivery worker:

> We have 4 whatsapp groups and people can join. We want to give priority to the people who are on the streets. But we are thinking of creating a group for people who are at home. For instance, if they see through their window that someone is stealing a bike, they could send us a message immediately and tell us, "Hey! They are stealing" so that some compañeros arrive. We invite those who want to join to write to us through the Facebook pages and we'll add you to one that has space.

Another example in which this flow of information between the private and public that is visually obvious is that one day that Eduardo was livestreaming, just before the stream

ended, Marco approached the camera and said:

> Before you end the live-stream, we'd like to share the information we got in the
> whatsapp group. There, [showing the WhatsApp conversation to the camera] as you
> can see, we received the video of the motorcycle of the delivrero who was run over.
> We don't know what street it was on but we're going to be investigating with our
> compañeros. It's an info that came a moment ago, we don't really know what
> happened. We don't know where the delivrero is. Whoever has more info let us know,
> if there is someone in the whatsapp group who knows him let us know so we can
> help.[232]

Through different media, messages are subject to interference. Delivery workers are

aware of the difficulty of controlling who has access to private groups. In fact, at least, during

my research one time the WhatsApp group was hacked. In a Facebook live, when Eduardo

started talking about how they were going to start using a new app that would function as

walkie-talkies, one follower immediately urged them to not *share with anyone the radio's*

channel because there's a lot of people infiltrated. So who is listening to which messages?

Who should listen and who should not?

Far from being a conceptual innovation, these platforms are the latest installment of a

collection of devices and strategies aimed at compartmentalizing knowledge and information.

From town halls and residential gatherings, to the press and the postal system, public and

private communication channels have been engineered in distinct material forms throughout

media history. Historically silenced, misrepresented, or stereotyped communities have used,

for instance, broadcast radio to challenge their imposed hegemonic narratives and promote

their local actions. Several reasons make radio a privileged medium to carry their voices.

First, radio is "easier to produce than either print media, which requires writing and literacy

---

[232] Marco talking with the followers on a livestream video. 12/10/2021.

skills, or video, which requires expensive equipment and editing skills."[233] Additionally,

Casilla points out two characteristics of the medium which makes it ideal for Latinx

communities: ephemerality and anonymity. "Over the air, real identities are largely masked

by telephone and stories quickly disappear."[234] Communities have created alternative

discourses that the radio has helped them to amplify. Thus, community radio operates as a

public space in which different voices and conversations can be heard/listened to and that can

lead the community into action.

The underlying tactics and practices of *Delivreros* use of media have a longer

trajectory and history of organizing and struggling. In his book, *Radio and the Struggle for

Civil Rights in the South*, Brian Ward details how black people turned their attention to radio

when black-oriented radio stations provided tactical insights and guidance in the civil rights

movement. In Mexico, the Zapatista Indigenous movement is often framed as the first major

Internet-based movement. Zapatistas used similar practices as Blacks and Latinos in the US

to disseminate their information to the public at large. Moreover, according to Rodríguez

during EZLN's clandestine training period (1983–1994), they used radio as a tool for internal

information dissemination and liaison. Zapatistas listened to the Salvadoran guerrilla *Radio

Venceremos* and established a system of fixed and mobile radio transmission, to compensate

for transportation difficulties in the wooded and mountainous area of Las Cañadas. The

EZLN communication strategy attests to the capacity of radio to mediate social movement.[235]

The use of new media technologies to circumvent traditional channels of communication and

power structures, allow to mobilize other voices and stories from the margins of the city.

---

[233] Casillas. 2014. *Sounds of Belonging,* 85.
[234] Casillas. 2014. *Sounds of Belonging,* 85.
[235] Rodríguez. 2019. *Citizens' Media in Latin America,* 149.

Yet, one medium does not replace another, but rather distinct media coexist in social movements media's ecosystem. Delivery workers use a private channel to communicate, coordinate, request help from their peers, and mobilize in real-time. Additionally, the private channel provides a space to manage logistical issues. For instance, through collective consensus, they try to establish fixed schedules to accompany each other on their way back to their rooms.

6/1/21 10:58 PM It would be good if we establish that every half hour a group leaves so we already know the time and not come in a hurry so that there are no accidents.
6/1/21 10:59 PM Good idea or every hour…
6/1/21 11:00 PM Half an hour so one does not despair
6/1/21 11:00 PM Every 20 minutes would be fine

Through the use of private communication channels, they form a distributed network that enables collective perception and action. Moreover they have WhatsApp groups for specific purposes, for instance, they have one for those who live in the Bronx and cross the Willis Bridge and another one for those who live in Queens and cross the Queensboro one. The following conversation exemplifies the way delivery workers coordinate and alert in real-time. It took five minutes to organize and alert the people who were going to cross.

9/6/21 10:59 PM Compañeros be alert !!
9/6/21 10:59 PM 2 dark-haired men passed by on a green motorcycle towards 125 st
9/6/21 10:59 PM Those who are about to cross the Willis Bridge… Be careful!
9/6/21 10:59 PM 😮
9/6/21 10:59 PM Wait for another compa if you are going to cross.
9/6/21 10:59 PM It's a green motorcycle!!
9/6/21 10:59 PM I'm going to cross in about 15 minutes
9/6/21 11:01 PM Who is close?
9/6/21 11:01 PM I'm on 116 st
9/6/21 11:01 PM Are you going to cross the bridge?
9/6/21 11:03 PM Yes
9/6/21 11:03 PM Wait for another paisas so you can cross with them

9/6/21 11:04 PM Cross in groups of at least 4.

Private channels also serve as a marketplace for transactions and my research reveals that within those spaces, there's a sense of collective accountability. Delivery workers return to those chats to ask for help and to make a decision collectively.

> [9:32 pm, 05/13/2022] A compañero is lying on Grand st and 83 st. I couldn't find his U lock key to lock his bike. They [random people] already called the police. I believe the ambulance will take him. What should I do?
> [9:33 pm, 05/13/2022] You should take the bike with you
> [9:33 pm, 05/13/2022] I don't know… what if they [people around] tell me something. They're going to think that I'm going to steal it.
> [9:34 pm, 05/13/2022] Take it with you, it's safer otherwise someone will steal it.
> [9:35 pm, 05/13/2022] What should I do? lock it and leave? Or wait for the police?
> [9:36 pm, 05/13/2022] Here is a "rat" [thief] who told me: the bike is good
> [9:36 pm, 05/13/2022] I just took the key off the battery..
> [9:38 pm, 05/13/2022] Take it, if you leave it there locked, they're going to cut the 🔒
> [9:48 pm, 05/13/2022] I left the bike there and I put the key back in his pocket.
> [9:49 pm, 05/13/2022] I'm leaving.. I stayed until I made sure the bike was locked.

I argue that by asking what to do in these spaces, delivery workers are assigning or legitimizing the group as a moral agent capable of choosing the best option. Peter French considers groups that are well-organized to be appropriate sites of collective responsibility. "Group solidarity exists in cases where group members identify themselves as group members and assert their shared interests and needs or in cases where group members exhibit collective consciousness to the extent that they are inclined to take pride or feel shame in group actions without prompting."[236] Embedded within this private group there is an evolving culture created and sustained by the members that responds and fulfills their needs.

Delivery workers use Facebook to report what's happening to the general public by livestreaming accidents, uploading information about bike robberies, and documenting their

---

[236] Stanford Encyclopedia Of Philosophy. 2005. "Collective Responsibility."

everyday actions. The characteristics of this medium is that it is open to anyone, permanent (serves as a documentation), and there are different ways to communicate (direct messages, livestreaming, posts). The tool that they use the most is livestreaming. Overall, I identify three objectives to workers' livestreaming on Facebook: it helps delivery workers to document, and have a real-time record of, accidents and bike robberies; it establishes public credibility and reputation; and it legitimizes the information that they convey. It's normal to hear during the livestreams phrases like: "We are here, livestreaming at this time of the night;" "We are at 56th and 8th, there was an accident, one more of the delivery workers have died;" "We're right here where they found the bike that was stolen;" "Here we are with the thief, thank God, we were able to stop him." The idea of being 'here' permeates these videos. When I asked Marco why it was so important for them to emphasize where they were he answered me, *We are the ones who see the reality, we're the ones that are on the streets.* This statement has a context. When he says that they are the ones on the street, he is differentiating their network with another that he argues that are only using delivery workers but that the people behind it are not delivery workers nor they are on the streets, know what is happening, or want to help.

There is a sense of community in livestreaming. There is a lot of engagement and a culture of participation, and followers turn to the Facebook pages to find out the news, since they believe Facebook pages are the most informed of what is happening on the streets. Eduardo, as a savvy live-streamer, makes sure to interact with the audience while he is streaming. *A follower asks us 'what do you know about a compañero who was run over today?' Well, unfortunately we still don't know anything, no one has contacted us yet in any of the four pages, but if any* delivrero *or follower knows something, notify us so that we can*

give the information.[237] Livestreams as a medium allows users to connect in community.

Once emotionally hooked in the online space, viewers can interact and share the content that moved them to action. On some occasions, audiences that help the community either by donating food, money or time are mentioned during the livestream. For instance, during a vigil Eduardo told Miguel and I: *Someone just made the first donation, if the name is there, I must mention it right now on the live.* Miguel checked the information and gave it to Eduardo, then Eduardo in the video said: *Thank you Jessica, because you were the first supporter, with all our heart, God bless you.* This can help audiences to feel a sense of rewardness. Viewers share with their friends and family, who share with others who further share – amplifying not only the delivery worker's message but also the audience's commitment to the community and good actions. I found out that delivery workers hope that by sharing videos, society will realize what is happening and will support them. And during their lives, they repeatedly encourage audiences to share the information: *Let's go, let's share the videos to raise awareness*.

Another purpose of livestreaming is to bridge communities by maintaining ties with their countries of origin and families. In the Facebook group, national borders are erased. Delivery workers transmit both what happens in the US and what happens in Mexico. For instance, when a delivery worker dies, they document the vigils and funerals in Manhattan but also the repatriation of the body and its arrival to their final destination in rural Mexico. Wives and mothers watch the livestreams and regularly comment that their husband or son is going to cross the bridge, or they watch the live with the hope to see them in the video to know that they are on their way home. Messages like "My son crosses there, please help

---

[237] Eduardo talking with the followers on a live-stream video. 12/10/2021.

him" or "My husband is on his way, wait for him please," are recurrent on the livestreams. The Facebook group allows families who are far away to stay informed of what is happening in NYC. For instance, a mom, who follows the facebook page, commented: "God bless you, my beautiful son, you and all those who bike. May God protect you and light your way now and always my son. Take care of yourself. Our support from Tlapa, [Mexico] blessings to all." When the family is at a far remove, their only hope is for the community to protect their loved ones.

Lastly, livestreaming helps to forge delivery workers' own narrative of the role that they place in society and challenge the one that they got assigned by broader socio-political forces. Rodri told me that the way he saw the pages was:

> To educate people like us [delivery workers] who go out every day so that they [delivery workers] know that we have rights here in NYC. We have the right to call an ambulance, we have the right to make a report. We also have obligations: wear a helmet, respect road laws. There are many delivery workers giving a bad image of the community. We want to educate the delivreros so that this image changes and they [society] give us the respect we deserve as human beings, that is why I am here.[238]

This group of *delivreros* strive to change the way their community perceives itself in relation to wider narratives about race, work, class, and achievement in the US They produce an identity for their group, by highlighting actions to protect and support the community, and forging a different narrative from mainstream media. An example of the last point is crystallized in a quote from a live streamed video: *I believe that we, wherever we come from, are people who have not robbed anyone. We want to work with dignity and honesty. We are in the streets and we have to support each other because you don't know when it's going to be your turn*. Followers celebrate this narrative and reinforce the hard work ethic one: *Good job,*

---

[238] Rodri. Conversation with the author 01/27/2022.

compañeros, it is not easy to work all day and then volunteer to support your compas.

Audiences are also attentive and worry about how delivery people are being portrayed. For example, a follower in a livestream commented: "My question is why do you write that you inform us of a *compañero*!!?` 🧐 This page is called delivery boys. Now anyone who drives a motorcycle or rides a bicycle is a delivery boy? That man was drunk and is not a food delivery worker. You shouldn't upload the information here because then people perceive delivery workers as irresponsible.🧐🧐 Be more serious." This comment illustrates how delivery workers strive to distance themselves or differentiate themselves from narratives that they are a threat, that they want to break the rules, and that they are not polite. Overall, religion, family, work ethic, and community service are themes that are constantly promoted in delivery workers' live streams.

By highlighting their actions towards public good, they use this platform to counter negative stereotypes of Latin Americans in the US However, rather than countering systemic racism in the United States, they use this platform to distinguish themselves from other marginalized communities, and oftentimes reinforce negative stereotypes about marginalized communities and reproduce social hierarchies as they struggle to change the narrative that socio-cultural structures have imposed over them. For instance, Omar told me *there you see in the video how the black men approach and they told him 'Mexico, get out of here because we are going to kill you.' They are people who do not work.* Moreover, stereotypes of the place of origin are transferred to the new context. Omar continued,

> I wasn't there to look good in a video and say I'm brave because I[m from Guerrero [Mexico], no. I had to defend my paisano. I drew strength from my heart, because nobody wanted to defend. Look what happened to me for helping, but I thought in my mind: today you are not going to take the bicycle because today I'm here and then I

punch him. I know that maybe it was not the best thing to do, but otherwise they would have taken the bike. Many when they saw the video told me but you didn't do anything. I'm not here to fight, I'm here to defend." Thus, honor and strength are values that give delivery workers status and it relates to the idea of "brave men do not back down.[239]

I have so far described why and how delivery workers organize to protect each other and how by doing it they walk away from the narrative that they are uneducated, and a threat.

By understanding which and how information flows between WhatsApp and Facebook, I identify that workers' live-streamed on Facebook to construct their own narrative, and to establish public credibility and reputation. On the other hand, WhatsApp groups provide a space to manage logistical issues and serve as a marketplace for transactions. These distinct layers of communication synergize to form a transnational distributed knowledge network and to shape and interpret the individual and collective identities of migrant delivery workers.

Connecting the dots

The flow of information—through different spaces and times—of everyday life-making experiences from delivery workers enables them to construct a place for subversion, and negotiation with roles assigned to them by broader socio-political forces. Thus, I argue that Latin American delivery workers' use of technology provides us a unique glimpse into the convergence of social networks, media culture, and social movements within the context of contemporary gig labor and migrant organization. These distinct layers of communication synergize to form a transnational distributed knowledge network and to shape and interpret the individual and collective identities of Latin American delivery

---

[239] Omar. Conversation with the Author and other delivery workers, 09/21/2021.

workers. Altogether, this chapter discusses how the formation of a solidarity network becomes part of the collective identity of *delivreros*. In sum, delivery workers face violence in the streets and lack of response from the government. This led to the formation of a distributed network of knowledge and support. And this network has been important for them to forge a group identity. But one important question remains unanswered: where did they learn how to organize?

Delivery workers have a life before and after the US They bring this with them: the experience of working and resisting, the social networks, forms of organization, culture and knowledge. Moving into the conclusion, I'll share an unexpected insight that I made regarding the way their organization in New York City relates to the way this community organizes back in Mexico, and the struggles that they have endured throughout their history. When I asked Abraham what differences he encountered in the US compared to Mexico he told me: *In Tlapa [city in Mexico] it happens the same as here. They [police/government] don't do anything, just like here. When we have problems, they just ignore us… In both places.* Historically, indigenous communities in Latin America have been invisibilized, marginalized and undervalued both in their countries of origin and in the US The group in NYC, thus, is reminiscent of a collection of self-organized tactics with a long history in Mexico that have moved along with them. What happens in New York mirrors what happens in Mexico.

Conclusion: Migration as a medium

The history of my community or any other community in Mexico is similar. Indigenous people and communities continue to be forgotten, governments come and go, and our situation remains the same.[240]

Delivery workers adapt older indigenous practices to a context of urban cities and technology. Most of *delivreros* that I interact with, come from the *Me'phaa* community in Mexico. What happens in New York is not an isolated phenomenon, but mimics the social organization that delivery workers have in their country of origin. The specific moment in which I realized that this deep connection existed was when I heard the following quote in a livestreamed video: "Here is the cousin... the uncle... we are like in our community. The solution is in our hands, we must be united, organized. The fight for justice continues. We have to defend ourselves and we are going to do it as we learn it back home: Only the people save the people."

The community watch

6/23/21 9:19 PM Don't cross alone there are four suspects in the middle of the bridge.
6/23/21 9:21 PM Thanks for letting us know…
6/23/21 9:47 PM *La guardia comunitaria* [volunteer team] is arriving soon to 125th st

Their collective efforts to ensure their safety represent one of many ways in which Latin American *delivreros* have come to occupy a remarkable space, in the streets of New York. One particular action that delivery workers did that was successful and that I deeply researched through participant observation, was the establishment of a community watch in the Willis Bridge that connects Manhattan to The Bronx. The community has attracted a lot

---

[240] Abraham. Conversation with the author 10/10/2021.

of attention, not only from fellow delivery workers but also from the media, artists, and government officials, because of the *Guardia Comunitaria* (community watch). The invitation to join as a volunteer or to inform whether they see something/someone potentially dangerous comes from either the WhatsApp group or Facebook's lives. For instance, Marco sent the following WhatsApp message, in preparation to the community watch, to the group designated for people who cross the bridge:

> 6/17/21 12:20 PM Good morning compañeros...Today we continue to invite all of you who like to volunteer to do our community watch after 10 pm to cross from 125 1av to the Bronx. So far it has been quite a success thanks to those who have joined, and helped. Together we will be stronger. Blessings, and see you later.

10 minutes later, several *delivreros* started confirming, with text or emojis, that they would join:

> 6/17/21 12:32 PM I'll be there at 10:00 pm 👍
> 6/17/21 12:34 PM 👍👏
> 6/17/21 12:40 PM I'll stop by with some food for the volunteers. Thanks for your hard work.

In the corner of 125th street and 1st ave one can see a billboard that reads: we are on guard [sic] to protect our delivery workers. Beneath the overpass, the group of *delivreros*, gather together every night encouraging workers to cross in groups of five or more. The group works solely with the help of volunteers. Delivery workers themselves, their family or the general public, donate food, time or money. Seeing them there physically, sprang into action the whole community. Before they mounted the community watch, on the Willis Bridge, there were on average three robberies a day. By implementing the community watch, robberies decreased and eventually stopped. Tony shared with me with a proud voice: *Since the guard [sic] began on Tuesday, June 15 at night, there have been no robberies.*

The lights of their parked bikes signal their presence. Through their symbols and forms of organization, *delivreros* are remapping their national borders in segregated spaces. The following quote took place during the one year anniversary of *El Noticiero*. Abraham, speaking to all the attendees, said: *Thank you so much to the compañeros and compañeras who took the time to be here tonight at the entrance of the Willis bridge, which is our home [metaphorically speaking].* The background music in Spanish, and the scene with the colorful party flags hanging in there took me back to a party in Mexico, however I was under the bridge in Manhattan where *delivreros* were 'reappropriating' a public space with their music, people, aesthetics and forms of organization. By claiming parts of the city, such as the overpass, *delivreros* effectively reclaim their position within this new place.

Their presence and live-streamings strengthened the community and their narrative. Abraham told me: *Night after night, the 'auxiliares comunitarios' [community helpers] have been here giving their time, not to protect the bridge, but rather to organize us.* Additionally, Eduardo believes that social media has played a crucial role: *This movement has grown thanks to the followers, the delivery workers. We have seen the need to carry out these actions because they have been affecting us at all times.* The community watch is only an example of a rise in network action and organization amongst delivery workers who have been the target of violent robberies and car accidents, which oftentimes have been fatal.

This initiative is not an invention within this community, nor is it an adoption from local organization practices in New York. Rather, it is the implementation of a form of organization dating hundreds or even thousands of years that resembles the communitary police implemented in indigenous communities in Mexico. This mode of organization has a long history in Mexico, and has played an important role in tensions arising between the

federal government and indigenous communities. This observation connects what I've seen in NYC with what these communities live in present Mexico, and throughout their history.

While scholars in the transnationalist tradition have described cultural transformations in places of origin,[241] there's not a lot of research about the way people bring with them and implement forms of social organization in the new place. I argue, thus, that by mapping out how *delivreros* organize and form a distributed knowledge network in New York, and showing how these actions are grounded in indigenous knowledge, I extend theories about transnational communities.

Context in Mexico

It would take me 252 hours biking south from NYC, to get to the Me'phaa community in Guerrero, Mexico. There, the community of around 1800 inhabitants has developed its own way to organize. Each year, a committee is elected in assemblies to protect and look for the well-being of their people. On several occasions I told Abraham that what they were doing was unpaid labor and asked him why they were doing it, and that they should ask for (monetary) help to which he would always answer: *In our communities we saw how people served the community, I think that is what led us to volunteer here*.

In Mexico there is a historical tradition of self-defense within indigenous communities. The economic, technological and social transformations—the end of the agrarian reform, creating roads to connect isolated communities, the presence of radio and television and opening the market for international investors—of the 1980s and 1990s generated an adverse environment for communities with high levels of exclusion. Moreover,

---

[241] See Smith 2006

according to Zermeño, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the effects of the 1994 economic crisis, caused a social instability that increased violence creating unsustainable environments in rural Mexico.[242]

The implementation of neoliberal politics in rural Mexico has as a consequence the dismantling of government programs to support the countryside, the insertion of rural people in the market that generated a general impoverishment of the rural population.[243] This abandonment of the State forced indigenous communities to protect themselves. According to Días and Fini "the conditions of insecurity and risk that these macroeconomic transformations generated must be understood as an inherent product of the neoliberal regime, not as a collateral effect."[244] Insecurity is a central component linked to wealth where "accumulation is based on the systematic devaluation of the poor with the exploitation of their precarious jobs."[245] For Meyer, insecurity is a clear indicator of loss of strength, and effectiveness of the state. For this reason, in terms of its organization as a political entity, Mexico, instead of modernizing, goes backwards."[246]

Guerrero has a long history of social movements and forms of self-organization. During the 20th century, different social processes and fights for civil rights occurred, such as the peasant movement against neoliberal policies, the indigenous movement to guarantee the exercise of their rights to self-determination, the Afro-Mexican movement for its recognition, and the teacher's and student's movements in favor of public education. In addition to the

---

[242] Zermeño. 1998. "La sociedad derrotada."
[243] González. 2014. "La policía comunitaria en Guerrero."
[244] Díaz and Fini. 2018. *Defender al pueblo,* 14.
[245] Díaz and Fini. 2018. *Defender al pueblo,* 15.
[246] Meyer. 2016. "Nos Movemos ¿Hacia El Siglo XIX?"

conflicts between the government and society, in Guerrero, it is critical to consider a third actor: criminal groups who aim to control territories for the production of marijuana.

Given this scenario, between 1994 and 1996 community defense initiatives emerged in various parts of the state.[247] Of them, only the one in the indigenous region of the Mountain succeeded and continues to function to this day. The Community Police of the Mountain of Guerrero, "made up of 104 communities from 13 municipalities in the state, is known as the Regional Coordinator of Community Authorities, and its objective is the procurement and administration of justice."[248] The Act of Agreement for the creation of the Community Police expresses:

> Analyzing the situation of public insecurity suffered by the communities of this region when traveling along the path that connects them with other cities[...] and seeing that this situation is unbearable, since hundreds of times we have complaint with the corresponding authorities and do not have the support of any of them, and knowing that we are daily victims of assaults, rapes, robberies, injuries and homicides, we are forced to take the following agreement: we decided that the community police groups from each community guard the main roads.[249]

With this decision, the Community Police of the state of Guerrero was formed. Interestingly, although community police have existed in many indigenous and rural communities in Mexico for a long time, Benítez and Gaussens posit that "the novelty of the 1995 regional assembly agreement was to set up security groups in each community, but to operate on the roads that connected the towns, articulating between them at regional level."[250]

The *Me'phaa* community's committee is based on the constitutional right for self-organization of indigenous communities in Mexico, and supported by international laws.

---

[247] García. 2000. "Inventario de las organizaciones campesinas", 115.
[248] Díaz and Fini. 2018. *Defender al pueblo,* 15.
[249] crac-pc. 1995. "Acta de acuerdo."
[250] Benítez and Gaussens. 2019. *Por los Laberintos del Sur,* 50.

At the national level, the community's police in indigenous societies is based on the second article of the Mexican constitution, which guarantees them the right to decide their internal forms of coexistence, social, economic, political and cultural organization; to apply their own legal systems in the regulation and solution of their internal conflicts, and to elect, in accordance with their norms, procedures and traditional practices, the authorities or representatives for their forms of internal government. Internationally, different organizations recognize the existence of indigenous peoples and their collective rights, including that of self-determination, expressed as autonomy. For instance, Article XV (Right to self government, management and control of internal affairs) of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) declares that "States acknowledge that indigenous peoples have the right to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development, and that accordingly they have the right to autonomy or self-government with regard to their internal and local affairs.[251]

Characteristics of community's committee and police

The fundamental unit of organization of indigenous people is the community, and assemblies are the basis for community actions and decisions. Indigenous authorities, prior to the Conquest, had several characteristics that still exist among their descendants in Mexico. "Indigenous authorities responded to their '*calpulli*' or neighborhood. Each neighborhood had its own independent government. The elders of each neighborhood, meeting in council, were in charge of appointing the officials responsible for carrying out their instructions in the community. This council elected the '*tlatoani*' (the one who speaks), the governor. They also chose the '*tlacatecuhtli*' (the chief of men), who was in charge of military affairs.[252]

---

[251] OAS. 1990. "Annual Report."
[252] Instituto Federal Electoral. 1996. "Formas de Gobierno."

In present-day Guerrero, every year, the *Me'phaa* community committee is formed
through an electoral system voted in assemblies. According to Gallardo, "participatory
decision making forge a sense of belonging and identity that strengthen and reaffirm the
social, political, economic and cultural relations of the members of the community."[253] The
way in which this reaffirmation is manifested is through participation in community work,
the cargo system and community assemblies. Groups in charge of the well-being and safety
in the community work under the logic of the charge system; who's members are appointed
in an assembly to perform this service on a rotating and unpaid basis.[254] Members of the
community who actively participate in community services and committee's positions are
socially recognized when they are assigned other responsibilities to move up through the
community's cargo system.[255] For Abraham, being part of the committee is a commitment
and the community must respect the members of it. *For example, if Ambar is selected as
commissioner, we will obey what Ambar says. It's only one year, but in that year we will obey
everything you say. After that, you leave the position and we appoint someone else and even
you have to obey what the new commissioner says*, Abraham explained. Thus, by
participating in the hierarchical cargo system passing through different roles, men get
authority and honor in the community.

In the case of the people in charge of the security, they are known as *policías de
comisaría*[256] or *policías suburbanos*.[257] The police community is distinct from other forms of
self-organization, such as self-defense groups, in the sense that the people select them.
Community's police are part of the main committee and they are responsible for keeping

[253] Gallardo. 2012. "Lo Público En Los Procesos."
[254] López Bárcenas. 2013. "Policías comunitarias."
[255] Gallardo. 2012. "Lo Público En Los Procesos."
[256] Dehouve. 2001. "Ensayo de geopolítica indígena," 47.
[257] Horta and Aburto, 2016. " El origen de la Policía Comunitaria," 71.

order and safety within the community; responding to threats to the community, in the

absence of support from the federal government. This has resulted in tensions between

communitary police and state police. In a conversation I had with Abraham about the way his

community organizes, he told me:

> Abraham: In the communities there is a tradition that one has to 'serve' one's community. People would say "Compañeros, we need someone to represent us," so we vote in an assembly. One will never say I want to be the commissioner, the people are the ones who choose you.
>
> Ambar: Being a commissioner gives you a status?
>
> Abraham: Yes, because you represent the entire community. Becoming a commissioner is the last position you hold in your life. When you are a commissioner, you no longer have the obligation to take another role. We choose the commissioner and then the substitute, commander first, second, and third, and the rest of the committee members who are going to run errands. Since we were kids we've seen that when someone is going to be named commissioner, people celebrate it.
>
> Ambar: When are we going to celebrate your position as commissioner in NYC?
>
> Abraham: I don't know when I will be named right? As I told you I can't say I am. In the communities, there has always been respect for the way we elect the committee.[258]

There are three aspects that I would like to highlight in my conversation with

Abraham: First, the community is the one that chooses the leader, one cannot self-nominate;

Second, respect for the process is key; And third, by using the word 'serve' Abraham is

illuminating how the cargo system is a duty, rather than a choice. When I asked Abraham,

what does 'to serve' imply he told me: *To serve basically is when you donate your time.*

Everyone who serves 'loses' a year of their time that they don't dedicate to their family or

job. In the city, I have never seen it but when you serve in the community, you know what you

are going for. It's wasting time, going to meetings etc. That explains why those who have

served, are considered worthy of respect and are positioned at the top of the social hierarchy.

---

[258]Abraham. Conversation with the author 10/10/2021.

The commissioner in charge, recurs to the old commissioners for advice for matters of importance for the benefit of the community.

Overall, research has shown successes of self-organized security and justice systems. Some researchers such as Martínez Sifuentes and Sánchez Serrano emphasize its ethnic character, considering it a struggle for the recognition of indigenous identity and culture,[259] others like Flores Felix, conceive it as a process of building local democracy to generate peaceful social coexistence in the communities.[260] Yet, for instance Gasparello proposes it as a struggle for autonomy[261] or González Chávez, as a decolonial struggle.[262] For Fuentes Díaz, "modernity has transformed the organization processes of communities; but new identities have emerged that combine tradition and innovation."[263] Yet, little has been said about how this model has been implemented outside rural indigenous communities.

Transnational forms of organization

In NYC as in Mexico, the community has remained as the basic structure, but it has been transformed, modifying its functions to adapt to a new place and communities' needs. In a public event, Abraham told the audience: *Many compañeros have had the courage and want to do things for the community. I call it community here not because we are in a community [in rural Mexico] but because all of us who are here, you and I, are making a community, in New York.* Abraham's view of the community away from home, is evidenced in the way the organization in NYC and Guerrero are structured.

---

[259] Martínez Sifuentes, 2001; Sánchez Serrano, 2012.
[260] Flores Felix, 2007.
[261] Gasparello, 2009.
[262] González Chávez, 2014.
[263] Fuentes Díaz. 2018. *Defender al pueblo,* 90.

I attended the meeting where delivery workers started to think about creating an

official committee. Abraham started: *If we are going to make a committee, we have to see*

who has what, what their skills are and how we can do things better. Rodri, who is from the

city, responded:

> Look, I see that you have different talents. I see that El Vocho makes a visual impact, as soon as you see him he conveys power, that's why I would put him as the image. Eduardo in my opinion is the one that does all the operations of the social media pages. He is the one who is involved 24/7 doing that. He could be responsible for our social media platforms. You [turning his head towards Abraham] have a projection to speak in front of people and people listen to you. And I have seen it, I have noticed it. You can be the one who speaks in front of everyone, right? You can be the one who speaks because you have that facility. You stand, you talk, and you have that gift. If you have that part dominated, you are the one who will speak.[264]

While trying to understand the committee structure and its similarities to the way

delivery workers are organizing in NYC, I asked Abraham whether the commissioner was a

mediator between the community and the state, I then continued:

> Ambar: So are you the commissioner here?
>
> Abraham: No, I don't consider myself the commissioner because I haven't been appointed. I don't want to impose myself and say, "listen to me because I'm the one who did this," no. I just hope that this gets structured. We have to have someone as leader because otherwise you will see that each one will pull in different directions because each person has a different vision. If someone else is appointed right now, I would still go to the meeting and give my point of view as a neighbor, as a citizen, as a member of the group.
>
> Ambar: But in the end, the commissioner is the one who decides where the movement is heading or aligned to, right?
>
> Abraham: Yes, but it is important that the commissioner also consult. I think it is very important to hold meetings every 15 days or so to reinforce our vision, as we do it back in the community.[265]

---

[264] Rodri. Conversation with Abraham, Eduardo and Marco. 01/07/2022.
[265] Abraham. Conversation with the author 10/10/2021.

In this conversation it is evident how Abraham strives to make clear how he's not the commissioner (as much as he wished to be appointed). Additionally, it crystallizes the way in which he's trying to implement what he learned in his community. Lastly, I want to point out to the importance of the participation of all members of the community, and how consulting to the members, to hear what the members of the community think about any decision, is highlighted as a core value to be a good leader.

Three basic values are generally reflected in the social and political organization of indigenous communities: respect gained through community service, the principle of reciprocity, and the communal voluntary work to maintain the community. For instance, Marco shared with me: *those from Washington Heights brought us two cakes on the page's anniversary and we were talking about how they deserve respect. The next time they have an activity we have the obligation to bring them three cakes to show reciprocity. Those are the customs of our communities.*[266] Thus, these values are preserved and cherished within the delivery worker's form of organization. The following quote that I heard during an event under the Willis, exemplifies it: *We are a volunteer group. We are the ones in the streets and we have to support each other because you don't know when it's going to be you who needs help. Everything that you see here today, has been donated by members of the community.* Rodri shared with me one day: *We are doing this free work, community work, this social work because we want to and because we see the problems that are in the streets.* The fact that Rodri said three times that it is a voluntary work reveals to me their ethos, but also how they are striving to construct their own narrative.

---

[266] Marco. Conversation with the author 10/20/2021.

Beyond reproducing and implementing equivalent modes of organization and its values, there are striking parallels in the way *delivreros* organize physical space. In NYC, strategic zones are taking shape, with groups forming in the UWS, Harlem, Washington Heights, and so on. This strategic division resembles how in Guerrero, *comisarios* represent different *colonias*. In the same way that in NYC there are many independent groups that constitute the *auxiliares comunitarios*, in Guerrero there are many *comisionados de colonias*. In this mode of organization, group dynamics are constantly changing: they merge, divide, recombine and reassemble both geographically and socially.

Both in Mexico and in New York, these self-organized groups have arisen due to the lack of support and response from the authorities. Abraham's comparison between two similar car accidents cases exemplifies it:

> They say that we are all the same here, but the reality is that we are not. Four days ago an accident happened at 12th Street and 2nd Ave. A motorcyclist was riding at full speed and crashed into a car. They were reviving him and what did they [police] do? They cordoned off the entire area, they closed the entire avenue and two patrols started looking for the car. And when the delivrero at Saint Nicholas died, do you remember that he died almost the same way? They didn't do that there. In the video one can see how they [the paramedics] picked him up and left but they didn't cordon off the area, nor they went to look for the car.[267]

This suggests to me that Abraham, as many indigenous delivery workers feel forgotten and ignored in both countries. Interestingly, much of the violence that they experienced has to do with mobility: they encounter more violence when they cross between communities in Mexico and between boroughs in New York.

Overall, I see the case of delivery workers as the ideal one to understand how these forms of social organizations are implemented outside of the place and situation for where

---

[267] Abraham. Conversation with the author 10/10/2021.

they were conceptualized and with that the interconnectedness of two distant places because, communal forms of organization had traveled from one generation to another, from one place to another. Community watches, social dynamics, and forms of organization in NYC don't exist in isolation but rather they're an attestation of a more complex history of indigenous communities' search for autonomy.

Migration as a medium

Migration is more than the visible movement of people; Migrants are not only moving physically but they are also moving ideas, knowledge and form of organization. Thus, people themselves can be thought of as a medium that moves knowledge between countries. I see migration as a communication process; a way in which knowledge and messages travel around the world creating an impact in new places. Through physical movement delivery workers are changing the social environment in which they live, turning themselves into 'the message' in the communication process.

The idea that migrants move knowledge has been recognized in academic discussions of diaspora. However, most of these discussions focus on transfer of scientific and technical knowledge through movement of people with higher education. Moreover, research from developed countries centers around exporting knowledge, but not about importing forms of organization as that can have an impact on the regions where new people arrive. My ethnographic research provides a broader perspective on the forms of knowledge that people travel with, and how they impact their new environment. From this perspective, I posit that migration is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, way in which ideas travel on a global scale.

Physical movement of ideas through people is the oldest form of communication over large geographic scales. Although technologies such as the telegraph were revolutionary due to their ability to separate communication from transportation.[268] Yet, people keep and will keep moving. In doing so, they are bound to keep transporting knowledge and ideas creating a transnational flow of information.

In a globalized society and with the internet, the idea that knowledge moves between countries very quickly permeates the mainstream narrative. But how is it different for ideas to move physically through people than digitally between countries? The difference is that people implement those ideas. I argue that the physical movement of ideas has different consequences than the digital one. In terms of social organization, it is clear that delivery workers' solidarity network has succeeded because they learned how to structure it and implement it. Had they read about it online, it is very unlikely that it would have succeeded because one needs to understand not only how it works but have the same values, culture and idiosyncrasy to make it work.

Final remarks

The case of delivery workers, their representation in mainstream media and New Yorkers perception of them in present NYC isn't new. In his thesis about city bike messengers, Kidder[269] tracks a history of media and societies' perception of couriers. In the mid-80s, when bike messengers increased, couriers became known as, "the speeding bane of New York's pedestrians and motorists."[270] The New York Times and other media outlets published articles attacking bicycle messengers. And even though, during the pandemic, the

---

[268] See Carey. 1989 "Communication as Culture."
[269] Kidder. 2004. "Alleycats, Fixies and Double Rushes."
[270] Lyall. 1987. "For Manhattan Couriers," 58.

New York Times have portrayed them as essential workers, the backlash that they receive in the streets is the same as in the past. New York Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward commented that messengers were, "...scaring the public to death, and we've got to do something about it."[271] Councilwoman Carol Greitzer summed up the prevailing attitude by saying, "There isn't a single person who doesn't have a horror story to tell about what happened or nearly happened to them."[272] Bob Levy, a columnist for the Washington Post, published a series of articles bashing DC messengers. "In my gentler moments, I've called them law-flouting, obscenity-spewing, bath-needing, wild-riding, pedestrian-smashing madmen."[273] Levy went so far as to accuse messengers of not only reckless riding, but causing an epidemic of bicycle theft throughout the city.[274] This history reveals how narratives, problems and actions repeat over and over in different epochs and situations.

I finish my thesis reaffirming that delivery workers aren't a passive and inconsequential byproduct of long-standing power asymmetries between countries. It is important to highlight that the context that leads a community to organize doesn't emerge overnight. The indifference of the state to complaints and insecurity has caused *delivreros'* tolerance to come to an end. *We've to do it ourselves, because if we don't do it nobody will.* This is what I heard every night that I was with them under the Willis, this is a reminder that keeps them going. Everything seems to indicate that the government won't solve the problem; meanwhile, local self-organized collective practices have proven to be a successful model both in Guerrero and NYC. *Courage is what's giving us the strength to continue. We've been here many hours and we're not going to get tired, because we're already tired,*

---

[271] Tommasson. 1991. "Fax Displacing Manhattan Bike Couriers."
[272] Levy. 1987. "Do Messengers Own Their Bikes?"
[273] Purdum. 1986. "Many Bicyclists Are Going Against the City's Grain."
[274] Levy. 1989. "Hope Amid the Spokes and Wheels."

but of injustice. Abraham told in a vigil to the attendees and media outlets that were documenting the event.

I started my thesis with a contextualization of the community of *delivreros'* where I conducted my research. I aimed to highlight the socio-economical and political forces that constantly position them at the lower level of the social class hierarchy. In doing so, my intention is to reveal the tensions and contradictions delivery workers experience and the way they pushed to change that narrative. For instance, as they struggle with racial, and class stereotypes, they cultivate identities as hard workers, and are willing to help their community, making them worthy of respect, a value that is praised in indigenous communities. Yet, by establishing reputations as hard workers, they continue reproducing racial and class stereotypes towards other marginalized communities. *Delivreros* are neither mere victims or criminals as mainstream media want to portray them, nor hard workers as they strive to tell. They are intricate humans who actively and creatively engage to make their lives better in New York.

In the first chapter, I discussed ways in which QuickDelivery uses gamification to introduce structure into a job that would seem unstructured and flexible from the outside. I argue that QuickDelivery is playing with uncertainty since it keeps workers connected and interacting with the app all day long, even when they're not working. These interactions occur before work starts, when couriers wake up and attempt to schedule a time slot to do deliveries, or when couriers that failed to secure a spot try their luck to catch an opening in the schedule. They occur during work, as delivery workers remain uncertain regarding the number of orders that they will receive. Lastly, they occur as the work day comes to an end, when couriers face uncertainty regarding the time the system will end their shift. Yet,

workers have found ways to cope with this app by understanding the rules and playing the system. Although masqueraded as play, what we observe in gig labor ultimately resembles long-standing tensions that characterized relations between companies and workers, including those that emerged within models of the Fordist era.

In the second chapter I examined how indigenous Latin American migrant delivery workers in New York City exercise agency, build community, and resist platform control through their use of digital social networks and communication technologies. Scholars[275] such as Gray, Rey, and Rosenblat have shown how the gig economy ecosystem is underpinned by long-standing tensions between companies and workers; here I argued that migrant delivery workers defy information and knowledge asymmetries by repurposing the technology that has been built as a means for control. Marginalized, misrepresented, or ignored by mainstream media and governmental actors, information and communication technologies (ICT) allow migrant delivery workers to bypass traditional channels, disseminate their own stories, and create community. I mapped how delivery workers communicate and engage collectively and with each other through digital platforms. My research revealed two main digital platforms that they have adopted to share information: one that operates inwards (Whatsapp), and another that operates outwards (Facebook). Both platforms fulfill multiple roles: from places of leisure to civic and political spaces; from media spheres for humor to open arenas to talk about taboo topics. Yet, I showed how these two forms of communication represent opposite sides of the spectrum between public and private communication, and between ephemeral and permanent information. Delivery workers use Facebook to live-stream accidents, upload information about bike robberies, and

---

[275] Gray 2019; Rey 2014; Rosenblat 2017.

document their everyday actions, whereas they use WhatsApp to communicate, coordinate, request help from their peers, and mobilize in real-time. I analyzed how public and private means of communication facilitate and constrain social forms of organization in contemporary times. Further, I built a typology of public and private messages to understand which (and how) information flows between WhatsApp and Facebook. I identified two objectives to workers' live-streaming on Facebook: it helps workers construct their own narrative, and it establishes public credibility and reputation. On the other hand, WhatsApp's groups provide a space to manage logistical issues and serve as a marketplace for transactions. These distinct layers of communication synergize to form a transnational distributed knowledge network and to shape and interpret the individual and collective identities of migrant delivery workers. In sum, this chapter illuminates how the flow of information through different spaces and times of everyday life-making experiences enables migrant workers to construct a place for subversion and negotiation with roles assigned to them by broader socio-political forces.

In the conclusion I pushed the idea that migration moves ideas, memories, knowledge, stories, and forms of organization. I finished this thesis thinking about migration as a medium. What we observe on the Willis mirrors what happens in Mexico. The *auxiliares comunitarios* in NYC? Are reminiscent of a long history of self-organized tactics, which have moved along with them.

We end this live-stream once again from here, under the Willis Bridge, making history. Thank you very much compañeros and let's keep going. [In the background one can hear Mexican music.] Eduardo

Bibliography

Ahuja, Kabir. et.al,. 2021. "Ordering in: The rapid evolution of food delivery." McKinsey and Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/ordering-in-the-rapid-evolution-of-food-delivery.

Bald, Vivek. 2013. *Bengali Harlem and the lost histories of South Asian America*.

Bartholomew, Jem. 2021. "Cold and Callous: The Uber Eats Algorithm is Sacking People Automatically," *The Big Issue,* August 4. Available at: https://www.bigissue.com /news/employment/the-uber-eats-algorithm-is-automatically-sacking-hundreds-of-peo ple/.

Baudrillard, Jean. 1998. *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. 55 City Road, London: SAGE Publications Ltd. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526401502.

Beltrán, Héctor. 2012. *Echándole Ganas Across Borders: Narratives of La Frontera Sur from the Everyday into the Mainstream.* Master Thesis. University of California, Berkeley.

Benítez, David and Gaussens, Pierre. 2019. *Por los Laberintos del Sur. Movimientos sociales y luchas políticas en Guerrero*. UAM Xochimilco.

Black, R.W. 2005."Online fanfiction:What technology and Popular Culture Can Teach Us about Writing and Literacy Instruction." *New Horizons for Learning Online Journal*, 11 (2) (Spring 2005).

Bogost. Ian. 2014. Why Gamification is Bullshit, In Walz, S. P. and Deterding, S. (eds) The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, pp. 277–296.

Briggs, Michael Alfred Shaw. 2019. *Smartphone compatible? Employment status in the gig economy.* LL.M thesis. University of Glasgow.

Bruns, Axel. 2008. *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second life, and Beyond: from production to produsage*. New York: Peter Lang.

Bucher, Taina. 2017. "The algorithmic imaginary: exploring the ordinary affects of Facebook algorithms." *Information, communication and society*, 20 (1), 30–44. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1154086.

Burawoy, Michael. 1979, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism*, University of Chicago Press.

——. 1985. *The politics of production: Factory regimes under capitalism and socialism*. Verso Books.

Butler, Sarah. 2017. "Deliveroo Wins Right Not to Give Riders Minimum Wage or Holiday Pay," *The Guardian,* November 14, www.theguardian.com/business/2017/ nov/14/deliveroo-couriers-minimum-wage-holiday-pay.

Caina, Bobby Calvan. 2021. "Food Delivery Workers, Ride-Share Drivers Demand More Rights". *ABC News*. https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/food-delivery-workers -rideshare-drivers-demand-rights-82606166.

Caillois, Roger. 2001. *Man, play and games*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Carey, James W. 1989. *Communication as culture: essays on media and society*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Castles, Stephen, and Mark J. Miller. 1998. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. New York and London: Guilford Press.

Casillas, Dolores Inés. *Sounds of Belonging: US Spanish-Language Radio and Public Advocacy*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.

Costanza-Chock, Sasha. 2014. *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets! Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement.* Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Chavez, Leo R. 2008. *The Latino threat: constructing immigrants, citizens, and the nation*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

Chen, Julie, Yulie, 2018. "Thrown under the bus and outrunning it! The logic of Didi and taxi drivers' labour and activism in the on-demand economy." *New media and society*, 20 (8), 2691–2711.

Cherry, Miriam A. and Aloisi, Antonio. 2016. "Dependent Contractors in the Gig Economy: A Comparative Approach" (October 22). 66 American Univ. L. Rev. 635 (2017), Saint Louis U. *Legal Studies Research Paper* No. 2016-15, Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2847869or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2847869.

Cohen, Jeffrey H. 2001."Transnational Migration in Rural Oaxaca, Mexico: Dependency, Development, and the Household." *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 4: 954–67.

"Collective Responsibility (Stanford Encyclopedia Of Philosophy)". 2005. *Plato.Stanford.Edu*. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/collective-responsibility /#MakiSensCollRespActiInteGrouSoli.

Collier, Ruth Berins and Dubal, Veena and Carter, Christopher. 2018. "Disrupting Regulation, Regulating Disruption: The Politics of Uber in the United States" (March 22). *Perspectives on Politics (*Forthcoming), UC Hastings Research Paper No. 280, Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3147296

Coutin, Susan Bibler, and Phyllis Pease Chock. 1995. "'Your Friend, the Illegal': Definition and Paradox in Newspaper Accounts of US Immigration Reform." *Identities* 2, nos, 1–2: 123–48.

Crac-pc. 1995. *Acta de acuerdo.* México.

Dale, Steve. 2014. "Gamification: Making work fun, or making fun of work?" *Business Information Review*, 31(2), 82–90. https://doi.org/10.1177/0266382114538350.

De Genova, Nicholas. 2002. "Migrant "Illegality" and Deportability in Everyday Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31:419-47.

De Genova, Nicholas, and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas. 2003. *Latino Crossings: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and the Politics of Race and Citizenship.* New York: Routledge.

De Stefano,Valerio. 2015. "The Rise of the 'Just-in-Time Workforce': On-Demand Work, Crowd Work and Labour Protection in the 'Gig-Economy'"*Comparative Labor Law and Policy Journal*, Available at http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2682602.

De Stefano, Valerio and Aloisi, Antonio. 2018. "Fundamental Labour Rights, Platform Work and Human-Rights Protection of Non-Standard Workers." *Labour, Business and Human Rights Law*. Legal Studies Research Paper No. 3125866, Available at http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3125866.

DeVito, Michael., Gergle, Darren., and Birnholtz, Jeremy. 2017. "'Algorithms ruin everything': #RIPTwitter, folk theories, and resistance to algorithmic change in social media." In: Proceedings of the 2017 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems (eds CHI 17 Conference Committee), Denver, CO, 6–11 May, pp.3163–3174. New York: ACM.

Dehouve, Daniele. 2001. *Ensayo de geopolítica indígena. Los municipios tlapanecos.* México: ciesas.

Deterding, Sebastian. 2019. "Gamification in Management: Between Choice Architecture and Humanistic Design." *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 28, 131-136.

Deterding, Sebastian and Khaled, Rilla and Nacke, Lennart and Dixon, Dan. 2011. *Gamification: Toward a definition*. 12-15.

Dragona, Daphne. 2014. "Counter-gamification: Emerging tactics and practices against the rule of numbers." In S. Fizek, M. Fuchs, P. Ruffino, and N. Schrape (Eds.), *Rethinking gamification* (pp.227–250). Lüneburg, Germany: Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Meson Press.

Dunn, Michael. 2018. *Making Gigs Work: Career Strategies, Job Quality and Migration in the Gig Economy.* PhD. Diss. University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

Dobler, Brian, Michelle Rodino-Colocino, Chenjerai Kumanyika, and Todd Wolfson. 2021. *The gig economy: workers and media in the age of convergence*. Abingdon: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group.

Escribano, Flavio. 2013. "Gamification versus ludictatorship." *Revista de Comunicación*, 5, 58-72. Retrieved from http:// revistadigitalis.uvic.cat/índex.php/obradigital/article/view/22.

Eslami, Motahhare. et al. 2016. "First I 'like' it, then I hide it: Folk theories of social feeds." In: *Proceedings of the 2016 conference on human factors in computing systems* (ed CHI 16 Conference Committee), San Jose, CA, 7–12 May, pp.2371–2382. New York: ACM.

Fertig, Beth. 2021. "Pandemic-Scarred Restaurants And Gig Workers Fight Back Against The Delivery Apps." *Gothamist*. https://gothamist.com/food/pandemic-scarred -restaurants-and-gig-workers-fight-back-against-delivery-apps?fbclid=IwAR0E5QIG _AcEo1bcSR6AbaGz-3l_a6d06j4kw0Chnugns_vJ1Jbr-K48tT8.

Fleming, Peter. 2005. "Workers' playtime? Boundaries and cynicism in a "culture of fun" program." *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 41 (3):285–303.

Flores Félix, J.J. 2007. *Reinventando la democracia. El Sistema de Policía Comunitaria y las luchas indias en el estado de Guerrero*. México: El Colegio de Guerrero, Plaza y Valdés.

Figueroa, Maria, et al. 2021. *Essential but Unprotected: App-Based Food Couriers in New York City*. Workers' Justice Project and Cornell University's ILR School., 13 Sept. https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/6c0bc951-f473-4720-be3e-797bd8c26b8e/091420 21CHARTSLos%20Deliveristas%20Unidos-v02.pdf.

Ferrari, Fabian and Mark Graham. 2021. "Fissures in algorithmic power: platforms, code, and contestation," *Cultural Studies*, 35:4-5, 814-832, doi:10.1080/09502386.2021.1895250.

Fuentes Díaz, Antonio, and Daniele Fini. 2018. *Defender al pueblo: autodefensas y policías comunitarias en México*.

Gajjala, Radhika. 2017. "The Problem of Value for Women's Work" *GenderIT*, www. genderit.org/node/4907/.

Gallardo García, Enrique David. 2012. "Lo Público En Los Procesos Comunitarios de Los Pueblos Indígenas En México." *Polis (Santiago)* 11 (31). Universidad de Los Lagos, Chile: 169–82. doi:10.4067/s0718-65682012000100010.

Gamio, Manuel. 1971. *The life story of the Mexican immigrant: autobiographic documents*. New York: Dover Publications.

García, Carlos. 2000. "Inventario de las organizaciones campesinas". In A. Bartra (ed.), *Crónicas del sur. Utopías campesinas en Guerrero*. México: Era.

Gasparello, Giovanna. 2009. "Policía Comunitaria de Guerrero, investigación y autonomía". *Política y Cultura*, núm. 32.

Georgiou, Myria. 2006. *Diaspora, identity and the media: diasporic transnationalism and mediated spatialities*. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press.

Gee, J.P. 2004.*Situated Language and Learning:A Critique ofTraditional Schooling*. NewYork: Routledge.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *Interpretations of Culture: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Gillespie, Marie., Herbert, David and Andersson, Matilda. 2010. "The Mumbai attacks and diasporic nationalism: BBC World Service online forums as conflict, contact and comfort zones." *South Asian Diaspora*. 2. 10.1080/19438190903542109.

Gillespie, Tarleton. 2006. "Designed to Effectively Frustrate: Copyright, Technology, and the Agency of Users." *New Media and Society* 8(4): 651-669.

Ginsburg, Faye. 2008. "Rethinking the Digital Age." *In The Media and Social Theory*, David Hesmondhalgh and Jason Toynbee, eds. Pp. 127-144. New York: Routledge.

Glickman, Willa. 2019. "What The Apps That Bring Food To Your Door Mean For Delivery." *The New York Review Of Books*. https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019 /09/20/what-the-apps-that-bring-food-to-your-door-mean-for-delivery-workers/.

González Chávez, L. 2014. "La policía comunitaria en Guerrero. Luchas decoloniales. Nuevos desafíos para la crac-Policía Comunitaria de Guerrero." *Pacarina del Sur* (en línea). Año 5, núm. 20.

Gomberg-Muñoz, Ruth. 2010. "Willing to Work: Agency and Vulnerability in an Undocumented Immigrant Network." *American Anthropologist* 112, no. 2: 295–307.

González, Juan. 2000. *Harvest of empire: a history of Latinos in America*. New York: Viking.

González Chávez, L. 2014. "La policía comunitaria en Guerrero. Luchas decoloniales. Nuevos desafíos para la crac-Policía Comunitaria de Guerrero." *Pacarina del Sur* (en línea). Año 5, núm. 20.

Goss, Jon, and Bruce Lindquist. 1995. "Conceptualizing International Labor Migration: A Structuration Perspective." *International Migration Review* 26 (2): 317–351.

Gray, Mary L., and Siddharth Suri. 2019. *Ghost work: how to stop Silicon Valley from building a new global underclass*. Harper Business.

Hernández, Gerardo. 2022. "Salarios En México: ¿Cuáles Son Los Trabajos Por Los Que Mejor Se Paga En 2022?". *El Economista*. https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/capitalhumano/Salarios-en-Mexico-Cuales-son-los-mas-altos-en-2022-20220404-0092.html.

Horta Cruz, Juan. and Sebás. Aburto Espinobarro. 2016. CRAC-PC. *El origen de la Policía Comunitaria. Montaña y Costa Chica de Guerrero*, México: S.E.

Instituto Federal Electoral. 1996. "Formas de Gobierno en las Comunidades Indígenas de México." *Portalanterior.Ine.Mx*. https://portalanterior.ine.mx/documentos/DECEYEC/vgn_ivestigacion/formas_de_gobierno_comunidades.htm.

Irizarry Aponte, Claudia. 2021. "Delivery Workers Cheer Restroom Access And Tip Transparency Alongside AOC And Chuck Schumer." *The City*. https://www.thecity.nyc/work/2022/1/23/22898143/delivery-workers-restroom-access-aoc-schumer.

Ivanova, Irina. 2021. "New York's Food Delivery Bicyclists And Drivers Demand More Workplace Rights." *Cbsnews.Com*. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/new-yorks-food-delivery-workers-demand-more-rights/.

Jenkins, Henry. 1992. Textual poachers: television fans and participatory culture. New York: Routledge.

——. 2009. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Kidder, Jeffrey. L. 2004. Alleycats, Fixies and Double Rushes: An Ethnography of New York City Bike Messengers. Master Thesis. The University of Georgia.

Kittler, Friedrich A., and Matthew Griffin. 1996 "The City Is a Medium." *New Literary History* 27, no. 4: 717–29.

Koen Breedveld. 1996. Post-Fordist Leisure and Work, Loisir et Société / Society and Leisure, 19:1, 67-90, Doi: 10.1080/07053436.1996.10715513.

Kücklich, Julian. 2005. "Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry." *Fibreculture Journal*.

Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network-theory*. ACLS Humanities E-Book. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lei, Y.-W. 2021. "Delivering Solidarity: Platform Architecture and Collective Contention in China's Platform Economy." *American Sociological Review*, 86(2), 279–309. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420979980.

Levy, Bob. 1987. "Do Messengers Own Their Bikes?" Washington Post, September 4.

_____. 1989. "Hope Amid the Spokes and Wheels." Washington Post, February 17.

Lopez, Sarah Lynn. 2010. "The Remittance House: Architecture of Migration in Rural Mexico." *Buildings and Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 17, no. 2: 33–52. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20839348.

López Bárcenas, Francisco. 2013. "Policías comunitarias, grupos de autodefensa y paramilitares", *La Jornada*, México, 22 de febrero.

Lyall, Sarah. 1987. "For Manhattan Couriers, Brakeless Bikes are the Way to Go." New York Times, June 14, pp. 58.

Macías, Saúl Enoé Gamboa. 2004. *Transmigrantes en Pueblayork: enclave étnico en el mercado de trabajo transaccional.* PhD. Diss. UAM Iztapalapa.

Mackay, Hughie. and Gillespie, Gareth. 1992. "Extending the Social Shaping of Technology Approach: Ideology and Appropriation," *Social Studies of Science* 22(4): 685-716.

Mainsah, Henry. 2014. "Young African Norwegian women and diaspora: Negotiating identity and community through digital social networks." *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture, 5*(1), 105–119. https://doi.org/10.1386/cjmc.5.1.105_1.

Martínez Sifuentes, E. 2001. *La policía comunitaria. Un sistema de seguridad pública comunitaria indígena del Estado de Guerrero*. México: Instituto Nacional Indigenista.

Marcus, George 1996. *Connected: Engagements with Media*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Mason, Sarah. 2018. High score, low pay: Why the gig economy loves gamification. The Guardian, 20. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018 /nov/20/high-score-low-pay-gamification-lyft-uber-drivers-ride-hailing-gig-economy

Massey, Douglas S., et. al. 1993 "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal." *Population and Development Review* 19, no. 3: 431–66. https://doi.org/10.2307/2938462.

Massey, Douglas. 2015. "A Missing Element in Migration Theories." *Migration letters : an international journal of migration studies.* 12. 279-299. 10.33182/ml.v12i3.280.

Marx, Karl. 1867. Capital: A critique of political economy. Volume 1, Part 1: The process of capitalist production. New York, NY: Cosimo.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 1963. *The poverty of philosophy*. New York: International Publishers.

Miller, Daniel. 2021. "A Theory of a Theory of the Smartphone." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 24, no. 5 (September): 860–76. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877921994574.

Miller, Daniel, et al. 2021. *The Global Smartphone: Beyond a Youth Technology*. UCL Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1b0fvh1.

Meyer, Lorenzo. 2016. "Nos Movemos ¿Hacia El Siglo XIX? Por Lorenzo Meyer". *Regeneraciónmx*. https://regeneracion.mx/nos-movemos-hacia-el-siglo-xix-por-lorenzo-meyer/.

Nedelcu, Mihaela. 2012. "Migrants' New Transnational Habitus: Rethinking Migration Through a Cosmopolitan Lens in the Digital Age." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* - 38. 1-18. 10.1080/1369183X.2012.698203.

Nelson, Richard K. 1969. Hunters of the Northern Ice. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nichols, Randy. 2021. "This is Gig Leisure. Games, Gamification, and Gig Labor" in *The Gig Economy. Workers and Media in the Age of Convergence.* Milton: Taylor and Francis Group.

NPR. 2021. "NPR Cookie Consent And Choices". *Npr.Org*. https://www.npr.org/sections /alltechconsidered/2014/06/07/319560646/stuck-in-the-machine-zone-your-sweet-tooth-for-candy-crush.

NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, *A Demographic Snapshot: NYC's Latinx Immigrant Population,* Oct 28, 2021. https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/immigrants /downloads/pdf/Hispanic-Immigrant-Fact-Sheet.pdf.

OAS. 1990. "ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS 1989-1990". *Cidh.Org*. http://www.cidh.org/annualrep /89.90eng/mexico9768.htm.

Oiarzabal, Pedro. 2012. "Diaspora Basques and Online Social Networks: An Analysis of Users of Basque Institutional Diaspora Groups on Facebook." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* - J ETHN MIGR STUD. 38. 1-17. 10.1080/1369183X.2012.698216.

Olszewski, Stephanie. 2021. "NYC Food Delivery Workers Face A 'Harrowing World' | Cornell Chronicle." *Cornell Chronicle*. https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2021/09 /nyc-food-delivery-workers-face-harrowing-world.

Peters, Enrique Dussel. 1998. "Recent Structural Changes in Mexico's Economy: A Preliminary Analysis of Some Sources of Mexican Migration to the United States," in *Crossings: Mexican Immigration in Interdisciplinary Perspectives,* ed. Suarez-Orozco, Marcelo M. London, England: Harvard University Press.

Pew Research. 2007. "2007 National Survey Of Latinos". *Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project*. https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2007/12/13/2007-national -survey-of-latinos/.

Ping Sun. 2019. "Your order, their labor: An exploration of algorithms and laboring on food delivery platforms in China," *Chinese Journal of Communication*, doi: 10.1080/17544750.2019.1583676.

Ponzanesi, Sandra and Leurs, K.H.A.. 2014. "On digital crossings in Europe." *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture*. 5. 10.1386/cjmc.5.1.3_1.

Portes, Alejandro. and Böröcz, Jözsef. 1989 "Contemporary immigration: theoretical perspectives on its determinants and modes of incorporation." *International Migration Review*, Vol 23, no. 3. *New York.*

Purdum, Todd S. 1986. "Many Bicyclists Are Going Against the City's Grain." New York Times, May 25.

Rader, Emilee, and Gray, Rebeca. 2015. "Understanding user beliefs about algorithmic curation in the facebook news feed." In: CHI'15 proceedings of the 33rd annual ACM conference on human factors in computing systems (ed CHI 15 Conference Committee), Seoul, Korea, 18–23 April, pp.173–182. New York: ACM.

Rey, P. J. 2014. "Gamification and Post-Fordist Capitalism", In Walz, S. P. and Deterding, S. (eds) *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, pp. 277–296.

Read, Jason. 2003. *The Micro-politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present*. Albany: State University of New York.

Rosenblat, Alex. 2019. *Uberland: How Algorithms Are Changing The Rules Of Work*. University of California Press.

Reshaping Work. 2018. "Juliet Schor - Dependence and precarity in the platform economy," YouTube Video, 00:30. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyA_ibtPZBU.

Rodino-Colocino, Michelle. 2008. "Technomadic Work: From Promotional Vision to WashTech's Opposition," *Work Organization, Labour and Globalization* 2, no. 1.104–16.

Rodríguez, Clemencia. "Citizens' Media in Latin America." In *Media Cultures in Latin America*. Routledge. 2019, 68-89

Rosenblat, Alex and Stark, Luke. 2016. "Algorithmic Labor and Information Asymmetries: A Case Study of Uber's Drivers." *International Journal Of Communication,* 10, 27, Available at http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2686227

Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press, 2018.

Sassen, Saskia. 2001. *The global city: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Schüll, Natasha. 2012. *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas*.

Schor, Juliet. 1991. *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline Of Leisure*. New York: Basic Books.

Seaver, Nick. 2017. "Algorithms as Culture: Some Tactics for the Ethnography of Algorithmic Systems." Big Data and Society, (December). https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951717738104.

Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, 2022. "Entra en vigor incremento al salario mínimo del 22%." [online] *gob.mx*. Available at: <https://www.gob.mx/stps/prensa/entra-en-vigor-incremento-al-salario-minimo-del-22?idiom=es>.

Sheller, Mimi and Urry, John. 2006. *Mobile Technologies of the City*. Routledge.

Smith, Robert C. 2006. *Mexican New York: transnational lives of new immigrants*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Smith-Nonini, Sandy. 2007. "Sticking to the Union: Anthropologists and "Union Maids" in San Francisco." *The Gender of Globalization: Women Navigating Cultural and Economic Marginalization*. Nandini Gunewardena and Ann Kingsolver, eds. Pp. 197–214. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press.

Stephen, Lynn. 2007. *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon*. Duke University Press.

Strangleman, Tim. 2007. "The Nostalgia for Permanence at Work? The End of Work and Its Commentators," *The Sociological Review* 55, no. 1: 81–103.

Suárez-Orozco, C., and Suárez-Orozco, M. M. 1995. *Transformations: Immigration, family life, and achievement motivation among Latino adolescents*. Stanford University Press.

Sun, Ping and Chen, Julie Yulie. 2021. "Platform labour and contingent agency in China." *China Perspectives* 2021(2021/1): 19–27.

Süsser, D., Roessler, B., and Nissenbaum, H. (2019). Online manipulation: Hidden influences in a digital world. *Georgetown Law Techonology Review*, *4*(1), 1-45. Retrieved from https:// georgetownlawtechreview.org/online-manipulation-hidden-influences-in-a-digital-world/GLTR-01-2020/

Tarnoff, Ben. 2019. "Platforms Don'T Exist." *Metal Machine Music (Newsletter)*. https://bentarnoff.substack.com/p/platforms-dont-exist.

Tassinari, Arianna, and Vincenzo Maccarrone. 2020. "Riders on the Storm: Workplace Solidarity among Gig Economy Couriers in Italy and the UK." *Work, Employment and Society* 34, no. 1 (February): 35–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017019862954.

Taylor, T. L. 2006. *Play between worlds: exploring online game culture*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

_____. 2018. *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*. Princeton University Press.

Taylor T.L. et. al. 2012. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Methods*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Timko, Peter, and Rianne van Melik. 2021. "Being a Deliveroo Rider: Practices of Platform Labor in Nijmegen and Berlin." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 50, no. 4 (August): 497–523. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241621994670.

Toff, Benjamin and Nielsen, Rasmus. 2018. "I Just Google It: Folk Theories of Distributed Discovery." *Journal of Communication*. 68. 10.1093/joc/jqy009.

Tommasson, Robert E. 1991. "Fax Displacing Manhattan Bike Couriers." New York Times, March 19.

Towey, Hannah. 2021. "New York Delivery Riders Have Formed Night Patrol Groups To Protect Each Other From Armed Thieves Stealing Their Bikes." *Business Insider*. https://www.businessinsider.com/nyc-delivery-workers-form-patrol-groups-riders-bike-robbery-theft-2021-9.

van Doorn, Niels and Julie Yujie Chen, "Odds stacked against workers: datafied gamification on Chinese and American food delivery platforms", *Socio-Economic Review*, Volume 19, Issue 4, October 2021, Pages 1345–1367, https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwab028.

van Doorn, Niels. 2017. "Platform Labor: On the Gendered and Racialized Exploitation of Low-Income Service Work in the 'On-Demand' Economy," *Information, Communication and Society* 20, no. 6. 907.

Woodcock, Jamie., and Johnson, M. R. 2018. "Gamification: What it is, and how to fight it." *The Sociological Review*, 66(3), 542–558.

Woodcock, Jamie, and Mark Graham. 2020. *The gig economy: a critical introduction*. Polity Press.

Woodcock, Jamie. 2021. *The Fight Against Platform Capitalism: An Inquiry into the Global Struggles of the Gig Economy*. London: University of Westminster Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16997/book51.

Wortham, S., Mortimer, K., and Allard, E. 2009. "Mexicans as Model Minorities in the New Latino Diaspora." Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs/212.

Zermeño, S. 1998. *La sociedad derrotada.* México: Siglo xxi.

Zizheng, Yu,. Emiliano Treré, and Tiziano Bonini. 2022 "The Emergence of Algorithmic Solidarity: Unveiling Mutual Aid Practices and Resistance among Chinese Delivery Workers." Media International Australia 183, no. 1 (May): 107–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X221074793.

Zlolniski, Christian. 2006. *Janitors, street vendors, and activists: the lives of Mexican immigrants in Silicon Valley*. Berkeley: University of California Press.