

**DELIVERY PLATFORM WORK IN A TURKISH CONTEXT: EXPLORING THE
EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND STRUGGLES OF ESNAF-KURYE**

by

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ABSTRACT

Delivery Platform Work in a Turkish Context: Exploring the Experiences, Challenges and Struggles of Esnaf-Kurye

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This dissertation explores the lived experiences, challenges, contradictions, and coping mechanisms of platform delivery workers, identified as *esnaf-kurye*, operating in Istanbul and engaged with three major platform companies in the food and grocery delivery sector: Getir, Trendyol, and Yemeksepeti. The research delves into how these workers experience, make sense of, and enact their *esnaf-kurye* position. It involves participant observation, in-depth interviews, and engagements spanning various contexts and timeframes, including workers' meetings, collective actions, internal discussions, and ongoing digital media research. The critical examination of these experiences uncovers a complex interplay with broader social (re)production relations, examining the intricate social, organizational, and gendered mechanisms in the reproduction of work, workers, and labor movements.

Arguing against technological determinism and the notion of a fully digitalized work control system, the dissertation underscores the essential control exerted over the workers through the predominant use of piecework as the payment method. Adopting a social reproduction lens, the study probes into the gendered dynamics of this predominantly male-driven service sector, asserting that workers' reliance on women's unpaid reproductive labor acts as a precondition for platforms offering only a partial solution to social reproduction.

The findings highlight the challenging work conditions within Turkish delivery platforms, characterized by extensive working hours, heightened risks of accidents and fatalities, low earnings, limited autonomy, arbitrary dismissals, diverse labor control methods, and a lack of protection, resulting in workers relying on their families for support. Consequently, the dissertation aims to draw attention to key issues such as labor subordination, lack of autonomy at work, demanding working hours limiting workers' social life and organization, and the absence of collective mechanisms for worker solidarity. These considerations are argued to be

pivotal not solely for the organization of *esnaf-kurye* workers but more widely for building a resilient and powerful labor movement capable of countering the deepening precarization of labor.

Keywords:

Platform Labor, Delivery Workers, Automation, Labor Control, Precarity, Social Reproduction, Esnaf-Kurye, Labor Movement, Istanbul, Turkey.



ÖZETÇE

Türkiye'de Teslimat Platformlarında Çalışma: Esnaf-kuryelerin deneyim, zorluk ve mücadelelerinin incelenmesi

Başak Kocadost

Sosyoloji, Doktora 16 Ocak 2024

Bu tez, gıda teslimat sektöründeki üç büyük platform şirketi olan Getir, Trendyol ve Yemeksepeti'ne bağlı olarak İstanbul'da çalışan ve *esnaf-kurye* olarak adlandırılan moto kuryelerin deneyimlerini, zorluklarını, çelişkilerini ve başa çıkma mekanizmalarını ele alıyor. Araştırma, bu işçilerin *esnaf-kurye* pozisyonlarını nasıl yaşadıklarını ve anlamlandırdıklarını inceliyor. Çalışma, geniş zaman aralığında çeşitli bağlamlarda gerçekleştirilen işçi toplantıları ile kolektif etkinlik ve eylemlere katılımcı gözlem, işçilerle derinlemesine görüşme ve dijital medya araştırması bulgularına dayanıyor. Bu deneyimlerin eleştirel olarak incelenmesi, iş, işçiler ve işçi hareketlerinin yeniden üretimindeki toplumsal, örgütsel ve cinsiyete dayalı mekanizmaları ve de bu mekanizmaların daha geniş toplumsal (yeniden) üretim ilişkileriyle karmaşık ilişkiselliğini ortaya çıkarıyor.

Teknolojik determinizme ve tamamen dijitalleştirilmiş bir emek denetimi nosyonuna karşı çıkan tez, platform işinde egemen ödeme biçimi olan parça başı çalışmanın işçiler üzerinde temel bir kontrol uyguladığını vurguluyor. Toplumsal yeniden üretim çerçevesini benimseyen çalışma, ağırlıklı erkek işçilerin çalıştığı bu hizmet sektöründeki cinsiyete dayalı dinamikleri inceliyor. Bu işçilerin emeğinin yaşadıkları hanelerdeki kadınların ücretsiz yeniden üretim emeğine dayanmasının, platformların toplumun yeniden üretimine kısmi bir çözüm sunmasının bir önkoşulunu oluşturduğunu öne sürüyor.

Bulgular; Türkiye'deki teslimat platformlarında çalışmanın çok uzun çalışma saatleri, artan iş kazaları ve işçi ölümleri, düşük kazançlar, işte sınırlı özerklik, keyfi işten çıkarmalar, çok çeşitli emek denetim yöntemleri ve işçilerin destek için ailelerine yaslanmalarına sebep olan koruyucu mekanizmaların yokluğu gibi özelliklerle karakterize olduğunu gösteriyor. Buradan hareketle tez; işçi tabiiyeti, işte özerklik eksikliği, işçilerin hem bir sosyal hayat kurmalarını hem de örgütlenmelerini zorlaştıran uzun çalışma saatleri ile işçi dayanışmasına yönelik kolektif mekanizmaların eksikliği gibi hususları irdeliyor. Bu meselelerin ele alınmasının, sadece *esnaf-kurye* işçilerinin örgütlenmesi için değil, aynı zamanda daha geniş düzeyde

emeğin giderek güvencesizleşmesine karşı dirençli ve güçlü bir işçi hareketi oluşturulabilmesi için kritik olduğu savunuluyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Platform Emegi, Teslimat İşçileri, Otomasyon, Emek Denetimi, Güvencesizlik, Toplumsal Yeniden Üretim, Esnaf-Kurye, İşçi Hareketleri, İstanbul, Türkiye.



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1. Introduction

On October 5, 2022, the streets of Florence bore witness to a 24-hour strike led by delivery workers advocating for improved health and safety conditions. This demonstration was prompted by the tragic death of Sebastian Galassi, a 26-year-old Glovo rider who lost his life in a road accident while on duty. The incident brought to the forefront the urgent challenges faced by delivery platform workers on a global scale. However, the day after, Galassi's family received an email from Glovo, an automated message dispatched almost 24 hours after the fatal accident, conveying: "We regret to inform you that your account has been deactivated due to non-compliance with the Terms and Conditions." The family, shocked and angered by the message, received an apology from Glovo shortly after, asserting it was "sent by mistake" and offering to cover funeral costs (GigEconomyProject, 2022).

At the age of 20, Bilal Şık, a Yemeksepeti delivery worker, tragically lost his life in a traffic accident in Mersin on October 22, 2023. His friends, demonstrating a powerful act of solidarity, gathered for his funeral and chose to abstain from work in a collective tribute. Subsequently, they convened for a press release at the cemetery, vehemently denouncing the *esnaf-kurye* system and expressing their anger over the escalating fatalities among delivery workers. In their statement, they emphasized, "We, as the working class, say to ourselves every day, 'we survived today as well,' yet carry that fear within us every moment." Despite this tragedy, the company offered no financial or moral support to the grieving family, neglecting even the basic gesture of condolences. Bilal's friends took it upon themselves to collect funds to assist the family. On the other hand, deeming the collective commemoration and display of solidarity provocative, the company applied pressure by initiating investigations and filing official reports on workers for allegedly organizing it.

This dissertation delves into the lives of delivery platform workers navigating similar serious trade-offs in Istanbul. It explores their experiences, challenges, and dynamics, aiming to illuminate their role in the changing landscape of (re)production relations.

The phenomenon of work mediated, organized, and governed through digital platforms has given rise to what is commonly known as the "gig economy" (Friedman, 2014), "platform economy" (Kenney and Zysman, 2016), or "on-demand economy" (Shapiro, 2018). These digital labor platforms are broadly categorized into two main groups (Scholz, 2016; De Stefano, 2016; Schmidt, 2017; Graham and Woodcock, 2019). The first group encompasses tasks

performed online or remotely by workers, commonly referred to as "online web-based platforms" (ILO, 2021), and also known as "crowdwork" (De Stefano, 2016). Within this category, there is a subset known as "microtasking," exemplified by platforms like Amazon Mechanical Turk. On these platforms, workers undertake elementary, repetitive, and fragmented tasks that are typically more cost-effective for corporations to outsource to human workers than to automate through Artificial Intelligence. Additionally, this group includes freelancer platforms like Upwork, Freelancer, or Guru, connecting clients with professionals offering a diverse array of services such as translation, design, consultation, and programming, among others. Consequently, this category encompasses work that demands varying levels of skills. The second group comprises traditional physical jobs performed in specific locations by workers, including transport, food and grocery delivery, as well as care and domestic work facilitated through applications. These platforms necessitate the physical presence of the worker at a specific location, leading them to be termed as "location-based platforms" (ILO, 2021) or "work-on-demand via app" (De Stefano, 2016).

Since this dissertation explores delivery platform workers, its primary interest lies in location-based platforms. The overarching strategy of these platforms, facilitated by venture capital investments, involves initially penetrating the market with competitive pricing tactics, extensive discounts, and promotions for customers, while luring a substantial workforce through enticing payment structures. It is only after securing a robust market position that these platforms gradually diminish workers' unit payments and exacerbate their working conditions (Shapiro, 2020).

Consequently, we can delineate three interconnected dynamics—investors, workers, and customers—that propel and sustain platformization. The involvement of these three forces in the platforms is also conditioned and shaped by broader socio-economic factors. Venture capital functions as a foundational resource for platform power, enabling and molding the business models and operations of these platforms (van Doorn and Shapiro, 2023). Against a backdrop of deteriorating working conditions in the labor market, declining wages, and high unemployment rates, platform companies seized upon these circumstances by initially presenting attractive prices and favorable working conditions. As a result, a significant number of workers transitioned to platform work, giving rise to a sizable customer base seeking personalized services in realms such as transportation, food, domestic work, and care through these platforms. This trend is also interwoven with broader issues like increasing

commodification, privatization of public goods and services, the expansion of market relations, and, consequently, the individualization of social reproduction. For a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of platformization, which encompasses economic, political, and social aspects, one must consider these three dynamics. However, this study places its primary focus on labor processes, social production and reproduction relations within the platform economy. While briefly addressing the monopolized tendencies of platforms at a descriptive level to provide information about the main platforms in Turkey, it predominantly examines platform work from the workers' perspective—exploring how they experience this work, how they reproduce themselves, and questioning its relations with broader social (re)production relations.

Platform workforce and labor relations

In the last two decades, the platform economy has experienced rapid growth, witnessing a remarkable surge in the global workforce participating in this sector. However, estimating the absolute number of workers on digital platforms is challenging. This difficulty arises not only due to the lack of a standardized description and conceptualization of platform work but also because traditional statistical methods face limitations in capturing online web-based platform labor. The nature of platform work, in general, poses difficulties for measurement (ILO, 2021). Statistics vary depending on whether they are based on surveys, tax returns, or specific reference periods. Despite these challenges, estimations exist. Although the number of workers in the platform economy remains relatively low, it has been growing in Europe and the United States since the 2008 economic crisis (Huws et al., 2018). Collins et al. (2019) also note a rapid increase in the United States. They found that the "1099 workforce" (the workforce earning income from non-employee work arrangements) increased by 1.9 percent from 2000 to 2016, reaching 11.8 percent of the total workforce, with more than half of this increase occurring between 2013 and 2016 alone. This growth is almost entirely attributed to the dramatic increase in workers on digital labor platforms.

Delivery workers represent a substantial segment of platform labor. As of 2022, the EU-27 countries had 28.3 million platform workers, with 24% engaged in delivery services, comparable to the 29 million individuals employed in manufacturing (Eurostat, 2022). The digital platform workforce in England and Wales nearly tripled between 2016 and 2021 (TUC, 2021). China witnessed a notable surge in digital platform workers, escalating from 50 million

in 2015 to 84 million in 2020, constituting almost ten percent of the country's employed population (CLB, 2023). The number of platform delivery workers alone reached almost 8 million in China (Du, 2022). In India, the platform economy demonstrated significant growth, engaging 7.7 million workers in 2020 (NITI Aayog, 2022: 3). Meanwhile, the Brazilian Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA, 2023: 5) reported that the total number of platform-based drivers and delivery workers reached 1.7 million people in Brazil in 2022.

Examining the working conditions of platform workers becomes crucial with the escalating numbers. Fairwork project¹ has achieved 353 platform ratings globally since its inception. Although their rating involves a more detailed methodology and operation, it is based on the following five principles: fair pay, fair working conditions, fair management, fair contracts, and fair representation, regardless of the workers' employment status. Less than half of the platforms ensure workers receive at least the local minimum wage after costs, provide transparent terms and conditions, and offer due process for decisions affecting workers. Furthermore, less than a quarter of platforms guarantee workers receive at least a local living wage after costs, provide a safety net, avoid imposing unfair contract terms, and ensure freedom of association and expression of workers' demands (Fairwork, 2023: 11).

However, there is a conspicuous absence of official statistics on platform workers, including delivery platform workers, in Turkey. Additionally, platform companies refrain from disclosing the number of workers they engage. Nevertheless, it can be argued that delivery platform work is a predominant form within the platform economy. In Turkey, a delivery platform worker is commonly referred to as "esnaf-kurye," where "esnaf" denotes individuals engaged in small-scale trade or craft. This term carries connotations of independence, business ownership, autonomy from a director or manager, and even the potential to establish and manage one's business, including employing workers. Unlike Uber's designation of "driver partners," many platform and application companies in Turkey use the term "esnaf-kurye" in their job postings, suggesting that portraying the work as a type of small-scale business holds social appeal.

¹ The Fairwork Project, launched in 2018 and coordinated by the Oxford Internet Institute at the University of Oxford and the WZB Berlin Social Science Center, is a network of more than 230 researchers spanning 38 countries worldwide. The project evaluates and ranks the working conditions of digital labor platforms and publishes country reports to promote fairer platform work.

The *esnaf-kurye* system has emerged as a predominant model not only within food and grocery delivery platforms but also across various sectors, including cargo, supermarkets, and e-commerce platforms in Turkey. It is noteworthy that, although not the primary focus of research, there is a significant presence of *esnaf-kurye* delivery workers who work with vehicles, such as cars, which they purchase themselves. Interest from both academic and political perspectives in this subject has only surfaced in recent years. Limited studies generally addressed the working conditions of delivery workers, especially with their increased visibility during the pandemic (ILO, 2022; IPA, 2021; Universus, 2021). In the case of the *esnaf-kurye* system, there is only one union research and a few of master's theses available (Boyacı, 2020; Kıdak, 2021; Ceylan, 2022; Asker, 2023). Given the crucial implications of platform work in the context of changing social (re)production relations within capitalism, the shifting meanings of work and the working class, and consequently the transformation of society in terms of work and life dynamics, it is evident that more extensive and comprehensive studies must be undertaken in this field. This study seeks to contribute to the newly emerging academic knowledge in this field.

The study centers on platform delivery workers in Istanbul, namely *esnaf-kurye*, working in Getir, Trendyol and Yemeksepeti, the three major companies within the food and grocery delivery platform sector. In this employment model, workers are officially classified as self-employed rather than employees. Under this arrangement, workers shoulder the responsibility for all costs related to the execution of their work and the reproduction of their labor. This includes the acquisition and maintenance of their vehicles, procurement of protective motorcycle gear, and covering fuel expenses. Additionally, workers bear the burden of assuming all associated risks and are required to manage payments for their health and social security coverage. While this arrangement shifts all financial risks and obligations onto the workers, it allows platform companies to sidestep investments in capital equipment and operational expenses. To legitimize their practices and obscure labor exploitation, these platform companies, positioning themselves as technology entities, assert their role as mere "mediators" of work, vehemently refusing to recognize themselves as employers or acknowledge an employment relationship. This strategic stance enables them to evade legal accountabilities tied to employer status and labor rights, avoiding responsibility even in cases of accidents or deaths.

While platform work tends to reduce labor to a collection of tasks, gigs, and pieces, one distinctive feature is the transformation of wages into a piece-rate payment system, replacing the conventional monthly wage structure. For delivery workers, this translates into a payment model based on the number of packages delivered. The imperative to deliver the maximum number of packages in the shortest time, coupled with companies' use of incentives such as bonuses, compels workers to extend their working hours in pursuit of a meaningful income. Notably, the piecework payment system exerts significant speed pressure on workers, leading to a deterioration in their health and forcing them to work even at the expense of their well-being.

In this employment arrangement, the financial insecurity of workers arises not only from assuming all the risks and costs associated with the job, such as accidents or health issues, but their wage also becomes contingent solely on their "performance." There is no wage security in this occupation; the wage is personalized, and the entire workforce is individualized. Consequently, the transformation of the nature and organization of work brought about by the platform economy alters social relations of (re)production to the detriment of workers and intensifies the commodification of labor. This implies a deepening precarity that manifests itself in both the labor process and the relations involved in production and social reproduction (Qi and Li, 2020)

The sector of platform delivery work, which we have outlined, stands out as one of the extensively scrutinized domains in the platform literature, alongside ride-hailing platforms. Nevertheless, the literature predominantly delves into the experiences of workers in these sectors within the Global North (ILO, 2021), with a primary focus on issues like algorithmic management and worker misclassification (Trappman et al., 2020). While companies leveraging technology and law in their favor is important in shaping platform labor relations, the extent to which frameworks built on these concepts illuminate the experiences of platform workers outside the Global North should be questioned. This study on delivery workers in Istanbul seeks to reconsider the questions related to issues such as labor control, workers' autonomy, agency, and organization within the realm of platform work by emphasizing critical aspects that these perspectives may have overlooked.

Some important contributions of the study

Firstly, unlike the noteworthy presence of migrant workers in many countries, it's crucial to emphasize the marginal role of migrants in platform delivery work in Turkey. In recent years, Istanbul, the main research setting of this study, has experienced a decline as a destination for internal migration. Legal constraints pose tremendous obstacles for immigrants from different countries seeking employment. Moreover, the platforms tend to not contract migrant workers, a situation exacerbated by an already high unemployment rate, a substantial available labor force, and an increasingly racist political climate in the country. Consequently, the delivery platform workforce is predominantly composed of male citizens. The study aims to explore the objective conditions and subjective factors driving these individuals towards platform work, with a focus on their prior work experiences. In doing so, it seeks to address a notable gap in the literature on platform economies, as highlighted by Vallas and Schor (2020: 285-6), by scrutinizing the systemic relationship between traditional economies and platform economies. Instead of treating the platform economy as an autonomous entity with its own set of rules, this study situates it within the broader socio-economic context, aiming to comprehend workers' orientations to engaging in platform work within the dynamics of this context.

The study also sheds light on facets of platform work that extend beyond algorithms, encompassing traditional labor management and control mechanisms including wage deductions, performance and bonus systems, and piece-rate payment, exacerbating the precarity of their labor. All these factors urge workers to work extensive hours, exerting more effort and taking more risks, thereby invalidating the promise of flexibility at work in practice. It underscores the pivotal role played by various managers at different levels - team leaders, warehouse supervisors, and regional managers - in labor management. These figures are particularly instrumental during periods of worker unrest and protests, serving to pacify reactions and control demonstrations. Moreover, supervisors, like those mentioned, dictate the daily or weekly work schedules, such as seen at Getir. Workers are compelled to labor for 12 hours a day. The average working hours for *esnaf-kurye* workers in Turkey already stand at 12.8 hours in Turkey (ILO, 2022: 15). Thus, the study underscores the absence of flexible working conditions and the substantial impact exerted by physical supervisors in the Turkish context. In other words, unlike the scholarship overestimating the digitalization of platform work, this study underscores the coexistence of more traditional methods of work control. It fundamentally considers the purpose of labor control and how it is experienced by workers, serving as a reminder that within a capitalist framework, work primarily involves economic and political control. Consequently, the study argues that it is more appropriate to discuss the

broader repertoire of control employed by platforms, rather than narrowly equating the platform economy with concepts such as 'algorithmic control.' This narrow focus also poses the risk of promoting technological determinism. A more rigorous conceptualization of the various forms of control is essential, taking into account the social embeddedness of platforms, which may differ across countries within larger systemic structures and dynamics.

The study makes a significant contribution by exploring a crucial yet often overlooked issue in the literature - the reproduction of platform workers (van Doorn and Shapiro, 2023). By extending the research from the point of production to their households, it sheds light on the reliance of delivery workers on their families, particularly on women's unpaid reproductive labor within the household. This dependence enables them to sustain extended working hours despite declining earnings and worsening working conditions. The argument posits that this gendered division of labor not only serves as a social precondition for platforms to offer only a partial solution to the problem of social reproduction through the market but also, conversely, reinforces the family unit through unequal gendered relations. This dual dynamic implies a social configuration characterized by simultaneous marketization and familiarism, grounded in the privatization of social reproduction - a dynamic aligned with the recent social policies of the Turkish government.

Research Questions and Objectives

The study aims to explore the local, lived and contested dimensions of platform economy within the Turkish context, problematizing the continuities and ruptures in the ways class positions and identifications are construed. It endeavors to elucidate the intricate wishes, perceptions, contradictions, and understandings of workers in their complexity, while closely examining the contextual and nuanced meanings they attribute to work, autonomy, control, and organization. Additionally, the research seeks to shed light on how workers' objective work conditions, alongside the broader socio-economic landscape, and their perceptions of self and community, shape their experiences at work, interactions with other workers, articulation of demands, and collective capacities within the realm of platform work. The study also explores the protective mechanisms relied upon for the reproduction of work, workers, and labor movements, as well as the limitations in front of their reproductions.

The exploration is guided by the following research questions:

- 1- How do workers experience, make sense of, and pursue their *esnaf-kurye* position in platform economy? How does it relate to the meanings they attribute to work and being worker?
- 2- To what extent do workers' understandings of autonomy, flexibility, control over their work and lives, and freedom conform or resist the work model established by companies, which also promises these notions?
- 3- How do workers' interactions and relationships with customers impact their self-identity, integrity, and judgment regarding the worth of their jobs? Additionally, what other dynamics influence their perception of the value of their work?
- 4- In an environment marked by increasing individualization and commodification of social reproduction, how do these reproductive workers in precarious conditions ensure their own reproduction?
- 5- How do the workers' perceptions of self and solidarity affect their relations with other workers, their demands, and the potential for collective action?
- 6- In what ways do delivery workers address shared challenges within the context of individualized and individualizing platform work? Which material, political, organizational, and social possibilities are considered or objected in this process?

Research Design and Methodology

The meaning attributed to work and the economic, social, cultural, or personal value attached to it has been a subject of extensive contemplation for me. These various understandings are shaped by prevailing social norms, individuals' racial, cultural, and gendered identities, their migrant position, their family background, social class, and consequently, their habitus. However, for individuals from lower classes, their ascribed meanings to work often do not empower them to lead their life trajectories accordingly, as they are primarily constrained by material conditions. Thus, work primarily signifies a necessity with limited room for choice.

Despite harboring aspirations of becoming a doctor and a journalist, my parents found themselves compelled to become teachers due to economic constraints. This was a result of the necessity to secure their livelihood, enabled by the regulation at that time that allowed them to receive a salary at the age of 17 upon graduating from a teacher training high school. Migrating

to Istanbul in the early 1980s, my family was assigned to Esenler, an urban poor district. My childhood unfolded there, amidst an environment where many children and young people of my age engaged in informal jobs like garment manufacturing in sweatshops, as the highest level of education most of them attained was completing high school. The contractors of these garment workshops were also our neighbors, earning much better than my parents.

My family actively guided me to pursue a good education and a professional career, aiming for me to continue the upward mobility story that they had initiated but could not continue due to material constraints. For instance, they would occasionally threaten to send me to work in a garment sweatshop if my dedication to studies waned. Consequently, at the age of 11, passing an entrance exam, I started education in the city center with children from higher social classes. I later attended a university widely acknowledged as prestigious, where admission was again based on high exam scores.

Alongside my education, starting from high school, I worked in the service sector, serving as a waiter in various establishments catering to customers from different social classes, along with engaging in various temporary jobs. Upon leaving Esenler, I started to live with friends. During all these processes, my environment has continually diversified in terms of many social, cultural, and economic aspects. While continuing my higher education, I sustained to work as a waiter, earning a weekly income. My life trajectory neither inclined me to prioritize the social status conferred by work, nor instilled the belief that the primary expectation from work is to earn a substantial income. Fundamentally, unlike the experiences of many girls in my childhood neighborhood, I did not find myself obliged to work in a garment sweatshop until marriage and then work at my family's house after marriage.

I managed with works that provided sufficient income, demanded minimal time, and afforded flexibility, allowing me more time for myself. I also enjoyed being a waiter, especially since it is a social and dynamic job, enabling me to interact with several different people. An office job that required regular work did not appeal to me, even though it potentially offered more status or income. Political approaches, aimed at transcending work in its capitalist form, while simultaneously assigning positive moral values to work under capitalism, the narrow focus on wage labor, and the assumed theological class consciousness, did not align with my perspective and experiences. My two-year master's study at Unicamp University in Brazil further enabled

me to refine and deepen my critical stance on global North-centric frameworks and the normative perspectives that emerge from them.

My feminist engagement has led me to recognize the significance of social reproduction for individuals and life. Simultaneously, it prompted me to question the forms of its social organization under capitalism, the inequalities these forms rely on and perpetuate, and the various dynamics and complex relations that devalue reproductive labor. Finally, during the pandemic, amidst debates about essential work, the increased visibility of delivery workers introduced me to the *esnaf-kurye* system. This, combined with my expanding reflections and interest in work within capitalist society over the years, has emerged as a research field that I could and wished to explore informed by the intricate social dynamics and articulations that I have also experienced, albeit in different ways. These reflections have significantly influenced not only my research's thematic focus but also its design, methodology, and the different ways I employ in analyzing my research material. I approach my research in a dialogical and situated manner, where my positionality is not only acknowledged but also serves to explain my reflexive methodologies. In essence, they have shaped not only the substance of my research but also the way I position myself within it.

I initiated this research in November 2021 by establishing contact with the Tourism, Entertainment, and Service Workers' Union (TEHİS), which represents *esnaf-kurye* workers. TEHİS organized the first action in this sector in March 2021 in Istanbul, addressing the increasing number of worker fatalities occurring among delivery workers while on duty. My primary objective was to understand the field and familiarize myself with workers. After establishing relationship with individuals in TEHİS, I actively started to contribute to the union's activities, including its organizational efforts for *esnaf-kurye* workers, events preparations, and action organizations. As a TEHİS volunteer, I participated in international meetings where unions from around the world, engaged in organizing platform workers, were present. I also took part in the establishment process of the Motorcycle Delivery Workers Association (Motorlu Kurye İşçileri Derneği) initiated by the same union. Additionally, I formed connections with the Courier News (Kurye Haber) team. Subsequently, I contributed to projects, including research and report planning and preparation, undertaken by the Delivery Worker Rights Association (Kurye Hakları Derneği) established by them. Over time, I expanded my familiarity with other organizations in the field and established interactions with individuals associated with those organizations.

I followed the strike of Trendyol Express *esnaf-kurye* workers, who perform deliveries using their cars, in January 2022. The strike increased public awareness of the *esnaf-kurye* working system in the country. Subsequently, I actively participated in the struggle of Yemeksepeti delivery workers, who were platform workers in employee status, during February and March. In January 2023, I closely monitored the protest process of Trendyol Go *esnaf-kurye* workers. Throughout these periods of activism, I had the chance to engage in conversations with numerous delivery workers. Additionally, I attended meetings related to delivery workers' fatalities or addressing companies that engage in unfair payment practices. This allowed me to establish connections with delivery workers from more diverse backgrounds.

This long and extensive immersion in the field allowed me to explore its complexities in detail, establish rigorous relations and build an accountable trust. Importantly this immersion informed the study design. For instance, the prior knowledge I obtained from observations and lengthy conversations played a crucial role in shaping the interview guide. My engagement in the field helped me to understand the nuances, grasp both workers' diverse subjectivities and positioning, and identify shared challenges and common perceptions. It allowed me to form the interview guide based on primarily data I gathered in the field, rather relying on solely dominant questions in the literature. Additionally, it equipped me to conduct interviews in a genuinely in-depth manner, being prepared for potential responses from workers and ready to open up productively in a dialogue.

This relatively long start and my endeavor to be open about my situated reflections and for new ideas and contestations have also enabled me to navigate as a woman in a men-dominated profession. In other words, as a woman in a homosocial world of predominantly young men, I could for instance explore the different meaning makings about masculinity in a relation to my gendered position in the field. This has not been a straightforward process, it rather encouraged me to further explore the complexities of gendered positions and dimensions of for instance platform work and social reproduction, among others.

Despite the three major actions mentioned above encompassing a broad and heterogeneous profile of workers, I conducted regular digital media research to ensure that the dissertation is not limited to workers I met only through actions, meetings, and workers' organizations. To understand the scope of functions of these groups and how workers self-organize, I joined delivery workers' social media groups. Additionally, to comprehend the discussions and tension

lines among workers, I followed online forums, social media accounts of workers' organizations and companies, relevant YouTube broadcasts, and all the comments and correspondences underneath them. Thus, I believe I was able to capture, at some level, the perspectives of workers who did not participate in actions or any rights-seeking initiatives and were not clustered around existing organizations in my research.

After familiarizing myself with the field and establishing relations with workers, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with a total of 25 platform delivery workers engaged with three major companies in the sector: Getir, Trendyol Go, and Yemeksepeti. The interviews were conducted on workers' days off, each lasting between 2-3 hours. I followed a purposeful approach in selecting workers for interviews considering several factors. I spoke with two female and two immigrant workers. In choosing the remaining male citizen workers for interviews, I aimed for diversity by considering factors such as age, marital status, parental status, working districts, education levels, start of work, contract directly with companies or through subcontract companies, political views, and participation in activism. Subsequently, I met and conversed with some of the workers' spouses, gaining more information about the workers' households. These choices were not made with the aim of asserting a comprehensive representation by claiming to include all workers. Instead, they were intended to comprehend potential particularities and differences alongside commonalities, taking into account the diverse positioning of workers. The goal was to expand the frame to capture contradictory dynamics and their relationality, even if it may complicate the clarity of the picture, hence purity of the arguments.

Throughout the field research, I consistently shared my observations, field notes, the debates I followed in online forums, the news I received with workers, union, and association members, and maintained communication with them. I actively sought their opinions, participated in discussions, and relayed the worker experiences to other workers while inquiring if they had encountered similar situations. I revisited identical discussion points on various occasions and at different times. Ultimately, the analysis of the data gathered involves an extensive review process, tracking repetitions temporally and spatially, judging when they have reached saturation, and checking them towards verifying the formations of the findings.

As a result, the study encompasses extensive participant observation, lengthy conversations, and engagements in various contexts and timeframes, including workers' meetings, collective

actions, internal discussions, and social media interactions. Throughout the research, I interacted with workers from diverse backgrounds. The observations derived from participant observation, informal conversations, and involvement in activism informed the preparation of my in-depth interviews. The experiences shared during these interviews prompted me to revisit the field to better situate these data and form the findings, encouraging me to question my preliminary results. To ensure the anonymity of the interviewed workers, I chose to use pseudonyms. When quoting their statements, I included the Turkish originals in the footnote, particularly for expressions with sociolect and connotations specific to the Turkish context, aiming to provide a more nuanced understanding of the workers' perspectives. While the content in online forums is publicly available, I refrained from specifying the Turkish originals of workers' words quoted from these forums.

Chapters

The second chapter contextualize precarity and technological change as fundamental processes inherent to capitalism, historically embedded differently across countries. This framing is crucial for properly situating platform work and comprehending the dynamics it generates in the Global South. The chapter begins by providing an overview of the concept of precarity in the social sciences. It proceeds to critique the prevailing conceptualization of precarity as a negative definition, arguing that it finds meaning only in opposition to specific historically and socially situated experiences, primarily within post-war, post-Fordist advanced capitalist countries. The second section of the chapter challenges the portrayal of technology as a neutral and inevitable force. The discussion highlights that, on the one hand, the increased capacity of technology has not resulted in the predicted "end of work," and on the other hand, the emergence of platform work, where individuals engage in extended hours at piece rates, cannot be considered an inevitable consequence of technological progress. The final section discusses the contested meanings of platform work in the Global South. In summary, the chapter concludes that while platform work tends to reduce labor to a collection of tasks, gigs, and pieces, transforms wages into piecework. This is driven by platform companies expanding their control over workers through the restructuring of work organization and leveraging technology to their advantage. Essentially, the transformation brought about by the platform economy alters social relations of (re)production to the detriment of workers and intensifies the commodification of labor, deepening precarity.

The third chapter discusses views on the supposed distinctiveness of platform companies that underpin the separation of the platform economy from conventional capitalist labor relations. First, it scrutinizes arguments suggesting the dominance of these platform companies in the economy resembles a form of feudalism, asserting that such viewpoints fail to grasp the operations of these companies. Shifting focus in the second section, the chapter examines the misclassification of platform workers as independent contractors, a strategy employed by companies to obscure labor exploitation and deny workers' rights. By analyzing lawsuits filed by workers and trade unions against platform companies regarding the employment status of platform workers, especially in the Global North, this section identifies patterns in litigation outcomes across countries. Acknowledging variations in platformization within national contexts, it argues that the uberization of labor relations is shaped by economic, social, and political power relations. Illustrative cases highlighting the political dimensions of the platform economy emphasize the limitations of relying solely on the misclassification framework to challenge the corporate power of platforms and secure workers' rights. The final section addresses the recent surge of e-commerce and digital platforms in Turkey, introducing key platform companies in the country and providing a descriptive analysis of the food and grocery delivery sector, emphasizing the rapid platformization of the Turkish economy.

The fourth chapter presents the study's findings on labor relations within the food and grocery delivery platform in Turkey, with a specific focus on three major companies in the sector: Getir, Trendyol, and Yemeksepeti. It delves into the workers' orientations to become *esnaf-kurye*, exploring their prior work experiences within the broader socio-economic context of the country. The chapter aims to uncover the nuanced meanings attributed to being *esnaf-kurye*, being a worker, and the nature of the work itself. It thoroughly examines various challenges workers faced, including work-related diseases, accidents, and fatalities, the piece-rate payment system, company-provided incentives such as bonuses and promotions, and the effects of this work model on workers' perceptions of their colleagues and collectivity. The chapter explores how workers' relationships with customers impact their self-identity, integrity, and judgment regarding the worth of their jobs. It also touches on how workers' masculinity is both (re)produced and (re)formed within this work context. Additionally, it critically evaluates the accuracy of framing the platform economy through the concept of 'algorithmic management,' demonstrating a broad repertoire of control mechanisms employed by companies, including the important presence of physical supervisors in the case of this study.

The fifth chapter scrutinizes platform work through the lens of social reproduction, exploring how this male-dominated sector ensures their reproduction. It directs attention to workers' households, delving into the gender relations and gendered division of labor that both shape and are shaped by delivery platform work in Istanbul. The argument unfolds by demonstrating that workers' reliance on the family, specifically on women's unpaid reproductive labor within the household, enables them to sustain extended working hours despite declining earnings and worsening working conditions. The contention is that this gendered division of labor serves as the social precondition for platforms to offer only a partial solution to the problem of social reproduction through the market. The chapter examines the significant absence of women from the paid workforce in the households of delivery workers, contextualizing it within the inadequacies of elderly and childcare services and their gendered nature in Turkey. The chapter also explores how the increasing commodification and monetization of life affect these households, workers' perceptions, relationships, and overall lives. The circumstance where delivery workers endure extended work hours with a heightened risk of accidents and even death, coupled with the absence of entitlement to paid leave and the obligation to cover their social security premiums, signifies a precarious situation that impacts both their present and future. It delves into the challenges faced by delivery platform workers, who find themselves compelled to relinquish basic health security, forfeit their social insurance rights, and incur debts within the examination of the broader context of the recent transformation of the health system in Turkey. Consequently, the chapter posits that the phenomenon of delivery platform work in Istanbul embodies a neoliberal-conservative coalition (Cooper, 2017) grounded in the privatization of social reproduction. This configuration reflects a dynamic aligned with the Turkish government's recent social policies characterized by both familism and marketization, standing as a significant obstacle to the collective appreciation of care.

The last chapter scrutinizes workers' collective coping mechanisms, building collectivity, cooperation modalities, organizational forms, and ways of resistance. In essence, it explores the realm of collective action, delineating its potential and constraints. It also explores the possibilities of a long-term, consistent, and self-reproducing collective capacity that can capture the subjectivity of *esnaf-kurye* workers. Consequently, the chapter emphasizes the crucial necessity for an organizational perspective that takes into account both the material conditions of workers — where work consumes a significant portion of their time, dominating their lives in an increasingly monetized environment — and their expectations from work. This perspective entails addressing critical issues such as stringent subordination relations, lack of

autonomy at work, a demanding working regime that allows no time for living, let alone organizing, the absence of collective mechanisms for workers to depend on, and the challenges arising from movements' limited self-reproductive capacity, which complicates the organization of workers. These considerations are argued to be pivotal not solely for *esnaf-kurye* organizations, but also for the development of a resilient and powerful labor movement positioned to counter the escalating trend of precarization.



2. Framing the Platform Work: Developing Technology, Precarizing Labour

When a new phenomenon is identified in social sciences, and scholars begin to try to define it with new concepts related to it, it is often questioned how genuinely new this phenomenon is. The platform economy is no exception in this regard. Scholars have argued that platform economy is not entirely novel, asserting that its foundations were established within the broader process of work precarization in recent decades (Abílio, 2017; Collier et al., 2017; van Doorn, 2023; Huws, 2017). Within this context, platform workers are regarded “as a crystallization of a more general process of precarity” (MacDonald and Giazitzoglu, 2019: 2). Furthermore, it was suggested to study platform economy by locating it “as a subtype of precarious work” since the challenges it presents are “old problems in new forms and from new sources” (Montgomery & Baglioni, 2020).

In the platform economy, laboring bodies bear all the risks and costs of the work, while the enjoy the conveniences of technology, effortlessly placing orders with a simple click. Financialized companies, leveraging the latest technology, engage workers through on-demand, piece-rate contracts facilitated by platforms. By identifying as technology firms and positioning themselves as mere "mediators", the companies thus neither recognize themselves as employers nor acknowledge that there is an employment relationship. In other words, in platform economy, technology is accessed, used, and experienced by various actors in distinct ways.

The fact that platform work is done through digital platforms using cutting-edge technology, that is, the alleged level of development, does not align with the working conditions. The platforms, in this regard, enable the continuation of traditional labor extraction strategies deeply embedded in capitalism (Stanford, 2017: 396). From a historical and global perspective, it is crucial to acknowledge that non-wage labour, piecework, subcontracted self-employment, temporary or casual work, home-based work have always been inherent in capitalism. Platforms, by integrating "the latest digital technologies with organizational, managerial and discursive strategies in order to optimize the use of labour for capital", represent the latest manifestation of the capitalist labor process (Haidar and Keune, 2021: 3).

This chapter grounds precarity and technological change as central processes inherent to capitalism, historically embedded differently across countries. This framing of precarity will enable us to properly situate platform work and understand the dynamics it engenders in the Global South. For this end, the first section of this chapter provides a concise overview of the concept of precarity in the social sciences. It is followed by a critical examination of dominant conceptualizations of precarity, including a discussion of precarity's "newness" as a social phenomenon. The argument here asserts that the conventional understanding of precarity relies on a flawed conceptualization of class, treating the working class as a homogeneous group rather than acknowledging its diverse segments, thus perceiving precarity as a new class formation. By reaching for a synthesis of these critical perspectives on the concept of precarity, the chapter proposes understanding precarity as a dynamic process inherent to capitalism. The argument is thus for a definition of precarity within the context of both production and social reproduction relations, considering temporal, spatial, organizational, social, and political dimensions.

The question of the social centrality of work in contemporary capitalism emerges precisely from these discussions, which have identified the inadequacy of existing theoretical perspectives. Therefore, the second section of the chapter is devoted to the debate on the role of work in the rapidly advancing realm of technology. It argues against the idea that technology heralds the end of work, emphasizing instead the emergence of a complex workforce composition that includes a growing number of individuals engaged in precarious forms of work, such as platform work. Opposing the portrayal of technology as a neutral, inevitable force, it focuses on how technology is reshaping labour processes by changing the nature and organization of work, and the division of labour within capitalism.

After having critiqued the Eurocentric conception of precarity and the techno-determinist view - both overlook the political, social, and gendered aspects of work that historically shaped differently across countries - the final section of the chapter scrutinizes how platform work in the Global South can be understood through the concept of precarity.

2.1. Precarity as the Historical Condition of Labor

2.1.1. The Trajectory of the Concept of Precarity

In the last few decades, the concept of precarity has received significant attention in the social sciences. The use of the term has even reached into the public sphere, becoming current among intellectuals and activists. In such settings, the concept often appears alongside related terms such as precariousness, precarization and precariat, sometimes used interchangeably. In the context of economic crisis and rising unemployment, precarity has even been addressed by financial institutions and governments.

Precarity as a sociological concept in academic literature was first used in the field of Family Sociology with regard to “new poverty” in France in the late 1970s². “Précarité” denoted the deterioration of the social conditions of families alongside a rise in problems such as dissolving solidarity, vulnerability, and poverty (Mauricio, 2015). In the early 1980s, precarity started to be studied as a social status in a broader framework becoming associated with new employment forms (Barbier, 2002: 6-7). From the late 1980s onwards, not only in France but in most advanced capitalist countries, the application of the terms precarity, precarious work/employment, and precarization became increasingly prevalent in the social sciences to explain the transformation in employment relations within the ascendance of neoliberalism - a transformation based on increasing commodification and expansion of market relations through the liberalization of trade and financial markets, and the privatization of services. In this context, the organization of work and the composition of the labor force changed significantly. Irregular, low-paid, temporary, short-term contracted, “atypical” jobs began to spread as the new employment forms within a more heterogeneous labor force, including women and migrant workers. The concept of precarity came to the fore in this environment, leading to debate on how to define, classify and analyze it.

The study of Gerry and Janine Rodgers (1989) is often referred to as the first English publication which attempts to conceptualize precarious work. They defined precarity as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, involving factors such as the degree of certainty of continuing work,

² To explore the earlier singular usages of the term associated with the Marxian concept of lumpenproletariat, consult Pierre Bourdieu’s book “Travail et travailleurs en Algérie” (1963) and Italian economist Paolo Sylos Labini’s article “Precarious Employment in Sicily” (1964) and book “Saggio sulle Classi Sociali” (1974) (Betti, 2018: 278-9).

control over work, degree of protection (both by law through social protections and by collective organizations), and income level. In other words, their approach considered precarious jobs in temporal, organizational, social, and economic terms. The phenomenon of rising insecurity, instability, and social and economic vulnerability from the perspective of labour has been treated diversely ever since, in terms of the labour condition as “precarious employment” (Vosko, 2006; Vosko et al., 2009), in terms of the polarization of the labour market as “good jobs and bad jobs” (Kalleberg, 2011), and the emergence of a new class as “precariat” (Standing, 2011).

In line with Rodgers’ conceptualization, Vosko et al. (2009) understand precarity as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. They object to usages that equate precarity with a specific form of employment, such as temporary work, without considering it in terms of a deficit in multiple forms of labor security. They emphasize that even a low-paid full-time worker without any social protection experiences precariousness in employment.

Campbell and Price (2016) also point out the need for a clarification of the conceptualizations by distinguishing between “precariousness in employment”, “precarious work” and “precarious workers”. The concept of “precariousness in employment” refers to objective job characteristics, while “precarious work” implies a constellation of different elements of precariousness in specific jobs. Kalleberg (2011) terms these jobs as “bad jobs”, highlighting a polarization process in the American labor market from the 1970s to the 2000s in terms of job quality. He asserts that job quality encompasses not only objective material elements like wage levels, social security, and benefits but also subjective aspects such as control over work, job satisfaction, and autonomy. Finally, “precarious workers” refer to the shared social and political attributes, aligning with Guy Standing’s concept of the “precariat” as the emerging class, which will be discussed in detail in the following section of the chapter.

In the late 1990s, the concept of precarity evolved beyond the study of work to encompass a more comprehensive analysis of society. It no longer solely pertains to insecure positions within the labor market but reflects the broader contemporary social condition. Bourdieu (1998: 82) notes that “precarity is now everywhere,” leading to the “destruction of existence,” characterized by the erosion of temporal structures and an overall deterioration in the relationship with the world, time, and space. Similarly, Bauman (2000) characterizes this

phenomenon as the articulation of the experiences marked by insecurity regarding social positions, entitlements and livelihoods, and uncertainties about the future, lacking safety in terms of self, possessions and community (161). In this context, individuals lose control over their lives and the ability to construct their future, as precarity infiltrates every social aspect, not just in the present but also in the future.

Grasped in this way, precarity is claimed to pose a “new social question”. Robert Castell (2003) underscores this situation, asserting that the precariousness of labour reaches into the previously stable employment zones. He contends,

Just as the pauperism of the nineteenth century arose out of the heart of the dynamic of early industrialization, so too does the precariousness of labor arise from a central process, driven by the new technological-economic imperatives at the very heart of modern capitalism. This is more than enough to pose a ‘new social question’ of the same magnitude and centrality (387).

During the late 1990s, precarity emerged as a focal point for political protests, notably within the Marxist autonomist movement. Its introduction as a political tool began with the MayDay demonstration in 2001 in Milan and later expanded during the 2005 EuroMayDay events across different European countries (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005). The objective was to create an alternative to traditional MayDay events by mobilizing precarious workers outside the purview of traditional trade unions and advocating for social rights essential to the emerging subject crucial to neoliberal production (Foti, 2004). In this period, various collectives and activist networks were established, such as *Les Intermittents* (referring to those working intermittently) in France in 2003 and *Precarias a la Deriva* (a feminist militant research group) in Spain in 2004.

This indicates that the concept of precarity had evolved into a tool for political organization. Viewing precarity as a process of subjectification, these movements embraced it, affirming its potential to foster imaginations of commonality and build multiple alliances with migrants and women (Casas-Cortés, 2014). In essence, rather than regarding precarity as an unfavorable condition for workers and their organizations, the emphasis was on its political potential for collective action within a commonality of a new multiple subject that precarity could engender.

The concept of precarity gained widespread attention not only among various disciplines of the social sciences, intellectuals, and activists but also, within the context of the early 2000s economic crisis and rising unemployment, financial institutions and governments began addressing precarity through public policy debates. International organizations conducted cross-country comparative research, organized symposiums, and published reports on the issue (European Commission 2004, 2012, 2016; ILO 2012, 2013). These reports identified growth in the number of precarious workers in the European Union and OECD countries.

In the fight against precarious work, these reports advocated for the promotion and monitoring of existing labor standards - Conventions and Recommendations adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and European Union legislations, in the form of Directives - and further regulation. Key aspects such as the right to collective bargaining and the existence of a minimum wage are deemed essential as they apply to all workers. Additionally, the reports called for the development of new regulatory instruments tailored to different forms of precarious work to ensure the social protection of precarious workers.

In recent years, the concept of precariousness has become a focal point in anthropological studies. Following Judith Butler's work, "Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence" (2004), precarity began to be understood as the shared human experience of vulnerability. It characterizes the general condition of being exposed to vulnerability due to a lack of security. Within this broad framework, precarity is seen as life without stability or as the fundamental aspect of human existence, given the incapacity of human beings to control certain major events such as death (Shaw and Byler, 2016). However, studies that address precarity on an ontological level often fall short in providing the concept with explanatory power. The loose use of the concept in reference to a universal human condition tends to diminish the term's significance, which it gained in specific contexts.

Millar (2017: 4-5), indeed, observes that Butler's investigation into ontological precariousness has significantly shaped the literature on precarity in anthropology, even though she never employs the term "precarity" in her 2004 collection of essays. Millar highlights that Butler later distinguishes between two concepts: precariousness, representing the unavoidable vulnerability inherent in our sociality, and precarity, indicating specific ways in which socio-economic and political institutions unevenly distribute the conditions of life. Moreover, Millar underscores that even before Butler directly engaged with the concept of precarity, her notion of ontological

precariousness inspired two separate applications, albeit seemingly related, of the term. The first, as mentioned earlier, and the second, which grounds precarity in the analysis of political-economic structures, explores how these material conditions shape subjectivities and lived experiences. In simpler terms, it involves "linking the study of political economy with questions of culture, subjectivity, and experience." Recent rich ethnographic studies, including insightful work by Campbell (2018), Hann & Parry (2018), Lazar & Sanchez (2019), and Molé (2010), along with Millar's own study (2014), have delved into the precariousness of work and life as interconnected experiences, exploring the intertwinement of making a living and leading a life.

Nonetheless, the trajectory of the concept of precarity in social sciences, as outlined briefly above, indicates that the concept is mainly understood to the extent that it serves to signify a rupture from one model of work relations, namely Standard Employment Relations, to another, precarity, which is supposed to follow both temporally and conceptually. This conceptualization of precarity amounts to a negative definition, finding meaning only in opposition to a specific historically and socially situated experience, and thus it is meaningful primarily for post-war, post-Fordist advanced capitalist countries. The Fordist conjuncture in advanced capitalist countries has, in this regard, reinforced the bias in the literature on precarity. The following section will investigate the universality of the concept.

2.1.2. Precarity: is it a new phenomenon?

The application of the concept of precarity portraying it as an entirely new condition and antithetical to the "Standard Employment Relationship (SER)" of the advanced capitalist countries in the post-War II period, has faced widespread criticism for reflecting a Euro-centric perspective (Mitropoulos, 2011; Munck, 2013; van der Linden, 2014; Scully, 2016; Mosoetsa et al., 2016). Among them, Mitropoulos (2011) particularly underlines that the concept became systematically deployed in labor studies as an explanatory factor for contemporary society only when it entered advanced capitalist countries, namely into the realm of the "stable". Many scholars have sought to rethink the concept, beyond the spatial, temporal, and ideological boundaries that have limited its meaning. Considering various socio-historical contexts, van der Linden (2014) demonstrates, for instance, that the precarious wage labor is not entirely new, emphasizing the need for a global context and a broad historical frame to properly understand the concept of precarity. He speaks of the "pre-invention of precarious employment" while highlighting the increased utilization of subcontracted self-employment, temporary or casual

labor, and home-based work (16). Similarly, Mosoetsa et al. (2016) argue:

For most of human history, work has occurred under unstable conditions, with little legal regulation and little expectation of long-term continuity. Hence, what we really have witnessed in recent decades is the return of precarious labor after a three-decade interruption during the Fordist era in some parts of the world (2016: 2).

In other words, the “standard” in “Standard Employment Relationship” betrays a narrow focus on a short experience in spatiotemporal terms, namely Fordist-era Europe, where a high degree of labor protection existed within the welfare state. Defining precarity negatively in reference to this specific context obscures the fact that precarity has been *the norm* in the Global South since the advent of capitalism (Munck, 2013).

Among the most well-known works on precarity, Guy Standing’s *The Precariat: The Dangerous Class* (2011), became the focus of similar criticism as mentioned above. Standing defines the concept of “precariat” in relation to a lack of seven forms of labor-related security: labor market security, employment security, job security, work security, skill reproduction security, income security and representation security (10). For Standing, while the working class/the proletariat includes individuals who enjoy all these forms of security, including long-term, stable, fixed-hour jobs with protection under unions and collective agreements, the precariat is distinguished by not being part of this working class. Rather, it constitutes a new class-in-the-making (6-7). It is an emerging, dangerous class, experiencing “anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation” (19). Therefore, it is more likely to be attracted by populist and neo-fascist politics (25).

Many Marxist critics reject Standing’s conceptualization of the precariat, however. For these critics, the material interests of Standing’s precariat are not opposed to those of the working class, or at least not sufficiently so to constitute two distinct classes (Wright, 2016). They argue that Standing’s concept of the precariat fails to adequately explain the basic tenets of what makes it a class, its relationship to other classes, the principles of its formation, or the means by which it is reproduced over time (Seymour, 2012). In other words, what Standing describes, is not the formation of a new social class but a phenomenon related to a particular labor regime (Breman, 2013: 135). Capitalism has historically been organized around several different modalities of employment, including various forms of precarious labor around the world. Yet

it never included a single, homogenous global working class; there have been different fractions of the working class. Claiming that “the precariat” now constitutes a new class obfuscates the heterogeneity of the working class on the one hand and creates an artificial distinction between its different fractions on the other (Bremman, 2013).

Indeed, such an antinomy between a homogenous proletariat class and a heterogeneous precariat is historically inaccurate. The forms of precariousness, which are new experiences today for workers in the Global North, were already widely experienced in Southern peripheral economies, not to mention by women, young people, and immigrants in Northern central economies. Such a mechanical, congealed understanding of the classes fails to account for the complexity of capitalist labor processes. It reifies class as an ontological category rather than a social formation. Hence, the changing employment relations that accompanied the rise of neoliberal policies in the post-war Global North represent only one modality of precarity. Instead of asking how new precarity is, the better question we should ask is “for whom is precarity new” (Millar, 2017: 2).

We cannot take the white-male-citizen-worker of Fordism as the global, timeless, perpetual reference for the proletariat, nor can we consider his working conditions, which he no longer bears, as a reference for today’s precariat. In turn, we cannot neglect the political, including gendered, aspects of capitalist (re)production relations. Hill (2017), in this regard, evokes the precarious state of Black Americans prior to the rise of neoliberalism, who lacked all forms of labor-related security, as defined by Standing. The promise of the New Deal excluded single women, domestic and agricultural workers, African Americans, and most immigrants (Boris and Dodson, 2013: 1). Feminist criticism has already revealed the gendered aspect of Fordism by exposing “the experience of the welfare state is *systematically* different for men and women” (Pierson, 1999: 183). Approaches centered on Standard Employment Relations, which embrace Fordism as a norm, are therefore subject to such criticism for eliding Fordism’s reliance on a gendered “male breadwinner/ female caregiver contract”, in which men participate in paid labor and women reproduce the labor force. To explain the ongoing dynamics or forms of precarious employment, terms such as “non-standard” or “atypical” that imply a lack of once-achieved labor-related securities are not adequate (Vosko, 2010: 12-3). It would be more appropriate to treat precarity as a process rather than a fixed category or a class, based on a narrow-minded focus on employment relations in advanced capitalist countries in the post-war era.

2.1.3. Precarity from a historical and global perspective

Standing's ahistorical duality of proletariat/precariat is also misleading regarding the characteristics and operation of global capitalism. The reliance of the formulation of a new class, the precariat, on this dualistic framework disallows an understanding of precarization as a process immanent to capitalism. Francesco Di Bernardo rightly states in this regard that such a conceptualization of precarity "obscures the political aspect and therefore disempowers a broader critique of capitalism, its ways of functioning and the class relations it determines" (2016: 11). Yet precarity needs to be studied within a global context and a broad historical frame since capitalism, geographically and historically, has relied on several modalities of employment. By presenting approaches that consider precarity as the basis of dispossession and address the political aspects of precarity, we will trace, below, the contours of a conceptualization of precarity that looks beyond the dualistic framework and instead problematizes the centrality of wage labour.

First, it is important to recall that in the literature of labour studies, before the application of the concept of "the precariat," different theories were established within an understanding of the "dual labour market". Munck (2013) evokes this history, paying attention to the need for a critical genealogy of the concept of the precariat. Such a genealogy would include an examination of the debate on marginality in the 1960s,³ and the question of the informal sector was raised in the early 1970s. Munck argues that the conceptualization of the precariat based on a dualistic framework is afflicted with the same problem as these approaches, namely that it "misunderstands the complexity of class making and remaking" (751).

Breman and van der Linden (2014) identify a rapid informalization and precarization of labour in the Global North as of the 1980s, accelerated by the global economic crisis in 2007/08. Mentioning the initial conceptualization of "informal sector" by Hart in 1973 as a pre-capitalist

³ For further insights into the role of "relative surplus population" within the debate on marginality in the South American context, refer to the following works: Nun, J., (1969) Superpoblación relativa, ejército industrial de reserva y masa marginal, *Revista Latinoamericana de Sociología, Buenos Aires*, 5, 2, *Julho*: 178–23; Quijano, A. (1974). The marginal pole of the economy and the marginalized labour force. *Economy and Society*, 3, 393-428; Oliveira, F., (1973) (2003). *Crítica à razão dualista/ O ornitorrinco*, Boitempo.

mode of production to be dissolved by the transition to capitalism, Breman and van der Linden state that what they mean by “informality” does not refer to a transitional problem. Rather, in an earlier article, Breman (1976) criticizes this dualism, in which “informal sector” is considered a separate economic compartment. Rejecting such assumptions, accepting the fragmented structure of the labor market, and exploring the dynamics between the parts and the whole will enable us to capture the complex totality of the productive system.

Cross (2010) provides a critique of the discourse of exceptionality based on fieldwork in a special economic zone in South India. He examines the structural continuities and dynamic interconnections between the zone and the “informal economy”, that what is commonly referred to as the “informal economy” is actually a constituent component of India's capitalist development. He argues that “the language of exceptionality ignores the significance of ‘informality’ or ‘precarity’ as a basis for industrialization in emerging global economies” (369). By recognizing precarity as integral to the operation of global capitalism, it shifts the perspective from viewing it as a marginal or transitional anomaly. This shift enables a more comprehensive understanding of why precarity persists globally, encompassing both the Global South and the Global North. Moreover, it prompts a consideration of the intricate political and social dimensions of precarity, emphasizing its embeddedness within larger systemic structures and dynamics. In this context, phenomena like the persistence of non-wage employment in India are not perceived anymore as a paradox (Roy, 2010).

Adopting a dynamic relational analysis that avoids simplistic dualisms and linear notions of progress is essential for understanding the complexities of precarity. Instead of treating one pole as the norm and the other as an exception destined to dissolve, a nuanced approach recognizes the contradictory social relations inherent in precarity.

Denning's perspective adds a valuable dimension to the discussion by challenging the centrality of wage labor in understanding capitalism. By emphasizing that capitalism begins with the imperative to earn a living rather than the offer of work, he contends that “unemployment precedes employment, and the informal economy precedes the formal, both historically and conceptually” (2010: 80-1). This perspective questions the equation of the proletariat with the waged laborer, asserting that it must be identified in connection to dispossession, expropriation, and market dependence. In this context, the proletariat comprises individuals dispossessed of

means of self-production, relying on the market for their subsistence and reproduction (Ferguson and McNally, 2014: 21).

Harvey's conceptualization, grounded in an extended understanding of primitive accumulation, highlights the continuous role and persistence of these processes within the history of capital accumulation (Harvey, 2003). He terms these ongoing processes "accumulation by dispossession," encompassing the commodification of land and labor power, expulsion of peasant populations, suppression of alternative forms of production and consumption, privatization of various property rights (common, collective, state, etc.), appropriation of public assets, and increasing financialization. Harvey contends that the dual character of capital accumulation and expanded reproduction, in an "organic relation," has shaped the historical geography of capitalism (2003: 141-2). The severity of accumulation by dispossession has been experienced in the periphery as a process intertwined with expanded reproduction. Thus, the precarious condition has been the norm for working classes under capitalism, not an exception.

The issue then goes beyond equating the proletariat solely with the "waged laborer"; it also involves the reduction of capitalism to the homogenous category of "free wage labor." When the assertion of the centrality of wage labor in capitalism is critically examined, precarious labor can be seen as a historical and structural characteristic of capitalism. In reality, wage labor is just one form of labor under capitalism. The coexistence of multiple forms of labor within a capitalist world-economy is not an anomaly or a sign of transition; this heterogenous composition is the fundamental nature of the capitalist system as a mode of production (Wallerstein, [1980] 2011: 32). Such a viewpoint also enables us to recognize the importance of non-waged factors, such as women's domestic labor, in the functioning of capitalism (Dalla Costa and James, 1972). Importantly for the subject of this dissertation, it establishes a framework for considering various forms of waged and unwaged work, including platform work, within the broader context of capitalism.

Mahmud (2015) points out that capitalism, as a global mode of capital accumulation, relies on accumulation by dispossession, a reserve army of labour, an informal sector of the economy and appropriation of labour-value. All of these constituent factors of capitalism, both individually and as a whole, cause precariousness of the working classes (701). From a Marxist perspective, the precariousness of work is seen as a historical condition of labour as commodity.

Shukaitis, influenced by Jacques Rancier, argues that the defining condition of the proletariat is essentially precarious existence. He asserts that the violent terror and dispossession of primitive accumulation are the very mechanisms that give rise to a state of precarity, wherein there exists an incapacity to effectively exist outside of capitalist relations (2012: 10).

Until this point, various criticisms of the concepts of precarity have been presented. Among them, we have identified the reliance of the concept of precarity on ahistorical claims and the formulation of a new class, the precariat, based on a dualistic framework (precariat/proletariat) that obscures the characteristics and operations of global capitalism in several ways. Southern and feminist criticisms of precarity have been mentioned, taking aim at precarity's claim to be a completely new global phenomenon.

Brazilian Sociologist Ruy Braga's view in this regard is instructive for summarizing of these criticisms. Locating precariat within a Marxist framework, Braga (2018) addresses it in light of the "relative surplus population." Such an approach is more accurate for three reasons:

First, it allows us to locate the precariat in the *heart of the capitalist mode of production* and not as a by-product of the crisis of Fordist development. Second, it emphasises the historical and relational dimension of this group *as part of the working class* and not as an intergenerational and multiclass amalgam that would progressively emerge as a new class. Third, instead of arbitrarily removing the insecurity of the wage relation, this notion enables us to treat precariousness as an *intrinsic dimension of the process of the commodification of labour* (2018: 4-5).

Before concluding this section, it is crucial to emphasize a key point. The discussions thus far should not be misconstrued as asserting that there is nothing novel about precarity. Platform work, in particular, represents one of its latest manifestations. This chapter challenges the perception of precarity solely as a shifting feature in the labor market of the Global North, revealing it to be an inherent aspect of capitalism. As articulated by Braga, the intention is not to freeze precariousness under a dogmatic perspective based on the "immutable essence of the working class" (2018: 17). On the contrary, it is imperative to comprehend how precarity is intricately woven into specific contexts. This involves acknowledging the diverse formations of capitalist relations in different places and avoiding the reduction of precarity to a singular experience - the Global Northic encounter.

The concept of precarity allows us to trace the structural origins of domination that emerge from distinct socioeconomic contexts and historicize the contradictions within contemporary capitalism. It also enables us to comprehend not only the tangible circumstances of working individuals but also the systemic characteristics of the capitalist system of social relations. These extend beyond labor markets, persist across time and space, and impact the ways in which societies reproduce themselves (Aznar Erasun, 2022).

2.2. End of Work? Rethinking Technology and the Complex, Persistent Realities of Labor in Contemporary Capitalism

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has reignited discussions surrounding the discourse of "the end of work," which spans from concerns about the evolving nature of labor in contemporary capitalism to utopian visions of a post-work society. While this discourse is not new, its increasing momentum underscores the critical need to make nuanced distinctions between the end of stable jobs, the end of wage work, and the more radical notion of the end of work itself. This differentiation is crucial to avoid theoretical inconsistencies and to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex transformations in the world of labor.

The section argues that while discussions about the end of stable and well-paid jobs are undoubtedly pertinent, the complete cessation of work, even in technologically and economically advanced capitalist countries, remains an elusive phenomenon. Contrary to a simplistic interpretation of the "end of work," the contemporary landscape is witnessing the emergence of new modalities of work, exemplified by the rise of platform work. Therefore, a purely quantitative approach fixated solely on technological development is deemed inadequate for capturing the qualitative changes in labor relations. Rather than adopting a techno-deterministic viewpoint, the section emphasizes the need to examine how technology is actively transforming labor processes, altering the nature and organization of work, and reshaping the division of labor within the framework of global capitalism. In this context, the spotlight is on understanding platform work not as an inevitable outcome of technological progress but as a complex phenomenon deeply entwined with broader economic, social, and political dynamics.

The swift progress of digital technologies has revived discussions on "the end of work," a discourse suggesting that ongoing technological advancements could lead to the replacement of human labor with automated machines. This has prompted a reconsideration and detailed inquiry of the centrality of work in contemporary capitalism (Mason, 2015; Srnicek & Williams, 2015; Frase, 2016; Bastani: 2019). Yet, this is not a recent phenomenon⁴. Scholars such as Claus Offe (1985; 1995), Jeremy Rifkin (1995), André Gorz (1999) and Ulrich Beck (2000) have previously explored ideas for envisioning societies beyond work, asserting the diminishing centrality of work in advanced capitalist countries. They have advocated for the development of new political frameworks that are less reliant on work in post-industrial societies.

When discussing "the end of work" in modern advanced capitalist societies, it is essential to clarify what we mean by that, and accordingly delineate between various concepts, including the "end of stable and well-paid jobs," the "end of wage work," and, critically, the "end of work" itself (Nun, 2000: 13). Additionally, we need to ascertain whether the notion of "the end of work" constitutes an analysis of the current state of work relations or if it pertains to a normative ethical-political horizon—a political vision of a post-work society. Failure to provide clear answers to these questions blurs the distinction between the existing and the normative, leading to theoretical inconsistencies in the approaches.

Dominique Méda's book *Le travail: Une valeur en voie de disparition* (1995), as highlighted by Nun (2000), exemplifies the ambiguity inherent in discussions about "the end of work." While Méda emphasizes the need to "disenchant work," viewing it neither purely as a "factor of production" nor as an "income distribution mechanism," her concluding statement suggests a different perspective. Méda asserts that the genuine issue in society is not the scarcity of work but the lack of a convincing income distribution method (Nun, 2000: 15). Although Méda appears to advocate for the "end of work", stating that work merely constitutes a means in the

⁴ The apprehension that the technological reorganization of work, previously termed mechanization and more recently automation, could make both work and workers obsolete has been a recurring theme throughout the history of capitalism. The debate on technological unemployment has surfaced repeatedly, reflecting concerns about the impact of advancing technology on the job market. For a concise history of "automation anxiety," refer to Koşar (2022). Additionally, Mueller (2021) provides a historical overview of workers' movements, particularly in the USA, opposing the growing mechanization of workplaces.

service of the capitalist logics, and call for the development of alternative activities based on distinct logics and autonomy, her conclusion seemingly laments the crisis of salaried society and the absence of work as an income distribution mechanism. This discrepancy highlights the ambiguities in the discourse on "the end of work".

The discourse on the "end of work" is notably biased toward the Global North, lacking resonance in the Global South where there is no intense debate about technological progress and job elimination through automation. To the contrary, Ekbja and Nardi (2019) introduce the concept of "heteromation" to stress the disguised human labor within automated processes, signaling a transformation in the division of labor between humans and machines. Contrary to the idea that machines replace tasks inefficiently done by humans, heteromation reveals a shift where humans perform activities that machines cannot do or that would cost more to the corporations to automate.

Platforms like Amazon Mechanical Turk exemplify this, with workers, often from Global South countries such as India, Venezuela, and Kenya, engaging in "microwork" or "microtasking," involving tasks like data cleaning, photo tagging, and algorithm auditing from their homes. This labor contributes to training machine learning and artificial intelligence (Jones, 2021). In essence, human labor fuels many smart machines, applications, websites, and AI systems, challenging the perception of technology and automation as entities developing independently of human labor. The hidden nature of this human contribution, labeled "ghost work" (Gray and Suri, 2019), emphasizes the erasure of the worker in this employment arrangement, reflecting the intentionally concealed aspect of automation.

Automation, indeed, does not serve as a substitute for labor but rather complements it, leading to increased output and generating higher demand for labor. The transformative impact of automation lies in the reconfiguration of work processes, focusing on task replacement rather than job elimination (Autor, 2015: 5). This restructuring affects the prevailing division of labor within specific production sectors, rather than simply suppressing certain occupations (Smith, 2020).

While scholars in the Global North challenge the "end of work" thesis by citing evidence like declining productivity rates (Henwood, 2015) or conducting longitudinal research to

demonstrate the persistence of jobs despite technological progress (Atkinson and Wu, 2017), this dissertation does not delve into these debates. Instead, its focus is on examining how technology is transforming labor processes, altering the nature and organization of work, and reshaping the division of labor within global capitalism. The specific concern is the Uberization of work, where individuals are hired for specific tasks rather than traditional jobs, posing a potential threat to the reduction of occupations to tasks and wages to piecework (Davis, 2015: 502).

A purely quantitative approach, fixated solely on the pace of technological development, neglects the qualitative aspects of change, particularly the evolving composition of work (Aloisi and de Stefano, 2022: 14). Spencer (2018) aptly points out that “technology poses a greater threat to the quality of work than to its quantity” within the context of capitalism. Unequal ownership of production, inherent in this system, constrains the utilization of technology to alleviate work time burdens and elevate the overall quality of work. Consequently, Spencer urges addressing the current challenges of work, including low pay, work-related insecurity, long working hours, lack of autonomy coupled with increased monitoring, and physical and mental health issues associated with work.

Contrary to the oversimplified notion of technology as a neutral force with uniform consequences, recent studies emphasize a more intricate reality. Digital tools tend to replace managerial roles and amplify organizational processes within workplaces (Aloisi and De Stefano, 2022: 18). The advent of digital technology tools to manage platform workers, including the performance measurement through scoring and customer ratings, as well as control mechanisms such as GPS surveillance and activity monitoring, has profound impacts on workers. The introduction of such technologies not only breeds overwork and a loss of autonomy but also blurs the boundaries between life and work, fostering heightened expectations for performance. This echoes historical precedents like the concept of 'speed-up' recognized by trade unions in the early twentieth century (Moore et al., 2018: 17).

The advancements in technological capabilities, it seems, do not necessarily translate into an improved work experience for individuals, nor do they usher in a reduction in working hours. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) research in 2018 (25), approximately one-third of the global workforce still works more than 48 hours per week, a century after the adoption of ILO Hours of Work Industry Convention No. 1 in 1919, which intended to establish

the eight-hour workday and a 48-hour weekly limit on working time. Moreover, the ILO reports that the percentage of the world's workers categorized as "employees" increased from 44 percent to 53 percent of the global labor market between 1991 and 2019, with developed capitalist countries playing a significant role in this rise (van der Linden, 2022).

During this period, the emergence of new marketing, administrative, and financial sectors led to the expansion of the service sector, resulting in a workforce that increased approximately twofold. Despite the long working hours in these sectors, individuals often find themselves effectively working only 15 hours weekly, as predicted by Keynes, while spending the remaining time in front of computers. This shift has given rise to jobs such as "dog-washers and all-night pizza delivery" (Graeber, 2013). Consequently, the workforce composition has become more complex, characterized by a polarization in the labor market and an increase in precarious forms of work.

This highlights that despite advancements in technological capacities, working hours have not decreased. It underscores the inaccuracy of an instrumental understanding of technology and exposes the political underpinnings of work in capitalism. Fleming (2015, as cited in Keynes, 1930/2009) delves into a closer examination of Keynes' argument, emphasizing the following lines:

Yet there is no country and no people, I think, who can look forward to the age of leisure and of abundance without a dread. For we have been trained too long to strive and not to enjoy. It is a fearful problem for the ordinary person, with no special talents, to occupy himself, especially if he no longer has roots in the soil or in custom or in the beloved conventions of a traditional society (p.37).

Fleming suggests that the ruling class's apprehension about a work-free world, where ordinary people would enjoy leisure, was a critical aspect not only in 1930 when the text was written but remains relevant today.

Before the political character of work, there is a fundamental economic rationale that explains the reluctance to replace labor power with automated machines under capitalism. Technological investments are primarily determined by their profitability rather than feasibility, given that technology development and operation entail substantial costs (Deakin, 2015). Consequently, the widespread use of robots is not observed in many jobs where human labor remains preferred

due to its cost-effectiveness. The availability of a cheap labor pool makes workers seem expendable or interchangeable, offering a viable alternative to full automation. This dynamic begets the proliferation of low-quality jobs rather than their automation (Aloisi and de Stefano, 2022: 15). Workers in these cheap labor jobs are thus more concerned about being substituted by other workers than the risk of their jobs being replaced by machines.

While discussions about the end of stable and well-paid jobs are pertinent, the complete cessation of work, even in technologically and economically advanced capitalist countries, remains an elusive phenomenon. Quite the contrary, new modalities of work, exemplified by platform work, have become prevalent. Scholars like Kalleberg (2011), lay stress on a significant change in recent decades - the polarization of the labor market in the United States and Europe. This shift is characterized by a decline in the employment share of middle-wage occupations, coupled with increases in both high-wage and low-wage occupations. The category of "personal services" stands out as the fastest-growing segment of the US labor market, often dubbed "wealth work" due to its appeal to higher-income customers and its execution by a "new underclass of urban servants" (Thompson, 2019).

While the phenomenon of "wealth work" may be more pronounced in countries marked by high income inequality and may not be replicable universally, Işık's (2022) research on income and consumption inequalities in 2000s Turkey suggests a similar trend. He draws attention to a defining feature of the 2000s for high-income groups, emphasizing the shift from commodity-oriented consumption patterns to service-oriented ones. The share of expenditure by high-income households on household services within the overall expenditure on household goods and services has consistently risen since 2002. Although there is no detailed breakdown of this expenditure, encompassing services like child and elderly care, food, and cleaning activities, it remains unclear how much of it is facilitated through digital platforms. Notably, the top 20% income segment holds the highest share in total household services expenditures, accounting for a range of 75% to 90% (2022: 289-90).

A critical aspect of these low-paid service jobs, often dismissed as no-skill occupations, unravels the gendered dimensions of work as well. Smith (2020) draws attention to the irony inherent in this characterization. While the resistance to automation in these sectors primarily arises from the availability of cheap labor, the nature of work in service occupations poses

material challenges for replication with machines. Tasks like cleaning, cooking, or caregiving necessitate a relational and social intelligence, considering the wishes and needs of the service recipient. However, as these tasks are predominantly carried out by women without pay at home, leading to negligible reproduction costs, they remain undervalued and low-paid status in the job market (Smith, 2020: 121-2).

Therefore, why and how technology is or is not incorporated into which sectors, which tasks, and which labor processes can be examined by taking into account broader political, social and gendered contexts. Hence there is a need for a theoretical framework that goes beyond simply examining technology's impact on work. Instead of viewing technology as a neutral, autonomous process with its own "inner logic," Howcroft and Taylor (2022) advocate for an exploration of what shapes automation. The reductionist perspective, framing technology as predictable in its potential "effects" to elucidate the causality between technological innovation and labor market transformation, oversimplifies sociotechnical change. Moreover, techno-determinist views serve an ideological function by obscuring class relations. Thus, automation also functions as an ideological weapon, necessitating a critical examination of this "ideology of automation and its attendant myth of human obsolescence" (Taylor, 2018). A profound analysis of automation is required by understanding technological change as a social process shaped by multifaceted forces such as economic, cultural, gendered relations, along with the state's influential role. Posing questions about which segments of the division of labor are automated, which are not, and scrutinizing the processes of automation "from intention to implementation and to outcome" (Howcroft and Taylor, 2022) becomes imperative in unravelling the complex dynamics at play.

While the increase in technological capacities has not led to the 'end of work' or a reduction in working hours, it is equally important to reject the notion that emerging forms of work, such as gig work through platforms, wherein individuals work extended hours at piece rates, should be deemed an inevitable outcome of technological progress. This perspective is crucial in steering away from a techno-determinist viewpoint. The fact that platform work is done through digital platforms using cutting-edge technology, that is, the alleged level of development, does not align with the working conditions. This is what Prassl (2018) calls the "Innovation Paradox", highlighting that, in the platform economy, the business model diverges significantly from innovation and, instead, bears resemblance to historical practices such as 18th century

outsourcing or 19th century dock work. Hence, we witness a unique recombination between cutting-edge technology and traditional labor practices, strategically employed by platform companies to serve their interests.

The operational dynamics of platform work are not solely or predominantly dictated by technology; instead, these platforms serve as facilitators for the application of enduring labor extraction strategies by management, deeply rooted in the historical context of capitalism. The foundations of this work model are shaped by factors beyond technology, including "the existence of persistent and substantial pools of surplus labor" (Stanford, 2017: 396).

Crucially, the viability of this model is contingent on preconditions unrelated to technology. These include the deterioration of working conditions in the formal labor market, decreasing wages, a decline in social welfare systems, and the diminishing power of labor in relation to capital. These broader socio-economic conditions have created an environment conducive to the success of platform companies, who capitalize on the prevailing entrepreneurship ideology, as stressed by Cant (2020).

In other words, the expansion of platforms cannot be exclusively attributed to the availability of digital technologies, rather, it reflects the long-term capitalist developments in the global political economy. Labor platforms, amalgamating "the latest digital technologies with organizational, managerial and discursive strategies in order to optimize the use of labor for capital", represent the contemporary manifestation of the capitalist labor process (Haidar and Keune, 2021: 3).

Location-based platform work offers a valuable opportunity for in-depth examination of automation processes. This sector embodies a reconfiguration between cutting-edge technology and traditional labor practices, strategically orchestrated by platform companies to serve their interests. The exploration of this nuanced relationship enhances our understanding of the evolving dynamics within the landscape of platform work, casting light on the strategic use of technology to reshape traditional labor structures in the pursuit of corporate interests. Consequently, it invites for a thoughtful consideration of how the introduction of specific technologies in labor processes shapes the nature and organization of work, workplaces, and the experiences of workers and labor relations.

Indeed, there is a pressing need to de-emphasize deterministic narratives about technology. It is essential to broaden the scope of what constitutes meaningful work and redirect attention to workers, prioritizing their experiences over the novelty of digital platforms and automation. Acknowledging that the role of technology is neither singular, causal, nor deterministic, it is crucial to frame the future more in terms of workers, recognizing their differences, and considering the impact of political and organizational change (Reid-Musson et al., 2020). This perspective emphasizes the multifaceted dynamics at play in the intersection of technology, labor, and social structures, encouraging a more nuanced understanding of the evolving landscape of work.

The critical question is not simply whether technology, in itself, propels us to either a utopian or dystopian future of work. The portrayal of technology as a neutral process obscures labor, labor exploitation and class relations. To echo Gibson's famous quote, substituting "technology" for "future": "The future is already here — it's just not evenly distributed." What we refer to as technology is, in fact, here and now — unequally distributed technology shaped within the capitalist relations of (re)production.

2.3. Transformative shifts and contested meanings of platform work in the Global South

In alignment with the previous arguments presented in this chapter, it should be evident that there would be differences in the operation of the platform economy between the Global North and Global South. In the Global North, changing employment relations have coincided with the ascent of neoliberal policies in the post-war era. Conversely, in the Global South, the informal economy is an integral component of capitalist development (Cross, 2010), and precarity has been the norm since the advent of capitalism (Munck, 2013).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the intricate ramifications of the platform economy in the Global South, it is imperative to shift away from a narrow viewpoint that construes precarity merely as a deviation from one model of work relations, specifically Standard Employment Relations. This perspective, rooted in a particular historically and socially contextualized experience significant in the post-war, post-Fordist landscape of advanced capitalist countries, defines precarity conceptually through a negative lens. The viewpoint

derived from this understanding of precarity predominantly interprets platform work within the framework of the declining position of labor in the post-Fordist context, consequently limiting it to a labor market characteristic. In this context, platform work is considered precarious to the extent that it represents a regression from standard employment relations.

On the other hand, interpreting platform work in the Global South through this narrow perspective would be fundamentally flawed. From this standpoint, the expansion of platform work in the Global South, where a Fordist context is absent and where the informal economy and precarity are pervasive, carries the risk of being misconstrued as progress without implying precarity. Consequently, precarity is once again simplified to a feature of the labor market. This section seeks to emphasize the fallacy of relying on a conceptualization of precarity biased towards the Global North – and inadvertently reproducing it in reverse – to illustrate the distinct consequences arising from platform work in the Global South. It underscores the necessity of a critical analysis that considers fundamental issues, including the exploitative practices of platform companies, the transformative shifts in the nature and organization of work, and the commodification of labor and production relations. Furthermore, it advocates for a dynamic analysis capable of capturing workers' subjectivity, offering a more profound understanding of the complex social relations (re)produced by the platform economy in the Global South.

The existing literature on platform work has predominantly concentrated on the male-dominated ride-hailing and delivery sectors in the Global North (ILO, 2021). Nonetheless, there is a growing body of work that has recently emerged focusing on platform workers in the Global South. These studies emphasize that in Global South countries, labor markets exhibit greater heterogeneity, marked by a significant prevalence of informality. Notably, with 61% of the global workforce engaged in non-standard and vulnerable forms of employment (ILO, 2020), van Doorn et al. (2020) underscore the importance of asking "who, exactly, experiences this kind of work as 'degraded'." They argue that perceiving platform labor as inherently 'degraded labor' impedes our understanding of why certain groups of workers choose to participate in platforms.

While the prevalence of informality in labor markets in Global South countries is a common phenomenon, work encompasses a broad spectrum of production relations, "from informal employment as wage, casual or day labor, to unpaid family labor, to informal outwork to

dependent self-employment to petty commodity production among others". The composition of the informal economy also varies from country to country. Therefore, precarious work needs to be studied "as embedded in concrete, historical, political and social contexts" (Hammer & Ness, 2021: 1-3).

As demonstrated in Chapter 4, workers' prior work trajectories are crucial in influencing how workers interpret platform work and understand their inclinations for engaging in it. The participation of workers from the Global South, who already come from informal and precarious conditions, in platforms may indicate an improvement in their labor market positions. However, this does not negate the possibility of framing the discussion of platform work in the Global South through the lens of precarization. The concept of precarity, often mischaracterized as a regression in the labor market position of workers primarily in the Global North, cannot be discarded in this context. The assertion that platform work signifies progress rather than regression in the labor market position of workers in the Global South, and thus does not necessarily imply precarity, further underscores the importance of reconsidering and refining our understanding of this term.

This section serves as a reminder that understanding the precarity of platform work requires viewing precarity not as a specific position in the labor market but as a process inherent in the commodification of labor and relations of (re)production. Accurate comprehension of the concept of precariousness is essential to contextualize platform work in the Global South. Additionally, it is crucial not to perceive workers' experiences and subjectivities as static or unidirectional. The assumption that workers, having already engaged in informal precarious work, will unquestionably accept all aspects of platform work is unfounded. Workers' experiences in platform work can lead to diverse perceptions, aspirations, and demands, giving rise to different contradictions.

Throughout this examination, it is crucial to bear in mind that, under capitalism, selling labor power is the primary means of subsistence for the vast majority, including platform workers. These individuals lack the means of production and are reliant on the market for their subsistence and reproduction. Consequently, work is not viewed as an opportunity but as an imperative. Given that work, including platform work, inherently involves a relationship of dependence and subordination, a critical approach is necessary.

In their study on the work experiences of Uber and Ola drivers in Bengaluru, India (2016), Surie and Koduganti observe that these ride-hailing platform companies have afforded platform workers a "stable, mid-term period of time to accumulate wealth". This, in turn, has allowed them to achieve stability and make short-term decisions by undertaking substantial investments in their work. This opportunity is typically unavailable to the majority of informal sector workers in India.

Similarly, Prabhat and colleagues (2019), in their study conducted on Uber drivers in five different regions in India, found that platforms in India "bring formalization, income opportunities, and subsistence for drivers and assist employment generation initiatives." They note that, unlike in the West, most urban workers in India do not have any access to pensions or social security, hence platform workers in Uber and Ola in India do not expect these companies to provide them either. The drivers see these companies not as their employers but as facilitators of passengers and payments, and themselves as independent small business owners.

Santos (2020), drawing from his research conducted in São Paulo involving nine platform workers, observes that individuals engaged in platform work often perceive advantages and do not necessarily view themselves as precarious. He claims that labeling platform work in Brazil as necessarily precarious stems from the classist discourse of academia. Santos argues that this widespread approach among Brazilian academics is rooted in the uncritical adoption of conceptualizations developed in the Global North without scrutiny in research and a lack of sufficient attention to the voices of platform workers. He critiques dualistic explanations, such as precarious work versus decent work, emphasizing the need to situate these categories within specific temporal and geographical contexts.

Santos (2020) needs to add, however, that it is not necessarily impossible to enhance the new production relations generated by platforms to promote decent work. In support of this perspective, he could refer to studies arguing that the platform economy has the potential to "contribute to the formalization of work; allow access to new markets; and create flexible work opportunities, which is particularly relevant for women" (Aneja et al., 2019: 2). Additionally, platforms offer an opportunity for individuals to engage in employment-relevant networks that

might be otherwise inaccessible through traditional channels. This enables people to trade, establish new business connections, and access valuable markets, which is constrained by traditional networks (Mann, 2014: 293).

These above-mentioned researchers emphasize the importance of considering workers' prior experiences in precarious working conditions when analyzing their participation in platform work and understanding their perspectives. While acknowledging the significance of workers' previous work trajectories and subjectivities in shaping their perceptions and experiences in platform work, there is a notable shift in discourse. A discourse of opportunities that are available to workers due to their new position in the labor market. Against what Millar (2017) calls a denunciatory discourse of precarity confined to a narrative of loss that sees precarity as a regression from (the real or ideal) standard employment model, there is an emerging perspective that sees precarity as a form of progress.

This perspective views the evolving position of workers in the labor market not as a regression from an idealized standard employment model but as a transformative shift that introduces new opportunities. Both discourses, one focusing on loss and the other on opportunity, are essentially equivalent, as they both center on the changing position of the worker in the labor market, albeit in opposite directions. However, presenting an opposing argument by simply pointing in the opposite direction within the same narrative to challenge the dominant framework of the Global North, may be insufficient for a comprehensive analysis. To fully comprehend the intricate social relations that platforms (re)produce, a critical analysis should extend to encompass the practices of platform companies and the nature of the work itself. Ideology-laden arguments such as praising service contracts as a pathway to formalization, market access, or the creation of employment opportunities, cannot be considered conclusive evidence that platform work is not precarious - unless precarity is defined as the lack of marketability of labor.

Capogrossi's (2020) study on subcontracted female cleaning workers in Córdoba, Argentina is noteworthy at this juncture. These workers, predominantly women who were formerly employed as paid domestic workers, express the devaluation of their labor in their new roles, particularly conflicts with supervisors. However, they underscore factors of stability and salary, asserting a preference for their current employment, considering it an advancement. They

foreground that in the previous job, they earned less and irregularly and experienced mistreatment due to being treated as servants.

Capogrossi grapples with the challenge of incorporating these seemingly contradictory local meanings of workers into the analysis when making sense of subcontracted cleaning work marked by adverse conditions, including overexploitation, constant rotation, unpaid extra work, an inability to plan vacations, arbitrary control, and disciplinary processes. In an effort to encapsulate these seemingly contradictory dimensions and understand "why workers see stability and security where we see precarity" (1121), she introduces the term "crystalline stability" or "fragile stability." This term encompasses the perception of stability in employment and salaries relative to their previous trajectories, valued by workers, and it simultaneously acknowledges workers' rights as fragile and weak. That is effectively intertwining material conditions with subjective meanings. Capogrossi concludes that this multiplicity of sometimes seemingly contradictory aspects is nothing more than the complex universe surrounding relations, experiences, representations, and practices in the world of work.

As seen above, the tendency to perceive work as progress is not unique to platform workers, and attributing progress as a characteristic specific to platforms is also not accurate. Workers, emerging from more challenging working conditions, may value certain aspects of their new jobs, characterizing their changed position as progress. The meanings ascribed to work are shaped by various factors, but they unfold within an environment where choices for the lower classes are limited, and selling their labor power becomes a necessity. In this context, platforms may represent the best or even the only available means of livelihood for many people in the Global South (Cordero and Castro: 2019). However, this does not imply that workers will unquestionably embrace platform work or necessarily perceive it as a desirable job. Indeed, numerous studies discuss the challenges of platform work in Global South countries, highlighting the problems it creates for workers.

Studies of digital domestic work platforms in South Africa reveal that platforms do little to improve the lives of domestic workers, with wages remaining insufficient for workers to maintain a decent standard of living (Sibiya & Du Toit, 2022). To the extent that platform companies "capitalize the undervalued labor of marginalized women workers" and maintain the power of those who buy their labor – a situation that characterizes the traditional sector in

South Africa - “the platform economy represents a continuation of the normalization of labor exploitation of domestic workers” (Hunt & Samman, 2020: 120-1).

Wood and colleagues (2019), in their study on the remote gig workers in six countries across Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, found platform work, facilitated by algorithmic management techniques, tends to provide workers with high levels of flexibility and autonomy. However, due to the same management mechanisms, the majority of workers are compelled to work intense unsocial and irregular hours to meet client demand. This is likely to result in overwork, sleep deprivation, exhaustion, a lack of social contact and social isolation.

Dinh and Tienari (2022) delve into the experiences of male platform drivers in Vietnam, examining how masculinity and emotions are enacted, and considering the role of social media platforms in shaping these dynamics. They note that these workers, akin to many in the Global South, emerge from precarious work experiences with platform companies promoting them hopes and promises of freedom and prosperity. However, Dinh and Tienari meticulously elucidate how these promises often shatter and workers’ dreams are broken once they are actively engaged on the platform. To comprehensively explore the local, lived, and contested dimensions of the platform economy, it becomes crucial to critically examine both the continuities and ruptures in the ways paid work, class positions, and identifications are constructed. Worker experiences and subjectivity should not be viewed as static or unidirectional; instead, a dynamic and rigorous analysis is imperative to capture the complex realities inherent in platform work.

In conducting a dynamic analysis to comprehend the evolving subjectivities of workers, examining Nastiti’s research (2017) on the ride-hailing platform *Go-jek* and the extensive worker discontent it triggered in Indonesia proves insightful. Following the launch of its motorcycle taxi service in early 2015, *Go-jek* encountered significant resistance from traditional, informal motorcycle taxi drivers (*ojek*). In response, *Go-jek* adopted a recruitment strategy specifically targeted at traditional *ojek* drivers in August 2015, hiring 30,000 *ojek* drivers. Despite their initial hopes for flexible work and higher earnings, these workers soon initiated protests against *Go-jek*’s changing wage structure, underpayment of bonuses tied to performance evaluations, heightened control measures, and unfair dismissals.

The majority of *Go-jek* drivers were formerly traditional ojek drivers, while others were either previously unemployed or dissatisfied with their previous jobs. Nastiti's research, conducted between September 2015 and February 2017, documented at least 50 protests across 15 different cities in Indonesia during this period. This timeframe coincided with *Go-jek*'s competition with companies like Grab and Uber⁵. By leveraging technology, rhetoric, and legal loopholes, *Go-jek* perpetuated an asymmetry of power, establishing an unequal relationship with drivers. This resulted in the "super-exploitation" of drivers as well as the disruption of traditional drivers. *Go-jek*, as an intermediary, garnered significant support from investors and the government, facilitating its expansion to other countries in the region⁶. The collective discontent among workers manifested as a profound sense of "deception" by middleman firms, portraying them in worker narratives as "betrayers" and "liars." In this context, Nastiti (2017) contends that the "violation of the sense of justice and the threat to the subsistence incomes of drivers" emerged as the leitmotif of their collective struggle.

In the Indonesian context, the majority of platform workers being previously unemployed or engaged in informal work did not deter them from taking collective action. Some of these individuals initially expressed their grievances with the platform but later became employed through the company's targeted recruitment strategies. However, over time, the workers came to view the company's mediation as immoral and unfair, prompting resistance. Therefore, the prior lack of access to labor rights, such as pensions or social security, does not imply that these workers will not develop expectations or articulate authentic demands from platform companies. Their experiences in platform work can shape diverse perceptions, aspirations, and demands, giving rise to various contradictions.

⁵ *Grab*, Southeast Asia's first decacorn, was established in Malaysia in 2012 and rapidly expanded across the region, including Indonesia in 2014. While *Grab* had a less diversified range of services compared to *Go-jek*, it aimed for a broader presence in the Southeast Asian region. In March 2018, *Uber* announced the sale of its Southeast Asia-based business to *Grab*, acquiring a 27.5% stake in *Grab* in the process. Following *Uber*'s exit from the region, *Go-jek*, in May 2018, disclosed its plans for expansion into other countries in the region (Lauria, 2021; Cheok, 2018).

⁶ Nastiti (2017), highlighting the significant government support in *Go-jek*'s growth, suggests that further research should explore the role of the state and the intricate relationship between the state and capital to comprehend the evolving dynamics of informal labor politics. She observes that "capital increasingly moves to the digital business landscape, and that the state officially endorses various investments in digital business to capitalize on labor in the informal economy."

To gain a comprehensive understanding of workers' positionings, it is imperative to establish a framework that considers their emotional, moral, social, and political perspectives in all their complexity. This framework must account for the contextual and contested meanings attributed by workers to platform work, acknowledging the dynamic and multifaceted nature of their engagement. The need for a nuanced approach is heightened when considering that platform companies frequently initiate operations with enticing prices and favorable working conditions for workers, only to later adopt practices that can be detrimental once they have amassed a substantial workforce and established a secure position in the market (Shapiro, 2020).

An additional consideration is how to approach platform work in the Global South, especially given the substantial size of the informal economy. The Future of Work in the Global South Initiative (FoWiGS) (Albrieu, 2021) argues that platform work in the Global South "should not be framed as a substitute for formalization" as it "mostly absorbs informal work" and does not necessarily lead to a decline in the incomes of workers in the Global South (13-7). However, the assertion that platform work in the Global South "mostly absorbs informal work" warrants investigation at the country level. The informal economy encompasses a broad spectrum of production relations, and the composition of informal work in a given country will have diverse implications for the trajectory of the platform economy.

Examining the example of delivery platforms, it becomes crucial to understand how these platforms have reshaped the nature and organization of delivery work. For instance, in the food delivery sector in Turkey, prior to the entry of platform companies, the payment structure was based on monthly wages. The sector primarily relied on informal wage employment, with only a small number of workers being insured. Employees received fixed wages, and a portion were covered by a social security system offering health care and pensions. In other words, before the platform companies, the sector did not utilize piece-rate payment, meaning workers' earnings were not tied to the number of packages delivered per day. Moreover, businesses provided the necessary equipment, including motorcycles.

On the contrary, in platform work, workers are required to own their own motorcycles, or companies may sell or rent them. The shift in dynamics, particularly the transition to piece-rate payment and the requirement for workers to take on all responsibilities related to the execution

of the work, underscores the importance of further research on country level. Global South countries also exhibit differences in the dynamics of platform work, necessitating a nuanced understanding of the diverse contexts in which these platforms operate.

Revisiting the argument that platform work predominantly absorbs informal work in the Global South, even if we acknowledge that the majority of platform workers come from informal work in general – without differentiating different forms of informal work - it is important not to overlook the participation of workers, perhaps even in smaller numbers than those coming from informal work, in platform work and the diverse dynamics at play in this context.

The preceding discussion in this chapter does not imply that there has not been a change in employment relations with the rise of neoliberalism in Global South countries, or that this transformation has had no impact. The uneven and combined development of capitalism prevents such isolation. The decline in working conditions in the formal labor market, decreasing wages, weakening social welfare systems, and the diminishing power of labor organizations vis-à-vis capital have also represented a setback for workers in Global South countries who had previously achieved some partial social rights. It is plausible that some of these workers may turn to platform work.

The observation made by Vallas and Schor (2020) may have more relevance to the Global North, but similar mechanisms could also be partially at play in the Global South. In the context of platform workers, Vallas and Schor point out that the persistent shift away from standard employment relations by traditional firms in the labor market could result in an increased labor supply for platforms, even during periods of low unemployment. By capitalizing on such labor supply, the platform economy might further undermine standard employment, fostering a vicious cycle that erodes overall employment quality" (285-6). Informal and formal employment, in this context, are not independent or isolated from each other; instead, they share a relationship where changes in one sector can impact the other, shaping the dynamics of both.

Finally, in this section, let us briefly delve into the study of Heeks et al. (2020), which examines the thesis that digital platforms can fill institutional voids, potentially leading to more efficient and effective economic markets in the Global South (World Bank, 2016), based on the findings of their research on digital platforms in Pakistan, Colombia, the Philippines and South Africa.

Heeks et al. (2020) explore the developmental impact of digital platforms in the Global South using the concept of 'institutional voids,' referring to the absence or shortcoming of formal institutions that can impede market operations. This is particularly emphasized in countries of the Global South, where such voids are believed to limit economic activity.

Khanna and Palepu (2010), who introduced the concept of "institutional voids", define it as gaps in "the range of institutions that facilitate the functioning of markets". In this context, institutions are seen as facilitators rather than constraints, suggesting that businesses can fill these voids to enhance market functioning. While existing literature on voids in the Global South views them as problems that businesses can beneficially address, Heeks et al. (2020) bring two important insights to this understanding. First, they highlight potential downsides to void-filling, noting that when a single entity, such as a platform, fills all institutional functions of the market instead of distributing them among various actors, it concentrates power and allows for "quasi-monopolistic exploitation and rent-seeking." Second, they argue that digital platforms, in addition to filling voids, can perpetuate and even create institutional voids, as revealed by their research.

According to them, platforms play a role in filling voids by connecting more customers and workers, leading to job creation in the Global South. However, this filling tends to occur asymmetrically. In the initial stages of market development, platforms encourage both workers and customers to participate. As the labor supply increases and becomes oversaturated, these worker incentives are no longer necessary and are consequently removed. According to platform workers in the study, their incomes have declined over time as platforms have implemented less favorable payment terms. Heeks et al. (2020) also note that the platform economy not only creates significant voids in terms of information asymmetry between platforms and workers but places all risks associated with the work (non-payment, accidents, police intervention, etc.) on the workers at the forefront of platform work. In this context, platform-based markets appear to maintain the characteristics of the "relatively informal labor markets" they were intended to replace, characterized by "over-competition through labor supply-demand asymmetry, opportunism by the platform, and job insecurity and precarity (Heeks et al., 2020: 11)."

In conclusion, Heeks et al. (2020) argue that the role of platforms in the Global South should not only be viewed as filling institutional voids but also as “void-maintaining and void-creating”. Platforms perpetuate or introduce institutional voids, disrupting the fair functioning of labor markets and leading to platform opportunism, job insecurity and precarity. Furthermore, the void-filling functions of platforms may also have downsides, as their digital void-filling concentrates power and limits the autonomy of workers.

2.4. Conclusion

The chapter establishes that precarity is inherent to capitalism, manifesting historically and globally in forms such as non-wage labor, piecework, subcontracted self-employment, temporary work, and home-based work. Capitalism, as a global mode of capital accumulation, hinges on factors like accumulation by dispossession, a reserve army of labor, an informal sector, and labor-value appropriation - all leading to the precariousness of the working class. Consequently, the proletariat cannot be simplistically equated with the term “waged laborer,” as capitalism has historically embraced diverse employment modalities.

In this regard, we presented feminist and Global South perspectives critiquing the application of the precarity concept as an entirely new condition, as it contrasts it with the “Standard Employment Relationship” of advanced capitalist countries post-World War II. These perspectives underscore the Euro-centric nature of such understandings. We challenged the idea of the white-male-citizen-worker of Fordism as the universal proletariat and opposed the negative definition of precarity as a new class, highlighting its historical and social inaccuracies. The homogenous proletariat versus heterogeneous precariat antinomy fails to grasp the complexity of capitalist labor processes.

Rejecting an instrumental view of technology, the chapter challenges the idea that technology signals the end of work. It emphasizes technology's role in reshaping labor processes within the intricate web of social, economic, and political power relations. The increased capacity of technology has not resulted in the predicted “end of work” or a reduction in working hours. Moreover, the emergence of new forms of work, like platform work facilitated by online platforms, where individuals work extended hours at piece rates, cannot be automatically an unavoidable outcome of technological progress.

The chapter proposes an understanding of precarity as an inherent dynamic process within capitalism. It argues for a similar perspective when examining platform work in the Global South, avoiding its reduction to a regression in the labor market position. Emphasizing the necessity to move beyond simplified narratives and binary categorizations, the chapter underscores the importance of recognizing workers' multifaceted experiences and subjectivities. It lays stress on the need to understand the intricate dynamics between platforms, workers, and the broader socio-economic context. It calls for adopting a framework that acknowledges worker agency, considers historical trajectories, and navigates the complex interplay of formal and informal labor markets for a comprehensive understanding of platform work in the Global South.

While platform work tends to reduce labor to a collection of tasks, gigs, and pieces, transforming wages into piecework, it signifies an escalation of precarity as platform companies expand their control over workers by restructuring the organization of work and leveraging technology to their advantage. In this arrangement, workers bear responsibility for all the costs associated with executing the work and reproducing their labor, irrespective of whether this was the case previously. In essence, the transformation of the nature and organization of work brought about by the platform economy alters social relations of (re)production to the detriment of workers and intensifies the commodification of labor. Precarity, in this context, manifests itself in both the labor process and the relations involved in the production and social reproduction (Qi and Li, 2020).

The upcoming chapter shifts its focus to platform companies. It begins by examining the nature of these companies, which portray themselves as technology firms serving merely as intermediaries and discusses what their operations signify in contemporary economic relations. Following this, it explores the fundamental strategy employed by these companies to avoid employer roles, which involves not classifying platform workers as employees, and delves into the lawsuits filed against this practice. Lastly, gradually entering the scope of this research, it addresses the recent rise of digital platforms in Turkey, introducing prominent platform companies in the country.

3. Platformization in the World and Turkey: Shedding Light on Platform Economy in Theoretical, Legal, and Political Gray Zones

To legitimize their practices and obfuscate labor exploitation, platform companies, positioning themselves as technology entities, assert that they merely "mediate" work, refusing to acknowledge themselves as employers or admit to an employment relationship. Using the latest technology, these highly financialized companies achieve substantial profit increases by evading operational costs and employment responsibilities. Workers, on the other hand, shoulder all the associated risks and costs of the work.

This chapter discusses views on the supposed distinctiveness of platform companies that underpin the separation of the platform economy from conventional capitalist labor relations. It addresses the claims suggesting that the dominance of these platform companies in the economy resembles a form of feudalism. Despite originating from various stances and serving different agendas, these viewpoints all fall short in comprehending the operations of the platform economy and ultimately obscure the issues of labor and labor exploitation. In contrast, this chapter asserts that these companies are inherently capitalist, and there is, therefore, a relationship of subordination between these companies and workers based on the exploitation of labor.

The "techno-feudalism" thesis posits that the dominance of digital platforms in the economy, primarily accumulating capital through rent, amounts to a form of feudalism. The first section of this chapter critically examines this thesis, demonstrating that these companies are fundamentally capitalist firms. It underscores the inaccuracy of explaining the dynamics of the platform economy through the lens of feudalism.

In the second section, the focus shifts to the misclassification of platform workers as independent contractors, a strategy employed by companies to mask labor exploitation and deny workers' rights. By reviewing lawsuits filed by workers and trade unions against platform companies on the employment status of platform workers, especially in the Global North, this section analyzes patterns in litigation outcomes across countries. Acknowledging the variations

in platformization within national contexts, the third section argues that the uberization of work and labor relations is shaped by economic, social, and political power relations, influenced by factors such as government policies and public institutions, the strength of labor organizations, and the legal framework. Through illustrative cases highlighting the political dimensions of the platform economy, the section emphasizes the limitations of relying solely on the misclassification framework to challenge the corporate power of platforms and attain workers' rights.

In the final section, the chapter addresses the recent surge of e-commerce and digital platforms in Turkey, introducing key platform companies in the country. It provides a descriptive analysis of the food and grocery delivery sector, emphasizing the rapid platformization of the Turkish economy. While the Turkish government may not make significant direct investments in digital technologies and businesses, it provides incentive and support programs for entrepreneurship. One such program is the "New Entrepreneur Support," which will be briefly mentioned as numerous platform delivery workers have also benefited from it.

3.1. A critique of techno-feudal thesis

Until recently, the prevailing notion was that technological progress would herald the end of work through the displacement of labor by automated machines (Mason, 2015; Srnicek & Williams, 2015; Frase, 2016; Bastani, 2019). However, the impact of technology on work, particularly through the operations of platform companies, has complicated these assertions about automation, emphasizing the significance of big data, algorithms, and their influence on work relations.

The optimistic post-capitalist vision, suggesting that information technologies and automation would usher in societal well-being, seems to have given way to claims asserting that the erosion of capitalism leads to intensified monopolies and inequalities. Capital accumulation now relies more on rents, debts, licenses, and fees than on commodity production and wage labor, a phenomenon also labeled as "rentier capitalism" (Sadowski, 2020; Christophers, 2022). This occurs under the sway of an emerging ruling class termed the "vectoralist class," which owns and controls the vector of information (Wark, 2019). According to this perspective, capitalism has undergone a transformation into "something worse" known as "techno-feudalism"

(Varoufakis, 2021) or "neofeudalism," where "digital platforms are the new watermills, their billionaire owners the new lords, and their thousands of workers and billions of users the new peasants" (Dean, 2020).

In his critique of "the end of work" literature in the 1990s, Caffentzis (1999: 36) cautioned about not only the theoretical and empirical inaccuracies of the thesis but also its objectionable nature as a political strategy. He pointed out that it "ultimately seeks to convince both friend and foe alike, behind everyone's back, that capitalism is coming to an end." Today, we observe this thesis being openly advocated with the assertion of feudalism. This section contends that a thorough comprehension of the platforms' business models indicates that the digital economy should be analyzed within the framework of capitalism. The substantial investments made by these companies, the nature of their revenues, the pivotal role played by states in the digital economy, and the significance of legal regulation in this context collectively argue against explaining the digital economy in terms of feudalism.

Morozov, in his article "Critique of Techno-feudal Reason" (2022), notes that there is a substantial agreement between the Left and the Right in characterizing the new reality, both asserting that the emerging regime is akin to feudalism. Terms like 'techno-feudalism,' 'digital feudalism,' and 'information feudalism' are proposed to describe this perspective. Morozov views this "techno-feudal thesis" as indicative of the failure to recognize that both expropriation and exploitation are intrinsic components of capitalist accumulation throughout history. The argument suggesting that, under feudalism, surplus-value extraction was non-economic and mainly political, while under capitalism, it became purely economic, implies that in the transition from feudalism to capitalism politically enabled dispossession gave way to economically enabled exploitation. This perspective struggles to reconcile ongoing expropriation - the expropriation of data through intellectual property rights by platforms and users' 'unpaid digital labor' within 'digital dispossession' - with the capitalist logic of profit and exploitation. Consequently, it simplistically claims that capitalism is regressing to feudalism.

Morozov contends that the techno-feudal thesis stems from a deficiency in contemporary Marxist theory, specifically its inability to comprehend precisely what is produced in the digital economy and how it operates. The lack of analytical clarity regarding the business models of platforms leads to the misinterpretation of intellectual property rights excesses or

financialization as indicative of a feudal logic of rent and dispossession. By treating intangible resources, primarily data, acquired through intellectual property rights similarly to how land rentiers are treated, the platforms are erroneously perceived as not capitalists but disguised rentiers. This analogy between feudal land and contemporary data results in equating technology firms with non-capitalism and characterizing their revenues as rent.

Morozov (2022) emphasizes that the absence of managers or workers in a firm, or its use of algorithms for automation, doesn't render it non-capitalist. This is because such a firm still absorbs surplus value produced elsewhere in the economy, aligning with Marx's perspective on the equalization of profits among differently automated firms and industries. Morozov cites a passage from Volume Three of *Capital* to support this point:

“A capitalist who employed no variable capital at all in his sphere of production, hence not a single worker (in fact an exaggerated assumption), would have just as much an interest in the exploitation of the working class by capital and would just as much derive his profit from unpaid surplus labour as would a capitalist who employed only variable capital (again an exaggerated assumption) and therefore laid out his entire capital on wages.” Marx, *Capital, Volume Three*, London 1991, p. 300.

According to Morozov, acknowledging that Google produces search result commodities, rather than merely accumulating data, while recognizing the significance of indexing in Google's operations, eliminates any challenge in considering it a capitalist enterprise. Additionally, major digital platform companies like Google, Amazon, and Facebook possess fewer intangible assets compared to other corporate giants. Morozov raises a pertinent question by highlighting the substantial R&D investments made by these platforms: “If these tech giants are simply idle rentiers exploiting intellectual-property rights and network effects, why do they allocate substantial funds to what can only be described as production activities?”

Lebayle and Pinsard (2021) similarly contend that the digital economy, with its revenue characteristics and dependence on political intervention falls under the analytical framework of capitalism. They criticize the analogy between rents and feudalism, emphasizing the difficulty in affirming that the concept of feudalism adequately explains the workings of the digital economy, particularly considering the crucial role played by states. Furthermore, the amalgamation of monopoly rents, diminished investment, and the comparatively stagnant productivity gains is not an unprecedented scenario within capitalism.

Arguing that not all meanings of the term "rent" are inherently tied to feudalism, Lebayle and Pinsard differentiate between "land rent" and "monopoly rent." This differentiation is crucial for understanding the socio-economic dynamics of digital companies, which operate under the specific logic of capitalist production rather than feudal production. Unlike land rent, digital platforms require ongoing investment, political intervention, and legal regulation to establish and sustain their monopolistic positions. Therefore, monopoly rents are periodic, transitory, and highly dependent on the level of regulation; thus, they cannot constitute pure income and involve at least partial reinvestment.

Amazon, as a company benefiting from monopoly rent, actively reinvests its earnings instead of distributing dividends. However, these investments are not solely aimed at extracting income through rents. They also enhance the efficiency of specific operations, such as logistics, allowing for the extraction of profits from industrial activities that can be optimized based on technological conditions. Companies in the digital economy, like Amazon, thus generate revenue through multiple channels: "monopoly rents (deducted from all branches of production), excess profit (deducted from within each branch of production, due to increased productivity), and business profit" (Lebayle & Pinsard, 2021).

In the realm of food and grocery delivery platforms, their functioning becomes more apparent. Capitalist production, not limited to the production of commodities but primarily centered on the production of surplus value, is exemplified by the delivery platform. It sells commodified food delivery, realizing value from the restaurant's food (simultaneously enabling the restaurant to extract value from the produced food) and extracting value from the production of the food delivery (Woodcock, 2021: 32).

A comprehensive understanding of the business models employed by digital platforms necessitates an analysis of the digital economy within the context of capitalism. The substantial investments made by these companies, the nature of their revenues, the indispensable role of states in the platform economy, and the significance of legal regulations underscore the inadequacy of explaining the platform economy through the lens of feudalism. This requires, above all, a correct understanding of capitalism; it entails adopting a perspective that doesn't perceive it as purely economic exploitation, that doesn't consider appropriation as unique to

feudalism, and that thoroughly questions the intentional distinction between the 'economic' and the 'political'.

3.2. Litigations against platform companies: The misclassification of platform workers

Uber defines itself in its mission statement as follows: “We are a tech company that connects the physical and digital worlds to help make movement happen at the tap of a button” (uber.com). Notably, the statement lacks specificity about the "physical world" it claims to connect, and it avoids acknowledging that what it terms as "movement" essentially involves work, with those carrying out this movement being classified as "workers." This strategic language use is not unique to Uber but is a common approach among platform companies at large, as highlighted by Prassl (2018: 80). Traditional labor market terms such as 'work' or 'worker' are conspicuously absent, replaced by a distinctive vocabulary and concepts, involving the “rebranding of employment as freelance entrepreneurship”. This linguistic maneuver serves as a deliberate strategy to navigate and circumvent existing regulations.

However, extensive Uber files revealed how this “connection” was made possible by company’s efforts to gain ground in academic, legal, and political fields to penetrate this “physical world” with its business model. Technological change, including the consolidation of certain technologies, takes place within a framework of economic, social and political power relations. Uber files leaked to The Guardian by Mark MacGann, Uber's former chief lobbyist in Europe, the Middle East and Africa include emails, iMessage, and WhatsApp messages between Uber's top executives, as well as presentations, notebooks, briefing papers, and invoices, covering 40 countries from 2013 to 2017, when Uber expanded aggressively worldwide. Uber files reveal "how the company broke the law, duped police and regulators, exploited violence against drivers and secretly lobbied governments across the world" (Davies et al., 2022). It also turns out that the company paid high-profile academics in Europe and the US to conduct research and write in support of the Uber business model (Lawrence, 2022).

The infiltration of platform companies into various facets of our lives, their pervasive presence in society, has been accompanied by their influence in academic, legal, and political spheres, marking a significant expansion of their activities over the last two decades. According to International Labour Organization's report (2021), global venture capital investments in digital

start-ups increased sixfold only between 2010 and 2019. Furthermore, the ascent of platform companies has coincided with a substantial concentration of market power in the hands of a select few tech monopolies. In 2018, for instance, Amazon and Walmart-owned Flipkart⁷ collectively held approximately 63% of the total market share in the online retail sector in India. Similarly, the seven largest digital platforms in the European Union dominate 69 % of the total value of the digital economy. Amazon, the infamous American multinational retail company, achieved a staggering \$386 billion in annual revenue in 2020, becoming the second-largest private employer globally (Delfanti et al., 2021).

While Uber and other platforms strive to entrench their business models, legal actions against these companies persist in various parts of the world. The matter has transcended from courtrooms to ballot boxes, exemplified by Proposition 22 in California. Proposition 22, endorsed by platform companies such as Uber and Lyft spending nearly \$200 million, was ratified in November 2020. It categorizes app-based transportation and delivery drivers as independent contractors, specifying particular labor and wage regulations. This marked a setback for California Assembly Bill 5 (2019), a law founded on the 2018 Supreme Court of California decision in the case *Dynamex Operations West, Inc. v. Superior Court*, which affirmed that workers in the company should be considered employees with associated labor protections. However, the legal process persists, as Alameda County Superior Court Judge Frank Roesch declared in August 2021 that several sections of Proposition 22 were unconstitutional, rendering the ballot measure unenforceable (Siddiqui, 2020; 2021).

This example, which reveals the political dimension of the platform economy, underscores the challenge of securing worker rights solely through legal endeavors to regulate platform work. Platform companies, wielding substantial financial power, engage in what is termed "regulatory entrepreneurship." They employ a diverse array of tactics and strategies, such as "operating in

⁷ Flipkart, established in 2007 by two former employees of Amazon in India, engaged in intense competition with Amazon after the latter's entry into the country in 2013. The rivalry led to substantial spending by both companies to attract more customers, placing significant pressure on Flipkart. In 2018, when Flipkart held the position of India's largest online retailer, 77% of its shares were acquired by Walmart for \$16 billion, marking the world's most significant e-commerce acquisition at that time. For more details, refer to Roy (2018): <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-44064337>.

legal gray areas, growing 'too big to ban,' and mobilizing users for political support," ultimately exerting active influence on the law to favor their interests. As illustrated in the aforementioned U.S. example, companies shift legal disputes into the political arena by targeting state and local laws (Pollman & Barry, 2016).

On the other hand, the trajectory of legal proceedings in Europe reveals another trend concerning the employment status of platform workers. In this context, Hiebl's comprehensive report (2022), which conducts a comparative analysis of case law from national courts dealing with alleged misclassification of platform workers, is illuminating. The report scrutinizes over 320 judgments and administrative decisions in cases filed up to August 2022 across 16 European countries. Hiebl identifies a "cautious trend" toward reclassifying workers for ride-hailing, food, and grocery delivery platforms as employees in most jurisdictions. However, a definitive conclusion regarding other types of platform work, such as cleaners and domestic workers, micro-taskers, and parcel delivery drivers, remains elusive at this point.

According to Hiebl (2022), while there are minor variations between countries, the case law in all jurisdictions acknowledges that the actual execution of a contract, rather than its formal designation, is pivotal in classifying it as an employment relationship. In essence, a substantive and purposive interpretation is favored over a formal and textual one. Courts take into account factors such as the duration of the contract and the number of working hours when determining the employee status. Furthermore, contrary to the possibility of substitution and/or subcontracting, the obligation of personal work performance is recognized as the primary indicator of employment status.

Nevertheless, the platform economy's lack of an obligation for platform workers to work for a specific or minimum duration poses a challenge in recognizing them as employees, given that the obligation to work is a fundamental element of employee status in nearly all jurisdictions. The absence of such an obligation, reflecting the flexibility of workers, has been a crucial criterion in recent high-profile court decisions that reject employee status. However, Hiebl (2022) references court decisions at the highest level that favor the reclassification of platform workers. These decisions are grounded in the platforms' exercise of control, sanctions, and initiatives that curtail workers' theoretical freedom not to work. Consequently, while courts consider a broad array of criteria in determining an employment relationship - such as the

priority of facts, flexibility of work schedules, continuity of work, and provision of work equipment (De Stefano et al., 2021) - the element of control over the work prominently features in these decisions (Collier et al., 2017; Zatz, 2016).

Hiebl's report (2022) highlights the specific sanctioning systems employed by platforms that curtail drivers' freedom to accept or refuse rides, exemplified by actions like blocking or deactivating drivers' accounts for repeated ride refusals. Additionally, ride-hailing and delivery platforms engage in continuous monitoring of their workers' acceptance and cancellation rates, although the impact of such monitoring on workers remains opaque. The utilization of GPS tracking, company-assigned performance ratings, and customer-driven rating systems serves as a means of control over workers and a basis for imposing sanctions. Some incentives aimed at enhancing workers' performance, such as bonus systems, are also considered within this context. Moreover, certain high-level courts have determined that platform work does not genuinely facilitate entrepreneurial activity for the workers, meaning independent business organization, including the ability to choose customers.

3.3. Diverse Paths in Platform Workers' Rights Beyond Misclassification

Legal scholars are engaged in a debate regarding the appropriate legal classification of platform workers. This debate revolves around questions such as whether existing employment tests are adequate for categorizing platform workers as employees or independent contractors, whether new tests are necessary, whether current laws should be extended to cover platform workers, or whether the creation of new employment categories is warranted. The significance of these questions is heightened by the fact that the observed trend toward classifying workers on ride-hailing, food and grocery delivery platforms as employees does not extend to other types of platform work, such as cleaners and domestic workers, micro-taskers, and parcel delivery drivers.

Rather than advocating for the enforcement of existing laws to recognize platform work as an employment relationship, some scholars propose the introduction of new regulations and employment categories specifically tailored to platform workers, such as "special employment regulation" (Todolí-Signes, 2017). However, there is a concern that such regulatory proposals may inadvertently reinforce the normalization and legitimization of precarious work

arrangements by masking the widespread precarity experienced by workers under the guise of "regulation" (Adams et al., 2015).

Similarly, the notion that creating a new distinct category for platform workers would resolve issues might obscure the fact that platform workers constitute only a fraction of the larger problem of work precarization. Therefore, an alternative proposition is that universal protection, irrespective of employment status, would safeguard not only platform workers but all precarious workers (Cherry & Aloisi, 2016). Consequently, when the legal struggle is confined to the binary framework of employed workers and self-employed individuals without addressing precarization comprehensively, it is unlikely to yield meaningful outcomes for all precarious workers.

“Taken for a Ride: Litigating the Digital Platform Model” (Moyer-Lee and Countouris, 2021) and “Taken for a Ride 2: Accelerating Towards Justice” (Moyer-Lee, 2022) published by the *International Lawyers Assisting Workers (ILAW) Network* not only analyze the case law and legislation on the employment relationship on digital platforms examining the world's major misclassification cases brought by workers against digital platforms, the reports also discuss the tactics and strategies of digital platform companies to defeat the workers' claims by building “an impenetrable legal armory around themselves” and suggest counter strategies for protecting workers.

Acknowledging that the resistance of workers and labor organizations to labor exploitation in the platform economy is not limited to litigation over employment status, the report nonetheless stress the significance of employment status as “the primary portal through which a laborer enters the world of workers' rights” (2021: 8). It observes while there is a general trend towards recognizing platform workers as employees in Western Europe and Latin America, this trend does not hold true for litigations outcomes in the United States and Australia.

However, given that most low-wage workers and labor organizations may lack the financial means to pursue employment status cases, on the one hand, and the reluctance of platform companies to comply with the law, on the other, the report emphasize the necessity for a “comprehensive enforcement regime”. This regime should entail “a government body with the financial resources and the political will to act”, “criminal sanctions and stiff civil penalties”

and "a procedural landscape which facilitates suits by workers, unions, and others". Without such a comprehensive enforcement regime, individual court decisions alone may not be sufficient to address the challenges posed by platform companies. In this context, the United Kingdom serves as example, where the courts have ruled in favor of workers, but the government lacks the political will to effectively enforce the law (Moyer-Lee, 2022: 46-47). Wray (2023) points to a similar situation in France, where the courts and government, as two arms of the state, are divided over the employment status of platform workers. While the courts rule that platform managers are criminally liable for false self-employment and impose high fines on companies, the government, on the other hand, is entering into agreements with the same companies within a 'social dialogue' process.

At this juncture, it is noteworthy that in 2021, the European Commission introduced a proposal for a Directive aimed at enhancing working conditions in platform work. The Directive seeks to ascertain the correct employment status for individuals engaged in platform work, providing them access to relevant labor and social protection rights. Additionally, it aims to ensure transparency and accountability in algorithmic management within platform work (European Commission, 2021). However, the final shape and actual impact of the proposal remain uncertain due to the extensive legislative procedure, including multiple rounds of amendments in the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. Some Member States have already sought to push the directive in a contrary direction. Furthermore, the directive's vague references to enforcement and the considerable discretion it grants to Member States add to the uncertainty (Moyer-Lee, 2022: 36-9).

Consequently, as implied by the preceding discussion, the uberization of work and labor relations is shaped by national contexts, within the complex interplay of various factors such as the role of government policies and public institutions, the legal framework, and the strength of labor organizations. In this context, Thelen (2018) draws attention to how Uber's classification of workers as independent contractors elicits different receptions in the United States, Germany and Sweden. The categorization as self-employed poses the most significant challenges for workers in the United States, where social insurance is directly tied to employment status. In Germany, it is perceived as a threat to the urban transportation system, while in Sweden, the concern centers around tax revenues. Hence, governments, employers, and employees in these countries have addressed these issues in distinct ways.

On the other hand, The Chinese government's action of compelling the ride-hailing company Didi, which controls 90% of the Chinese market, to delist from the New York Stock Exchange in 2022 is cited as a robust example of state enforcement (Moyer-Lee, 2022: 47). Additionally, in 2021, the Chinese government implemented a policy that formally designates drivers in ride-hailing platforms as independent contractors, not employees. Despite this classification, the policy mandates that these platform companies must ensure their workers receive a minimum wage and reasonable working hours, treating them similarly to employees in these regards. However, companies are exempted from making social insurance contributions under this policy (Du, 2022).

The case of China underscores the relevance of Zatz's point (2016) on the importance of a "work law" that does not "fetishize employment", but rather takes into account diverse ways in which work is organized in contemporary labor markets. Zatz (2011) argues for a dynamic perspective that goes beyond misclassification, considering independent contracting as "more a symptom rather than a driving cause" of the issue. The core problem, according to Zatz, is simply focusing on refinements to the employee/independent contractor distinction, which cannot confront employers' power to shape their business practices to substitute contracting for employment and thereby diminish the threat of unionization. Simply policing post hoc misclassification of employees as independent contractors overlooks this dynamic. Asking merely "whether the workers are employees or independent contractors" misses the way that both the firm and the law have already framed the issue.

Regarding the potential trajectory of platforms, Boyer (2021) puts forth three distinct configurations as the ideal types of platforms, corresponding to three possible conjunctures of capitalism. He emphasizes that technology is not just about adoption but results in different adaptations in every country, linked to different structures of power between society, economy, and the state. The first configuration is a market-led platform capitalism in "a fully commodified society", exemplified in the USA. The second is "a panoptic political control society", seen as the ultimate consequence of platforms, as in China. Finally, there is "A Republic of the Commons", where information is monitored and controlled by citizens, idealized in the European Union.

Yet, the current reality in Europe is far from such an imaginary of the commons. Moreover, it remains uncertain which of these ideal types will manifest in countries in the Global South, or how a different configuration will evolve. Acknowledging that the resistance of workers and labor organizations to labor exploitation in the platform economy goes beyond legal battles over employment status, labor movements will undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping the landscape of platform work. At this point, it is worth mentioning the global-scale research conducted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Trappman et al., 2020) on worker unrest among app-based food delivery workers, which is a pioneering study in this regard. Covering 527 cases of worker uprisings in 36 countries from January 2017 to May 2020 and utilizing the Leeds Index, a unique dataset on global platform worker protests, the research provides significant insights into regional variations in the motivations behind worker unrest.

Globally, the most substantial driving factor for delivery platform workers was pay, accounting for almost two-thirds of actions (63.4%) worldwide, except in the United States, where employment status was the primary driver for unrest. This divergence underscores a noteworthy distinction: the demand for employee classification predominates in the Global North but is not a primary concern for workers in the Global South. While legal action was the most prevalent type of action in North America and Australia, led mainly by mainstream unions, in Asia and South America, informal groups emerged as the main actors in workers' actions. The researchers, in their analysis of the results, note that the dominance of pay as the primary factor for labor unrest may be unexpected, considering the emphasis on employment status and algorithmic control as sources of contention in existing literature.

However, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, this outcome is expected, considering that, despite the recent increase in studies conducted in other regions and sector, the literature predominantly concentrates on ride-hailing and delivery service workers in the Global North. Therefore, conducting further research on experiences in the Global South has the potential to push scholarship in new directions. Inquiring about platform work in the Global South may reveal the extent to which a legal framework centered on the self-employed/employee dichotomy constrains our comprehension of platform workers' experiences.

3.4. Platformization in Turkey's social landscape: new contestations and monopolizations

As previously discussed, platform companies have become ubiquitous in various aspects of our lives, not only expanded the user base but has significantly increasing the workforce. Turkey reflects this global trend, with a rapid surge in e-commerce and digital platforms. This section delves into the recent developments in Turkey's digital landscape, particularly focusing on major platform companies. A descriptive analysis of the food and grocery delivery sector is provided to understand its scope and size. Additionally, we touch upon the government's support and incentive program to promote young entrepreneurship, highlighting its inclusion of platform delivery workers.

3.4.1 The rise of e-trade and digital platforms in a Turkish context

Uber's filings reveal its active engagement in various lobbying activities in Turkey, aimed at influencing favorable legal regulations. However, this endeavor has encountered significant challenges, with Uber facing strong resistance from taxi driver associations, notably led by the Istanbul Chamber of Automobile Drivers. These associations have taken legal action against Uber, alleging unfair competition, and have organized multiple protests. There have been instances of physical attacks on Uber drivers by taxi drivers, underscoring a tangible resistance to the company within the sector. Uber's strategy to establish a presence in the country, by reaching out to key actors from the government party and cultivating relationships with journalists close to the government failed after a tumultuous year in 2018. Despite Uber's attempts, the desired results were not achieved. The legal battles culminated in a ban on Uber in October 2019. At the end of 2020, it was reopened on the condition that it would only work with taxi drivers (Ünker, 2022).

The Istanbul Chamber of Taxi Drivers recently initiated a lawsuit against *Martı*, a digital platform providing scooter rental "*Martı Motorcycle*" and ride-sharing services "*Martı TAG*". In response, access to these applications was blocked in March 2023. The Istanbul Chamber of Automobile Drivers alleges that these practices are illegal, and the cars and scooters are 'pirate' operators. *Martı* CEO Öktem expressed surprise at the access restriction decision, revealing that it coincided with his visit to the New York Stock Exchange for discussions related to the

ongoing public offering. He laid stress on the contrasting situation, saying, "Yesterday, we were greeted with Turkish flags at the New York Stock Exchange; today, we are battling the taxi barons at the Çağlayan Courthouse." Öktem directed criticism at the President of the Istanbul Chamber of Automobile Drivers, affirming that their applications comply with the law, and they plan to appeal the decision.

Öktem also emphasized data from the İpsos research company, indicating that the number of *Martı TAG* drivers is double the number of taxi drivers. He clarified that *Martı* does not profit from this application. According to the mentioned research, 85% of Istanbul residents face taxi-related issues, and 81% of them wish to vote for someone capable of resolving the taxi problem (GazeteDuvar: 2023). Through this rhetoric, *Martı* aims to garner support from both consumers and the government, traditionally aligned with taxi drivers.

Contrastingly, e-commerce and food delivery platforms have not encountered such an opposition, swiftly solidifying their market dominance. Notable companies in these sectors include *Yemeksepeti* and *Getir*, prominent in food and grocery delivery, and *Trendyol* and *Hepsiburada*, recognized retail platforms with diverse product offerings. In a notable trend, supermarket chains that previously did not provide delivery services have adopted the platform economy model by developing their applications and offering home delivery services. A case in point is *Migros*, a major supermarket chain that, having initially served a limited customer base through in-house delivery, embraced the platform model by acquiring the digital platform *Paket Taxi*.

Although the use of digital platforms has escalated with the pandemic and app-based delivery workers have become more visible in this process, data on the volume of e-commerce and e-marketplaces indicate that the pandemic only reinforced to an already existing trend. The e-commerce sector in Turkey experienced an average annual growth rate of 35% between 2015 and 2019. In terms of growth rates based on categories, e-marketplaces like *Trendyol* and *Hepsiburada* claimed the top spot in the e-commerce sector with a growth rate of 38%. In 2019, e-marketplaces with 306 platforms constituted 37% of the e-commerce market (Deloitte, 2020).

According to data from the Ministry of Trade, inflation-adjusted e-commerce expenditures increased by 3.2 times between 2016 and 2020. In 2021, e-commerce expenditures reached 5.1

% of GDP. E-commerce volume in Turkey, meanwhile, constituted only 9.8% of total trade in 2019, rising to 15.7% and 17.7% in 2020 and 2021, respectively. This rate increased to 18.6% in 2022 (E-Commerce Info Platform). This aligns closely with the global average, as e-commerce accounted for around 19% of total retail trade worldwide in 2021. Moreover, recent calculations suggest that the e-commerce market is expected to experience the most significant growth in Asian and South American countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Indonesia, and India. Turkey is considered one of these rapidly growing countries (Coppola, 2023; Pasquali, 2023).

As of 2022, there are 548,688 businesses engaged in e-commerce activities in Turkey. The overwhelming majority (97%) of these businesses operate within e-commerce marketplaces (E-Commerce Info Platform). Examining the statistics from 2021, approximately half of the sellers in e-marketplaces are individual businesses, indicating that retailers or sellers are predominantly small-scale enterprises. Additionally, 70% of shoppers on these digital platforms prefer using mobile applications for their shopping experiences (E-Commerce Info Platform).

Undoubtedly, the surge in internet and smartphone usage is an important contributing factor. Internet penetration in Turkey, standing at 58% in 2016, experienced rapid growth, reaching 78% by 2020. When we look at the 2020 smartphone penetration rates by country, Turkey surpasses nations like Japan and Brazil with a rate 61.70%, closely following China (Deloitte, 2022).

3.4.2. A Closer Look at Delivery Platform Companies

Let us now take a closer look at the digital platforms that have been instrumental in the substantial growth of e-commerce in Turkey. *Getir* is the first startup platform in Turkey to venture into quick-commerce (q-commerce), a subset of rapid delivery designed for super-fast service. Q-commerce companies like *Getir* establish direct independent relationships with wholesalers and suppliers, eliminating established supply chains by utilizing networks of micro-fulfillment centers, often referred to as "dark stores." Q-commerce operates as an "asset-heavy" platform, involving substantial investments in tangible capital such as real estate, supply chain agreements, equipment, and vehicles. Dark stores strategically position themselves in urban centers near consumers to facilitate "instant delivery" (Verdin et al., 2023).

In the first quarter of 2021, *Getir* secured a \$428 million investment, making it the highest recipient of investment in Turkey. Subsequently, in 2022, *Getir* achieved the status of Turkey's 2nd Decacorn and Europe's first Decacorn in the fast grocery delivery sector, crossing the \$10 billion valuation threshold within a year of obtaining Unicorn status in 2021 (KPMG, 2022). This valuation propelled *Getir* to the 36th position among 1052 Unicorn companies globally, according to data published by CB Insights, which compiles a list of Unicorn companies worldwide. Operating in 129 cities across 9 countries and spanning three continents (DEİK, 2022), *Getir's* investors include prominent names such as Mubadala Investments, the *Abu Dhabi Growth Fund*, *Alpha Wave Global*, *Sequoia Capital*, and *Tiger Global*. Furthermore, *Getir* expanded its reach by acquiring *BLOK*, a grocery delivery startup operating in Spain and Italy, in addition to acquiring *Weezy* in the UK in 2021 and its German rival *Gorillas* in 2022 (Verdin et al., 2023).

As previously stated, the Uberization of work and labor relations exhibits variations based on national contexts. To illustrate, *Getir* adopts distinct employment models in different countries. In Spain, the company directly employs its workers in adherence to local labor laws. In England, it adopts a franchising approach for its dark stores. Notably, it utilizes zero employment contracts, a trend that has gained prominence in the country. In Turkey, where it initiated its operations, *Getir* employs both the franchise model and engages workers through service contracts, either directly or through subcontractors, treating them as freelancers (Verdin et al., 2023).

Established in 2001 as Turkey's initial food delivery website, *Yemeksepeti* has transformed into the digital platform it is today. As of 2022, it operates in 81 provinces of Turkey and has over 30 million users (Ulukan, 2022). The platform facilitates both food delivery from its affiliated restaurants and grocery delivery through its own dark stores. In 2015, the company was acquired by the Berlin-based global online food delivery platform *Delivery Hero* for \$589, marking the highest sale price for a company in Turkey's e-commerce sector at that time (Ayan, 2015). While the company has recently tended to employ more *esnaf-kurye* through subcontractors, it still maintains direct employees.

Trendyol, founded in 2009, achieved a valuation of \$16.5 billion in 2021, becoming the first Turkish company to be designated a "Decacorn". With a customer base exceeding 30 million,

the company delivers an average of 1 million packages daily (BBC News, 2021). The "Trendyol's Impact on Turkey's Economy" study by the Policy Analysis Laboratory (PAL) in 2021 revealed that the company has 1834 employees, and its platform hosts 98 thousand vendor businesses, predominantly SMEs and micro-enterprises. These sellers, in turn, employ 360 thousand people to manage orders from *Trendyol*. The sales realized on the platform mobilize many sectors such as product manufacturing, raw material production, warehouse and supply management, cargo distribution, packaging, customer service and digital marketing. Consequently, *Trendyol* indirectly generates employment for 708 thousand people. When combined with the 98 thousand sellers and the associated indirect employment, the company claims to contribute a total of 1.1 million jobs to the Turkish economy (PAL, 2021). As of August 2021, *Alibaba*, which invested in *Trendyol* in 2018, owns 78.95% of *Trendyol*'s shares (Turkish Competition Authority, 2022).

Established in 2000, *Hepsiburada* began its e-commerce activities on its website by directly selling products and services as a seller. Since 2015, it has opened its platform to third-party vendors and transitioned into an e-marketplace. In July 2021, *Hepsiburada* became the first Turkish company to be listed on NASDAQ stock exchange (Bloomberg HT, 2021).

Trendyol and *Hepsiburada* have diversified their services in the way of becoming a super-app. *Trendyol* complements its marketplace business model with additional services such as shipping operations (*Trendyol Express*), market and food delivery service (*Trendyol Go*), and digital wallet services (*Trendyol Wallet*). Conversely, *Hepsiburada* is broadening its scope with services like *HepsiExpress* (market and food delivery), *HepsiJet* (fast delivery), *HepsiGlobal* (e-export), and *HepsiPay* (payment) available nationwide (Turkish Competition Authority, 2022).

The e-marketplace sector in Turkey, which was dominated by four companies with comparable market shares under the leadership of *Hepsiburada* until 2019, has evolved into a concentrated structure dominated by two companies under the leadership of *Trendyol* in 2020. *Trendyol*, whose presence in the market was minimal in 2015, has become the market leader after five years. Between 2018 and 2020, these two companies increased their market shares from 56.1% to 70.1% in the e-marketplace sector. Hence, there has been a shift in the sector after 2018. *Trendyol* recorded the highest market share increase since this year, while *N11* and *GittiGidiyor*

realized the most significant market share loss. *Hepsiburada* tended to maintain its market share, and *Amazon Turkey*, which entered the market in 2018, achieved a limited market share increase. The inclusion of *Trendyol* in the *Alibaba Group* in 2018 is an influential factor in this. As of 2018 *Trendyol* had a very high level of advertising expenditures compared to other companies. The marketplace that follows *Trendyol* most closely in investment expenditures in this area is *Hepsiburada*, while other marketplaces have yet to progress (Turkish Competition Authority, 2022).

Given the high concentration ratios in the e-marketplace sector, it is likely that this trend may trigger mergers and acquisitions, as the tight oligopoly structure of the market is becoming more robust, and the market share asymmetry is becoming more evident. In 2022, *Gittigidiyor*, owned by *E-Bay*, which first acquired 93% of shares in 2011 and the remaining 7% in 2016, closed. *E-Bay* announced that it had decided to withdraw from Turkey due to the ongoing competitive dynamics in the market. The e-commerce platform, *N11*, which was established in 2012 in Turkey with the partnership of *Doğuş Group* and *SK Group*, one of the largest groups in South Korea, passed under the control of *Getir* by transferring a certain portion of its shares to *Getir* at the end of 2021 through a capital increase (Turkish Competition Authority, 2022).

In his 2022 study, Yeşilbağ examines the platformization and the case of digital monopolization in Turkey, with a specific focus on three rapidly growing companies: *Trendyol*, *Hepsiburada*, and *Getir*. The analysis uncovers a robust trend of monopolization within the sector, anticipated to consolidate further in the coming years. The Turkish case closely aligns with the overarching business model of platforms, characterized by the centrality of data, the impact of network effects, the pursuit of rapid market share through aggressive growth strategies, heightened mergers and acquisitions to acquire potential rivals, and the expansion of operations into related business areas. Yeşilbağ (2022) draws attention to the persistence of this rapid platformization of the economy, despite Turkish platforms' dependency on the infrastructure of American and Chinese Big Techs and the country's research and development expenditures remaining well below the OECD average.

While Turkish Government has not made significant investment in digital business and research and development during this period, it has taken steps to foster entrepreneurship through various incentive and support programs. In 2018, a law was enacted to establish a support program -

New Entrepreneur Support - for young entrepreneurs under the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization (KOSGEB)⁸, operating under the Ministry of Industry and Technology (Official Gazette, 2018). The program targets individuals aged 18-29 who are establishing a private company for the first time, leading to the opening of a social insurance account for the first time due to commercial or self-employment activity. The support comprises incentives that grant these young individuals' exemption from the insurance premium of the Social Insurance Institution for Tradesmen and Craftsmen and Other Independent Employees (Bağ-Kur) and offers income tax support. The Bağ-Kur insurance premiums of the beneficiaries are covered by the treasury for a duration of 1 year. Moreover, these individuals are relieved from income tax payments for amounts up to 150,000 TL for the year 2023. This exemption amount remains valid for a period of 3 years and is subject to annual updates (Official Gazette, 2023).

The exact total number of young people benefiting from this support program has not been specified. However, Entrepreneurship Support Program accounted for 39% of the total KOSGEB support given during its implementation. New Entrepreneur Support received the highest share of this support program (99.5%) (KOSGEB, 2021). In relation to this research, I observed that the young platform delivery workers I met during the fieldwork predominantly started their jobs by benefiting from this program.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter first critically examined the proposition that the economic dominance of digital platforms, accumulating capital primarily through rent, resembles a form of feudalism. The argument against this proposition was presented by underscoring the substantial investment levels of these companies, the nature of their revenues, the crucial role of states in the digital economy, and the significance of legal regulations.

⁸ As of December 2020, there were 3.2 million registered small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Turkey, constituting 99.8% of all enterprises in the country. SMEs play a significant role in the Turkish economy, providing 73.8% of total employment, contributing to 64.5% of the total turnover of enterprises, and accounting for 56.3% of total exports (The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey: 2020). <https://www.tobb.org.tr/KobiArastirma/Sayfalar/TRninKOBileriBulteni.php>

The uberization of work and labor relations is influenced by national contexts, encompassing variations in factors such as the role of state policies and public institutions, the composition of the workforce, the strength of labor organizations and the legal framework. The chapter addressed the cases brought by workers and trade unions against the platform companies regarding employment status of platform workers. It underscored the limitations of the misclassification framework, as the platform companies, wielding significant financial and political power, engage in "regulatory entrepreneurship". Refinements to the status of the platform workers are deemed insufficient to challenge the corporate power of platforms and to shape their business practices. Recognizing that independent contracting is "more a symptom rather than a driving cause" of the issue, thus, there is a need for a dynamic understanding beyond misclassification (Zatz, 2011), encompassing precarization holistically and avoiding confinement to the employee and independent contractor dichotomy for meaningful outcomes for all precarious workers. Furthermore, given the financial constraints faced by most low-wage workers and labor organizations to pursue employment status cases, coupled with the platform companies' reluctance to comply with the law, the chapter emphasized the importance of a perspective that goes beyond legal battles over employment status, listens more different worker resistances in various parts of the world, acknowledging their role in shaping the trajectory of platform work.

In the last section, the chapter focused on the Turkish context, exploring first Uber's attempts to enter Turkey and the resulting reactions. Despite Uber lobbying for legal regulations favorable to its operations in Turkey, it faced a significant backlash from taxi drivers and their associations. The government, traditionally aligned with these associations, continued to support them. Conversely, e-commerce and food delivery platforms did not encounter a similar opposition and enhanced their market influence swiftly. While the usage of digital platforms and applications in Turkey surged during the pandemic, and platform delivery workers gained visibility, data on the volume of e-commerce and e-marketplaces indicate that the pandemic only reinforced an already existing trend. The platformization of the economy is progressing rapidly, even though Turkish platforms remain dependent on the infrastructure of American and Chinese technology companies, and Turkey's research and development spending as a percentage of GDP falls below the OECD average. On the other hand, the Turkish government has recently introduced incentive and support programs at fostering entrepreneurship, and these

initiatives has found widespread participation of *esnaf-kurye* platform workers under the age of 29.

This chapter presented a brief exploration of platformization in the Turkish context, stating its peculiarities that arise from local political and social contestations. The upcoming chapter will unfold the research's findings on labor relations within the food and grocery delivery platform in Istanbul.



4. Being Esnaf-kurye Worker in Istanbul

This chapter delves into delivery platform work, known and recognized under the name of 'esnaf-kurye'. In this section, we will commence by offering concise details about the scale and regulation of *esnaf-kurye* in Turkey, highlighting the absence of statistical information and comprehensive research, thereby accentuating the resulting ambiguity. The second section outlines the labor relations within the food and grocery delivery platform in Turkey, focusing on three major companies in the sector: Getir, Trendyol, and Yemeksepeti. This section introduces delivery platform work, detailing the procedure of being an *esnaf-kurye* worker, their employment status, workers' related costs, and duties, as well as the companies' organization of work, including the working hours, breaks, payments, performance model, and control mechanisms.

The third section aims to understand the drivers behind individuals becoming esnaf-kurye by exploring their prior work experiences and the general deterioration of working conditions within the broader socio-economic context of the country. It argues that their inclination to become esnaf-kurye cannot be attributed to self-styled desires or illusions imposed by platforms.

The following section focuses on *esnaf-kurye* experiences after they commence work. Initially, we will address a pivotal concern: work-related diseases, accidents, and fatalities stemming from this work model. Subsequently, we will scrutinize the piece-rate payment system, which not only leads to these risks but also poses other critical challenges for workers. The discussion will explore how workers perceive incentives such as bonuses and promotions provided by companies, examine the effects of the *esnaf-kurye* work model on workers' interpretations of their work and colleagues, explore their relationships with customers, and scrutinize how workers' masculinity is both (re)produced and (re)formed within this work context.

The fifth section, taking into account all these discussions, examines the accuracy of framing the platform economy through the concept of 'algorithmic management'. The concluding

section serves as a summary, encapsulating the discussions in this chapter and revisiting the concept of worker consent, in the context of the *esnaf-kurye* system.

4.1. Motorcycle Delivery Worker Labor Force in Turkey: Unclear Estimates and Ambiguities

There is a noticeable absence of official statistics on delivery platform workers in Turkey, and there are only a few studies available (ILO, 2022; IPA, 2021; Universus, 2021). Additionally, platforms choose not to disclose the specific number of *esnaf-kurye* they hire. It is crucial to emphasize that working as an *esnaf-kurye* in the delivery sector extends beyond delivery applications and e-commerce platforms, encompassing contracts with Turkey's post office, cargo companies, and supermarkets. This diversity of roles and lack of reliable numbers add to confusion and allow for a wide range of estimates.

According to the All-Anatolian Motorcycle Delivery Workers' Federation (Tüm Anadolu Motosikletli Kuryeler Federasyonu), an estimated 900,000 motorcycle delivery workers operate in Turkey (Bianet, 2021). However, the specific number falling under the category of *esnaf-kurye* remains undisclosed⁹. Other delivery worker associations, such as Delivery Worker Rights Association (Kurye Hakları Derneği), offer varying estimates, sometimes reaching into the hundreds of thousands. It is important to note that the basis for these figures remains unclear, adding to the challenge of accurately assessing the workforce. Notably, existing few reports from sources such as the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) and the Istanbul Planning Agency (IPA, 2021) continue to reference these numbers, further highlighting the complexities in obtaining reliable statistics on delivery workers in Turkey.

⁹ The categorization of delivery work without differentiation based on various worker statuses and organizational structures has reinforced the confusion in existing studies. The Universus Center for Social Research's research in July-September 2020 is illustrative of this issue. The study, encompassing 14 face-to-face semi-structured interviews and 119 online surveys with motorcycle delivery workers in Istanbul, aimed to explore working conditions, income status, health and safety, and customer relations. However, the survey failed to inquire whether the delivery workers operating on digital platforms as *esnaf-kurye*, were employees in a company, or worked in individual restaurants. Researchers acknowledged this oversight after completing the survey, underscoring the need for a more nuanced approach in understanding the heterogeneous composition of the delivery sector.

According to the 2021 report by the TÜMTİS Union (All Transport Workers Union), approximately 100,000 people work as *esnaf-kurye* in Turkey (Kıdak, 2021). However, the report does not explicitly detail the composition of this number, such as how many of these workers are employed by cargo companies or work through delivery platforms.

According to NACE Rev. 2¹⁰, motorcycle delivery workers fall under the Transportation and Storage Group with the NACE code 53.20.09, encompassing general 'motorcycle delivery work activities.' As per the NACE code system, workplace hazard classes are categorized into Very Hazardous, Hazardous, and Less Hazardous. Notably, the motorcycle delivery profession is classified in the less dangerous class (ito.org).

In 2017, The Vocational Qualifications Authority (MYK) established the Vocational Standards of Motorcycle Delivery Work, formalized further in 2019 through the publication of National Qualification Criteria by the same institute. These criteria serve as the basis for obtaining a Motorcycle Delivery Worker Vocational Competence Certificate. However, it is crucial to note that there is no mandate stipulating the necessity of this certificate for individuals to work as motorcycle delivery workers. Moreover, there are no regulations regarding the *esnaf-kurye* system.

Consequently, the absence of fundamental data on the profession, coupled with regulatory ambiguities, has not been adequately addressed by the limited number of studies conducted in the field. Within the confines of this research, estimations were drawn from insights obtained through interviews with workers and perspectives shared by active associations and unions in the field. It is approximated that there are around 7,000-9,000 delivery workers serving as *esnaf-kurye* in Getir, 12,000-14,000 in Trendyol Go, and 8,000-10,000 in Yemeksepeti in Istanbul.

¹⁰ NACE, derived from the French term 'Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne' (Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community), serves as the system for classifying economic activities within the European Union. It utilizes a four-digit classification, providing the structure for collecting and presenting extensive statistical data across economic areas, including production, employment, and national accounts. NACE Rev. 2, the revised version of this classification, was introduced in 2007 to enhance accuracy and relevance in economic activity categorization. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php?title=Glossary:Statistical_classification_of_economic_activities_in_the_European_Community_\(NACE\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php?title=Glossary:Statistical_classification_of_economic_activities_in_the_European_Community_(NACE))

These figures are approximations. Given that food and grocery delivery platforms extend beyond these companies, and the presence of the *esnaf-kurye* model in other sectors, such as the cargo industry, has been identified, conducting more comprehensive research is imperative to determine the total number of *esnaf-kurye* workers both in Istanbul and across Turkey.¹¹

4.2. Labor Dynamics: Examining Work Relationships in Delivery Platforms

This section will outline the labor relations within the food and grocery delivery platform in Turkey, focusing on three major companies in the sector: *Getir*, *Trendyol*, and *Yemeksepeti*. Throughout the research, it was observed that these companies, strategically positioning themselves in relation to each other and the market, underwent changes in their workforce practices, payment structures, and employment systems. For instance, the oldest among them, *Yemeksepeti*, initially employed delivery workers solely in an employee position. However, as later companies began hiring workers as independent contractors, leading to an industry-wide shift in this direction, *Yemeksepeti* also transitioned to this model. Consequently, the organizational differences among these companies will be assessed not as specific characteristics unique to each company, but rather as indicators of the broader repertoire and dynamic relationships inherent in the platform economy. Accordingly, the discussion will not focus on individual companies but will describe the contours of delivery platform work in Turkey.

In this employment arrangement, delivery workers are legally considered self-employed rather than employees. While informal employment in the food delivery sector was already a well-known reality in Turkey, the practice of hiring delivery workers as "self-employed workers" through platforms began before the pandemic and gained further prevalence during it. We mentioned before that delivery platform workers are referred to as *esnaf-kurye* in Turkey. "Esnaf" is a common term for individuals engaged in small-scale trade or craft. It carries

¹¹ Additionally, though not within the scope of this research, it is noteworthy that many *esnaf-kurye* delivery workers make deliveries by car, both in *Trendyol* and *Getir*, as well as through various other platforms.

connotations of independence, business ownership, autonomy from a director or manager, and even the potential to establish and manage one's business, including employing workers.

This employment model, however, is not limited to food and grocery delivery but is also prevalent in cargo, supermarkets, and e-commerce platforms. Moreover, private hospitals in Turkey often require doctors to establish their private companies. That is these hospitals use the platform employment model as well by signing service contracts with the doctors instead of employing them directly within their own structure.

Delivery platform companies in Turkey not only engage in direct service contracts with workers but also frequently recruit workers through third-party companies. For instance, Yemeksepeti has agreements with numerous subcontractors and also directly contracts with workers. While Yemeksepeti still includes a portion of its delivery workers under employee status, there has been a significant decrease in their numbers due to the company's consolidation of the *esnaf-kurye* system. Similarly, Getir recruits workers through its primary subcontractor company, Vigo, and also establishes direct contracts with workers. Additionally, Getir operates with a franchising system, where some of its warehouses are assigned to franchisees. Trendyol, on the other hand, mainly recruits workers through the DSM Logistics company. Notably, all three companies generally do not provide a copy of the contracts to the workers.

Becoming a platform delivery worker does not entail stringent hiring criteria. Interested individuals can submit job applications online, usually requiring them to be over 18 years old, possess a motorcycle license, and maintain a clean criminal record. Following the application process, candidates are often invited to the offices for a single interview and receive a brief overview of the job. However, it is important to highlight instances where individuals work through other people's accounts, even if they are below 18 years of age. In these cases, individuals may pay rent to the account holders to access the platform and carry out deliveries.

On the other hand, workers are required to establish individual companies and hire an accountant. They are responsible for paying their own health and retirement premiums. In the previous section, we discussed the support program for young entrepreneurs. Many young *esnaf-kurye* workers receive this support when they start working for platform companies, meaning when they establish their own individual companies. That is, they are exempt from

health and retirement premiums for 1 year and income tax payments for 3 years. However, after the specified periods, workers are required to make these payments. In addition to these payments, there are various other expenses that workers must cover. *Esnaf-kurye* workers are obliged to pay several taxes, such as a 20% VAT on delivery orders received each month, income tax every six months, as well as stamp duty¹².

Research indicates a significant presence of migrant workers in the platform economy worldwide. Many migrant platform workers work in major cities of Global North countries (Altenried, 2021; Barratt et al., 2020; ILO, 2021; Aloisi & de Stefano, 2022; van Doorn et al., 2020; Lata et al., 2023). In South America, immigrants from within the continent are at a considerable level (Cordero and Castro, 2019; Miguez and Menendez, 2021), while in India, China, or various South Asian countries, a substantial portion of the platform economy is comprised of workers who have migrated from rural areas to urban centers (Dinh & Tienari: 2022; Das & Srravya, 2021; Sun, 2022; Tandon & Rathi 2022; Zhou, 2022).

However, in recent years, Istanbul, the main research setting of this study, has experienced a decline as a destination for internal migration. Legal regulations' constraints pose significant obstacles for immigrants from different countries seeking employment¹³. Consequently, the presence of immigrants in platform work remains marginal. Moreover, the platforms tend not to contract migrant workers, a situation exacerbated by an already high unemployment rate, a substantial available labor force, and an increasingly racist political climate in the country. A

¹² In Turkey, tradesmen and craftsmen are classified into two categories based on the determination of their earnings, and the tax they are obliged to pay depends on this categorization: those subject to income tax in the simple method and those subject to income tax in the real method. *Esnaf-kurye* is subject to real income tax. On the other hand, tradesmen such as grocers, hairdressers, taxi license plate owners are subject to simple income tax. Simple method taxpayers are taxed only on the difference between the purchase price and the sale price of goods. They do not need to maintain an operating ledger or pay other taxes, including VAT. This also implies a clear disadvantage of *esnaf-kurye* in terms of taxation.

¹³ For migrants to work as employees in Turkey, their employers must apply for a work permit on their behalf. The law restricts the proportion of immigrant workers in any business to no more than 10%. Additionally, certain branches of business are prohibited to immigrants. Those desiring to establish a private company must demonstrate a residence in Turkey for at least five years and then apply to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security for a self-employment work permit. They can open a company only if their requests are deemed appropriate following evaluation by the ministry.

notable exception is Yemeksepeti, which took a distinctive approach by initiating acquisitions in 2023. Workers joining this company, albeit in limited numbers still, mainly come from Central Asian countries, such as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Recognized as 'Turkish origin,' these individuals face fewer regulatory restrictions on establishing personal companies compared to other immigrants.

In the *esnaf-kurye* employment model, workers are mandated to own their own motorcycles, as only a few companies offer the option to purchase or rent them. Delivery workers must acquire commercial vehicle registration for the motorcycles used in their work and register the top cases for deliveries under this registration. Prior to this, the top cases of these motorcycles must be designed by authorized companies in accordance with legal specifications and approved by the Turkish Standards Institute. All these requirements entail additional expenses for the workers.

Moreover, workers are obligated to wear platform-branded uniforms and use top cases featuring the company's logo. These essential work equipment items are typically sold to workers, who are expected to use them during their working hours. Working without these branded items is strictly prohibited. Furthermore, workers are responsible for covering all costs associated with carrying out their work. This includes expenses related to their cellphone and motorcycle supply and maintenance, protective motorcycle equipment, as well as gasoline. Additionally, any traffic fines incurred during work duties are the financial responsibility of the workers themselves.

Consequently, this work arrangement shifts all risks and costs onto the workers. On one hand, it allows platform companies to avoid investing in capital equipment and operational costs. On the other hand, it enables them to evade the legal responsibilities of an employer in respecting labor rights. Since *esnaf-kurye* workers are classified as self-employed, they are deprived of the right to be a member of a union.

All three companies have application systems they use for employing workers. Workers are required to grant these applications a wide range of access permissions, including location information, microphone, camera, calling, managing calls, and managing background processes. In all three companies, a hierarchical structure is in place, with managers ranking above the workers. These managers go by various titles such as consultant, supervisor, field

manager, chief, regional manager. For instance, at *Trendyol*, the superiors above the workers are referred to as consultants. Workers typically have the ability to reach out to their immediate manager and address issues when necessary. Additionally, at *Getir*, the operational zones have formed social media communication groups that include both workers and managers from that specific zone. Companies also provide channels, such as chat or operators, through which workers can seek technical support.

In these three companies, the overwhelming majority of workers work very long hours, relying primarily on this income to make ends meet. At *Getir*, the work schedule is prepared daily or weekly by superiors and communicated to workers through messaging applications. Generally, workers are required to work six days a week for a minimum of 10 hours per day, with the possibility of extending to 16 hours in some weeks. For example, the work schedule of workers working through the *Vigo* subcontractor is sent daily and they are obliged to work 12 hours. They have the right to choose one of the weekdays off. However, workers may be expected to work seven days a week during certain periods. Previously, at *Yemeksepeti*, working hours were determined by superiors, similar to *Getir*, and sent to workers weekly. However, *Yemeksepeti* has transitioned to a model where each worker can choose their preferred hours and work for the desired duration within 24 hours. Despite this seemingly flexible approach, there are significant limitations in practice, as will be elaborated shortly.

On the other hand, at *Trendyol*, workers create their own work schedules, choosing preferred slots 7 days between 09.00-02.30. However, *Trendyol* designates specific time frames, namely 15:30-22:00 on Sundays and 18:00-22:00 on other days, as "winning hours," even though they do not offer higher pay per package compared to other times. Since July 2023, workers are required to work a total of 21 hours a week during these "winning hours." The schedule is designed in a way that if a worker does not work during these hours on any day other than Sunday, they are obliged to work on Sunday. Prior to this date, the company mandated a 45-hour workweek. However, neither the previous requirement nor the current 21-hour rule is documented anywhere. Nevertheless, the PowerPoint documents presented during the online presentation of the company's new payment structure in July 2023 still included the phrase "expectation to work 45 hours per week." Some workers I spoke to were uncertain whether this would continue to be used as a criterion for their evaluations. In fact, the platform work's rules are constantly changing unilaterally.

In platform work, each worker is assigned a performance score based on factors such as adherence to shifts, package delivery time, package acceptance rate and customer satisfaction. This score does not only impact the worker's earning but also establish limits on their ability to determine working hours. For instance, at *Getir*, a percentage of the hourly payment is deducted in case of low performance score, and even being one minute late to work results in a wage deduction. In other words, *Getir* uses the hourly payment as a disciplinary mechanism. Conversely, workers with higher performance scores in both *Yemeksepeti* and *Trendyol* gain the privilege of choosing their working hours (slots) earlier. Workers with lower scores are left to choose from the remaining hours. Therefore, the flexibility in working and the freedom to choose working hours have limited practical significance. An extreme example illustrating this is the use of breaks at *Yemeksepeti*. In theory, workers who work 8 hours or more are entitled to a 30-minute break, and those who work 12 hours or more get a 1.5-hour break. However, taking breaks affects performance scores negatively, causing the worker to select their working slot for the next week later than those with higher scores. Consequently, if there are not enough free slots remaining, the worker may find it challenging to secure work.

At *Trendyol*, workers are entitled to a 45-minute break when working 8 hours or more. However, before January 2023, workers at *Trendyol* did not have the right to take a break during what the company referred to as 'winning hours,' particularly when the order density was high. It's noteworthy that one of the demands raised by workers during protests held on this date was the abolition of this practice. Consequently, the company responded to this demand and abolished the policy, allowing workers to take breaks even during peak order periods.

On the other hand, those working 12 hours a day at *Getir* via *Vigo* also have the right to a 45-minute break. Notably, workers with a direct contract with *Getir* have a more extended break, being entitled to a 1-hour break for the same duration of work. Moreover, at *Getir*, the right to a break cannot be utilized during peak order hours. Similarly, in *Yemeksepeti*, during adverse weather conditions, unless the governorship prohibits working, the break option in the system is disabled, leaving workers unable to take breaks. It is important to note that the company runs aggressive campaigns and promotions for customers, particularly during these challenging periods.

Companies provide a minimal monetary subsidy for every 1 km that workers drive. However, in Turkey, where the price of gasoline has been constantly rising, this support is not only insufficient but also exacerbates by the fact that the navigation systems used by the companies are generally based on Manhattan distance calculation. This method tends to show the distance the workers actually drive as much shorter than it is. This issue is not unique to Turkey and is observed in other countries as well. For instance, among the demands of Foodpanda (owned by Delivery Hero company, which also owns *Yemeksepeti* in Turkey) workers in Hong Kong who initiated a resistance in August 2022, was the change of the Manhattan distance calculation system (globalmayday.net).

All three companies have a designated work zone that workers determine at the time of their recruitment. Within these zones, orders are supposed to be assigned to workers from distances ranging between 6-9 km, depending on the company. However, in practice, companies may assign orders from longer distances or even outside the designated zones. In other words, workers are required to enter the system from their own zone every day, but they may find themselves in different regions during the day. To compensate for this, companies provide extra gasoline support.

Rejecting orders is not allowed in practice, but the policies vary among the companies. At *Getir*, rejecting an order is not permitted; once an order arrives, a persistent and loud alarm rings on the phone until the order is accepted. On the other hand, workers at *Trendyol* face two options when presented with an order: they must either accept the order or close their slot for 1.5 hours. In essence, if an order is rejected, the company penalizes the worker by depriving them of the opportunity to work for 1.5 hours. The company, however, delegates this penalizing task to the workers themselves, as they choose this penalty through an option provided in the system. At *Yemeksepeti*, workers have the right to reject up to three orders, despite the fact that this practice lowers their performance scores. However, upon the third rejection, their accounts are deactivated for half an hour. In case of repeated rejections, workers are subject to more serious sanctions, and their accounts may be suspended, or their contracts may be terminated.

The payment system employed in platform work is piecework, meaning there is no guaranteed fixed wage, and workers are compensated for each delivered package. Payments are processed on a weekly basis. Companies announce their payment structures twice a year, in January and

July, coinciding with the new minimum wage adjustments. Payment policies may vary between cities, with piece wages typically higher in larger cities like Istanbul. Notably, some companies, such as *Getir*, have recently implemented varied pricing structures within districts in Istanbul.

Trendyol and *Yemeksepeti* compensate workers solely based on the number of packages they deliver, while *Getir* adopts a hybrid approach, providing both an hourly wage and payment per delivered package. However, *Getir's* per-package payment is lower compared to that of the other firms. Furthermore, the company uses the hourly payment as a disciplinary tool, deducting a percentage of the hourly payment for lateness, even if it is just one minute.

It is essential to note here that before the entry of platform companies into the sector, the payment structure in the food delivery sector in Turkey was based on monthly wages. The sector predominantly relied on informal wage employment, where workers received a fixed wage. A portion of workers were covered by a social security system that offered health care and pensions. In contrast to the current piece-rate payment system, the sector did not practice payment per package delivered before the advent of these firms. Workers' earnings were not influenced by the number of packages they delivered per day. Furthermore, businesses provided the necessary equipment for the job, including motorcycles for the workers.

In platform work, alongside the piecework system, workers are incentivized to enhance productivity through "promotions" or "bonuses." When workers exceed certain package number thresholds, their per-package pay also increases. *Yemeksepeti*, *Trendyol*, and *Getir* - all three companies - establish daily or weekly targets and provide "bonuses" to workers who achieve the specified package delivery goals. Besides the regular targets, companies occasionally introduce special bonus systems.

It is worth noting that the introduction of performance-based pay systems in Turkey has become more prevalent in recent decades, especially in sectors such as banking, insurance, marketing, retailing, information technology, automotive, and manufacturing. Workers generally perceive this system more as a "threat (stick)" than as an "incentive (carrot)" (Yılmaz, 2004: 270). This approach has also been adopted in the public sector, including hospitals and schools.

According to research conducted by the Turkish Medical Association (2009), doctors reported an increase in the number of examinations, hospitalized patients, patients admitted to intensive care units, and consultation requests in their institutions. However, they also noted a rise in "interventions without indications," "unethical practices," and "malpractice." Additionally, "examination time per patient" decreased. The introduction of a performance-based pay system led to increased "competition among employees" and "competition among clinics," while "leave and rest periods" decreased and "work stress" increased. The study revealed that a performance-based pay system, prioritizing quantity over the quality of service, has a significant negative impact on "honest work," "interest in scientific research," and "the opportunity to provide better service to society" (52-4).

On the other hand, "Surge Pricing", a dynamic pricing strategy that has become synonymous with Uber but also used by numerous other platforms (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016), is not utilized by delivery platforms in Turkey. This practice is typically employed by platforms to synchronize worker behavior with fluctuations in customer demand. It involves incentivizing workers to be present in specific areas during specific times by offering higher payment rates for tasks performed in "surge" areas with elevated customer demand. Workers receive notifications informing them that their tasks will be compensated at increased rates during certain times and in specific locations, thereby ensuring a higher availability of workers in high-demand areas (Nguyen & Mateescu, 2019: 5-6). This dynamic pricing strategy is implemented during adverse weather conditions or periods of reduced labor supply. For example, Deliveroo continued to apply it as an 'incentive' even during a 'red alert' snowstorm in Edinburgh in 2018 (Gregory, 2021: 321).

As stated earlier, while *Getir* workers are already obligated to work during the specified hours provided to them on a daily or weekly basis, *Trendyol* also mandates specific working hours for its workers. Therefore, it can be argued that these companies may not find it necessary to implement a dynamic wage policy. Conversely, although *Yemeksepeti* has recruited a significant number of workers which can mitigate any potential shortage in meeting customer demand, the company does not allow workers to take break in adverse weather conditions. Moreover, the company runs aggressive campaigns and promotions for customers, particularly during these challenging periods.

Given that workers are remunerated on a piece-rate basis, adverse weather conditions pose a serious dilemma for them, forcing a trade-off between personal safety and financial loss. This predicament sparked justified anger among *Trendyol* workers, prompting the company to make concessions on this issue in 2023. On days when work is prohibited by the governorship, *Trendyol* ensures that workers receive a specified daily payment. However, this approach is not universal among other companies, where workers facing similar circumstances do not receive comparable compensation.

At *Getir*, workers request leave by contacting their superiors in the event of illness or injury. Similarly, they report their situation to their consultants at *Trendyol*. However, taking leave at *Trendyol*, even for a specific period, can have adverse effects on performance scores. In the event of illness or an accident at *Yemeksepeti*, workers need to enter the system and have an order assigned to them to indicate their leave. Only after receiving an order can they communicate their situation to technical support. It's worth noting that *Yemeksepeti* has recently adopted a more application-centric approach to address worker issues, reducing reliance on physical supervisors. In this context, a significant challenge faced by workers is that public hospitals may not provide medical reports due to their self-employed status. This can lead to tensions with companies regarding the duration of requested leaves. On the other hand, considering the piece-work basis, workers often feel pressured to return before a required rest period.

All delivery workers in the three companies are covered by private insurance, which they pay for themselves, providing coverage for accidents that may occur during their employment. Additionally, in the case of potential traffic accidents, *Getir* and *Yemeksepeti* workers are responsible for going to the hospital and managing necessary procedures independently. In contrast, *Trendyol* has established a team, estimated to consist of 15-20 workers in Istanbul, specifically designated to accompany workers involved in accidents. The company has equipped this team with essential first aid training. In the event of an accident involving a *Trendyol* worker, their information is dispatched to the appropriate worker based on the region where the incident occurred. The assigned worker is not expected to carry out package deliveries during this time and receives compensation for providing assistance.

Moreover, *Trendyol* has entered into an agreement with a subcontracted security company. This subcontractor, often employing retired police officers, oversees the workers' compliance with essential traffic rules during their work. Infractions like riding without a helmet, running a red light, or driving in the wrong direction are documented by capturing a photo of the worker at the time of the incident. In the event of a first violation, the worker is notified of the situation and issued a warning. A second violation results in termination of the contract signed with the worker, i.e. dismissal.

In all three companies, workers are influenced by customer ratings. These ratings have the potential to affect their performance scores and may lead to warnings from their superiors. In *Getir*, customers rate both the restaurant and the delivery worker on a 5-point scale, with a comment box available under the question "Are you satisfied with the worker's delivery?" *Yemeksepeti* customers rate the delivery under the title "Speed". At *Trendyol*, customers rate the service, taste, and delivery on a 5-point scale. Following "Delivery," it says "Evaluate Trendyol Go" in parentheses. The score given in the "Delivery (Evaluate Trendyol Go)" category forms the worker's customer satisfaction score, impacting the worker's job, including their ability to choose a weekly slot, as mentioned above. It is worth noting that the company, by including its own name in this context, essentially prompts its customers to rate the workers. In contrast, platform companies themselves are not subject to customer ratings.

Consequently, as described in this section, although platform workers are legally categorized as self-employed, the imposition of specific working hours, limited break rights, the use of performance scores as disciplinary tools, and the presence of physical superiors reflect a classical subordinate relationship between employee and employer. Additionally, workers face significant financial responsibilities, including the establishment of individual companies, high tax payments, health and retirement premiums, as well as various other expenses such as motorcycle maintenance and uniforms.

The ascent of platform-based employment, commonly known as *esnaf-kurye* system, has become a prevailing model not only in food and grocery delivery but also in sectors such as cargo, supermarkets, and e-commerce platforms in Turkey. This transformation has consequences for various aspects of employment, influencing the responsibilities and risks shouldered by workers. A significant shift is the adoption of a piece-rate payment system,

replacing the traditional monthly wage structure, which stands out as a defining characteristic of delivery platform work. This payment model, based on charging per package delivered, often compels workers to extend their working hours, contradicting the promise of flexible working in practice. Moreover, while *Getir* already enforces mandatory working hours, the operation of the other two companies results in workers with shorter hours being unable to create their work schedules as they wish. In essence, this model presupposes that workers will engage in long hours and maintain high performance levels.

While the study noted that companies frequently alter their workforce practices, pay structures, and employment systems, resisting rigid classification among them, a few key points can be highlighted. *Getir*, the only Turkish company among these, adopts distinct employment models in different countries, as mentioned in the previous chapter. In Turkey, where it initiated its operations, *Getir* employs both the franchise model and engages workers through service contracts, either directly or through subcontractors, creating a more fissured workplace. In controlling the labor process, it relies on more physical managers, resembling a more conventional organizational model. In contrast, *Trendyol* has shifted towards a one-to-one model, emphasizing the worker-consultant relationship. The company imposes a limited working hours obligation and manages workers through a performance system. Additionally, it appears that *Trendyol* has responded to workers' demands to some extent. Notably, *Yemeksepeti*'s adoption of an application-oriented approach in labor process management and the absence of a minimum working hours obligation signal a different path, aligning more with practices observed in other countries.

4.3. Working 'without a boss': Understanding Worker Orientations in Becoming *Esnaf-Kurye*

This section is dedicated to unraveling the nuanced meanings attributed to being *esnaf-kurye*, being a worker and the nature of the work itself. It examines how workers interpret and navigate the ideals of flexibility, autonomy, and freedom - values also championed by the platform economy. The primary objective of this exploration is to gain insights into the factors that drive individuals to become *esnaf-kurye*. It probes whether this choice reflects the internalization of the neoliberal promises made by companies or grounded in genuine concerns about challenging

working conditions prevalent in the labor market. Put another way, the section seeks to uncover the extent to which the desire for self-employment represents an aspiration to be "the boss of one's own business" or a yearning to work "without a boss."

Acknowledging the complexity of these questions and the diverse perspectives among delivery workers, this section nonetheless draws attention to a noteworthy pattern that emerges in the life stories of interviewed platform workers. It does not claim universality but rather seeks to analyze the "systemic relationship between the conventional economy and platform economies," addressing a crucial gap identified by Vallas and Schor (2020: 285-6) in the literature on platform economies. Rather than treating the platform economy as an isolated entity operating under its own rules, this section aims to understand worker orientations to platform work by exploring their past experiences in the broader labor market.

The introduction to this chapter highlighted the scarcity of studies on platform workers in labor-based digital platforms in Turkey. Kıdak's study (2021) titled "Self-Employment Deception in Cargo Transportation: Tradesman Courier Model" (Kargo Taşımacılığında Kendi Hesabına Çalışma Aldatmacası: Esnaf-kurye Modeli), published by TÜMTİS union, is one of first studies to focus on *esnaf-kurye* system, although it is not specifically about platform workers. It draws on in-depth interviews with 12 workers engaged in cargo companies in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir as *esnaf-kurye*.

The first part of the study introduces the *esnaf-kurye* model after discussing the state of the cargo transportation sector in general, while the second part focuses on the recruitment processes of *esnaf-kurye* workers, their legal status, their conceptions of work, their class composition and level of alienation, their working conditions, monthly income, social security rights, health and safety measures, their relations with each other and the phenomenon of competition, their perspectives on organizing, their future expectations and concerns within the framework of the findings obtained from the interviews conducted within the research (13).

According to Kıdak, "workers who are initially attracted by the illusion of 'being their own boss'" soon "face a drama scenario" finding themselves in miserable working conditions. The study reaches the conclusion that the status of *esnaf-kurye* creates an "illusion in the class perceptions of the workers" and that the "level of alienation is the most important obstacle to

their collective actions”. From this normative point of view, it draws attention to the importance of “class consciousness” and argues that the demand for attaining employee status should be the focus of the struggle (95-6).

It is worth noting here two ethnographic studies (Tuğal, 2012; Birelma, 2016) that seek to understand workers’ subjectivities by scrutinizing the entrepreneurial aspirations among the working class. Tuğal’s work reveals that even in the urban poor districts of Istanbul, most sub-proletarians, including the poorest, perceive themselves as “serbest meslek sahibi”¹⁴ (free-lancers), rather than workers. He emphasizes that this self-perception embodies a “small-producer orientation, mixed with an entrepreneurial spirit”. Tuğal suggests that the urban poor's "small-producer orientation" is "transposed" from the "core expectation" of the small peasantry, namely, "the protection of small property". Additionally, Tuğal raises the question whether these orientations extend beyond the sub-proletarian position to encompass the proletariat. Drawing from his interaction with a limited number of formal sector workers in the field, he contends that these workers were among those “least influenced by small-producer ideology”.

Birelma (2016) challenges Tuğal's perspective, arguing that Tuğal characterizes a small-producer ideology among the working class as almost “an authentic anomaly,” specific to sub-proletarians in Turkey. Birelma remarks that this phenomenon is observed among working classes in many countries, albeit to varying degrees, providing examples from different nations. Through his ethnography in İkitelli, Birelma illustrates how workers interpret their status as worker, drawing on the term "el işi" ("stranger's business"), commonly used for wage work in the district. He explains that this term implies “a popular resentment towards and non-identification with wage labor in a social milieu where self-employment seems reachable”. While this argument seems plausible, he adds that "capitalism conditions this resentment, igniting the desire for entrepreneurism". However, it remains unclear what Birelma means by "capitalism", whether he refers to capitalism as relations of production or as an ideology.

¹⁴ Tuğal (2012: 66) explains that “serbest meslek' is an equivalent of the English term 'free-lancer,' but with very different local connotations.” While “in official statistics, the term refers to self-employed people”, “the local usage saves face among the unemployed and the sub-proletariat and hides illegal business; among professionals (and everybody else too), it avoids intrusion by survey researchers, since it serves as a standard answer.”

Birelma (2016) further asserts that "petty entrepreneurship is a key to understand the charm of capitalism among the working class" and that "its effects on subjectivities are even more significant than its actual prevalence". Consequently, he contends that "the prevalence and subjective impacts of entrepreneurship among the working class" constitute "arguably the most crucial factor for understanding working class consent to capitalism". In this context, it appears that by capitalism Birelma means capitalism as an ideology and that this ideology preaches entrepreneurship. In this idealistic interpretation, workers' subjectivity is framed as the entrepreneurial desire of the working class, and it is reduced to being an effect of ideology. The reasoning behind equating capitalism with entrepreneurship is also open to debate, and how this equation is justified remains unclear.

Fleming (2022: 60-3), in this regard, underscores that the critics of neoliberalism often overly emphasize its ideological doxa, relying excessively on its assumptions. However, this is not to disregard the role of ideology. Fleming's critique is not rooted in a materialist argument, but rather in the assertion that "late capitalism subjectively incorporates us in a purely negative sense." Neoliberal ideology, according to him, does not aim to persuade individuals that compliance will lead to happiness and special privileges. Instead, it seeks to remind them that potential exclusion is always imminent. In this perspective, critical theory needs to move away from the assumption that the capitalist organization of work attempts to "woo" workers into compliance for its preferred employment conditions.

Fleming argues that control no longer requires legitimacy; the neoliberal "ideological message" itself serves as more than a mere governance tool. The goal of managerial regulation, in his view, is not to entice individuals into becoming "willing collaborators", but to affirm the moment of power itself, determining whether an individual is currently favored or subject to harassment until they voluntarily leave. Moreover, challenging the discourse that posits neoliberalism as functioning by generating favorable desires to secure worker consent, Fleming argues that such an approach assumes a consistency in neoliberalism's operation. However, he contends that, from the perspective of the working classes, neoliberalism has never truly functioned, making it futile to inquire about its supposed internal consistency or functionality.

In a similar vein, Lazzarato (2012: 9) argues that capitalism has forsaken the grand narratives it previously built around the archetypes of the entrepreneur, the creative visionary, and the

independent worker who takes pride in being their own boss. The emphasis on “dedication, subjective motivation and *work on the self*” promoted by management since the 1980s has shifted into a mandate for individuals to bear the costs and risks of economic and financial disasters. The broader population is now tasked with assuming the responsibilities that corporations and the Welfare State “externalize onto society”, with debt being the foremost burden.

Instead of portraying platform workers as mere victims of false consciousness or neoliberal ideology, this chapter adopts a framework that underscores the political-economic conditions shaping individuals’ inclination to work as *esnaf-kurye*. It prioritizes recognizing the social embeddedness of workers within a political-economic and historical context.

Initially, it is crucial to acknowledge a significant process of proletarianization in Turkey since the 2000s. However, this transformation has been coupled with a gradual decline in the power of the expanding labor in relation to capital. In 2002, the percentage of labor payments in GDP was 29.2%, but by 2022, it had decreased to 25.4%. Additionally, the proportion of wage earners in employment grew from 49.7% to 70.2%, and the number of individuals receiving labor payments increased from 10.6 million to 21.6 million over the same period. To elaborate, even though wage earners made up 49.7% of employment in 2002 and received 29.2% of the income, their share decreased to 24.5% in 2022, despite their increased presence in employment at 70.2% (Çelik, 2022a). The shift against labor in distribution is also evident in the widening disparity between real wages and productivity. During the 2000s, average productivity growth exceeded average real wage growth (Orhangazi, 2019: 341), signifying that a growing number of workers had to contend with heightened rates of exploitation during this period.

Furthermore, there is a notable trend in recent years where the average wage level in Turkey is aligning with the minimum wage level. The increase in all labor incomes, excluding the minimum wage, has been comparatively low. As of 2022, almost half of all wage earners in Turkey are receiving minimum wage. Between 2016 and 2020, while the minimum wage saw a significant increase of 78.7%, gross wages only rose by 30.4% during the same period. Consequently, the average gross wage, which was 89% above the minimum wage in 2016, sharply declined to being only 38% above the minimum wage in 2020. Despite the government’s emphasis on raising the minimum wage, Çelik (2022b) characterizes this

situation, where the minimum wage increasingly resembles the average wage, as a "minimum wage trap". In such a context, the prospect of earning more than the minimum wage, even at the expense of working long hours, becomes a notable attraction for delivery workers.

Moreover, household indebtedness witnessed a significant surge in the 2000s. In 2002, the household debt-to-disposable income ratio stood at 4.7%, escalating to 52% in 2015 (Güngen, 2018: 340). The household debt-to-GDP ratio also surged more than tenfold, from 1.8% in 2002 to 19.6% in 2013 (Akçay, 2018: 13). Personal loans have consistently been the highest category of credit since 2010 in the total amount of consumer loans, encompassing housing, vehicle, and personal loans (Alpar, 2022: 1320). The credit expansion during this period, as part of Turkey's financial inclusion strategy where the state played a proactive role, aimed to transform significant portions of the population into financial consumers. However, the increased access to the financial system, without any or only a slight improvement in income levels, resulted in elevated levels of indebtedness (Güngen, 2018).

Workers are also facing the looming fear of unemployment while trying to survive far below the poverty line with falling wages and increasing debt burden. According to a report by DİSK-AR (The Research Center of the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey), the unemployment rate surged from 20.6% in February 2020, pre-pandemic, to 23.4% in February 2023. Youth and women face even higher rates of unemployment. However, a significant majority of the unemployed find themselves ineligible for unemployment benefits due to stringent conditions and the mismanagement of unemployment insurance resources. In February 2023, a mere 12.7% of officially unemployed individuals could avail themselves of unemployment insurance (DİSK-AR, 2023). The orientation of platform workers to become *esnaf-kurye* need to be contextualized within this landscape. Workers' aspiration for autonomy must be viewed against the backdrop of the recent shifts in labor relations in Turkey, highlighting the possibility that this desire may stem from past unfavorable work experiences and the absence of better alternatives in the current labor market conditions.

In such a political economy of proletarianization, indebtedness and job insecurities, flexibility appears as a significant ideal to many of the research participants. Erdal, who transitioned to working as an *esnaf-kurye* for Trendyol after leaving his position as a delivery employee at Yemeksepeti, expressed satisfaction with his new job, emphasizing the autonomy he gained in determining his own working hours. During the time of our conversation, Trendyol required

workers to commit to a minimum of 45 hours per week. Additionally, there was a mandatory working period between 15:30 and 22:00 on Sundays and between 18:00 and 22:00 on other days, labeled by the company as "winning hours." Despite these stipulations, the workers may still set their weekly work schedules by selecting suitable time slots. When questioned about the mandatory 45-hour workweek at Trendyol, Erdal acknowledged it but still asserted, "Yes, it is, but I am still working flexibly." While the proclaimed flexibility of the platform economy may not align with the practical realities at Trendyol, where workers contend with long hours, individuals like Erdal, among my interviewees at the company, highlighted the benefits of being able to choose their work schedules even within these constraints.

Similarly, a study on Uber drivers in Quebec conducted by Jamil and Noiseux (2018: 15-6) highlights that driver, despite working long hours, emphasize flexibility. The researchers observe a strong preference among drivers for weekends and evenings due to the increased earning potential, even in the presence of a higher number of drivers during these peak times. The study concluded that drivers structure their working schedules in close alignment with market dynamics, responding to market demand rather than individual preferences. While the flexibility to choose working hours may appear less significant for these workers who already allocate most of their non-sleeping hours to work, a majority of the drivers interviewed still underscored the importance of flexibility.

In Turkey, the legal maximum weekly working time is set at 45 hours, and according to the law, workers are entitled to receive overtime wages for each hour worked beyond this limit. However, ILO working time statistics reveal that the average weekly working time per employed person in Turkey in 2021 was 43.4 hours. Essentially, the maximum working time aligns with the average working time in Turkey. Furthermore, approximately 29% of the labor force is employed for 49 hours or more per week, nearly one-third of the workforce. In this context, individuals like Erdal do not perceive the 45-hour requirement as an additional burden. During his employment at Yemeksepeti, indeed, Erdal was already working overtime and sometimes took on extra shifts. Therefore, his job at Trendyol seems preferable to him, not only because he can choose his own hours but also because he is already accustomed to working long hours. Knowing that extensive working hours are a common reality for individuals like him, Erdal emphasizes the advantage of flexibility in his new job.

Many of the waged delivery workers I encountered were engaged in overwork or additional jobs, often working excessive hours in total. These supplementary roles included hourly or per-delivery basis deliveries, providing motor-taxi services at night or on off days, working at a friend's shop for specific hours, and selling motorcycle equipment or other products. The choice, therefore, lies between having an additional job and working long hours as an *esnaf-kurye*. This may prompt workers to transition into the *esnaf-kurye* role, or at the very least, they may not perceive an issue with taking on this role in terms of the length of their working hours, given that delivery workers already endure extensive hours in both scenarios.

In addition, most delivery workers who previously worked at individual restaurants expressed dissatisfaction, noting that restaurants assigned them tasks beyond delivery duties. They reported being required to perform additional responsibilities such as mopping floors, cleaning toilets, wash dishes, preparing tables, and assisting the waiters, especially during periods of low delivery demand. Complaints also centered around delayed and incomplete wage payments.

Berkay, a 25-year-old currently employed as an *esnaf-kurye*, shared his experience of starting work at a döner restaurant at the age of 14. Displaying burn marks on his hands, he recounted the challenges, stating, "This didn't happen on a motorbike. I remember the days when I used to work alone 16-17 hours. I had to slice 75 kilos of döner meat and serve it, all by myself". Berkay also worked as a delivery worker in a restaurant, highlighting the restrictive environment, saying, "You are constantly under supervision. To take a break, to smoke... you always have to ask for permission, to inform. You can't wear shorts; you can't wear sweatpants. You need to trim your beard. But when you're an *esnaf-kurye*, if I dye my hair yellow, no one can question why I choose to dye it that way."

Nevzat, a 57-year-old *esnaf-kurye*, has a diverse work history including previous employment in a factory. He expressed discomfort with the factory environment, particularly the practice of foremen flattering the boss. Excessive demands and constant psychological pressure associated with the factory work led him to dislike that occupation. Similarly, Ersin who has experience working in sweatshops and factories, highlights the advantage of not having a superior at in his current job, stating: "Here, there's no foreman, no overseer."¹⁵

¹⁵ "Burda usta yok, dayı yok, çavuş yok"

Müge, aged 31, entered the workforce during the summer holidays, beginning her employment at a textile sweatshop at the age of 14. She recounted an environment characterized by a high volume of orders, shouting, and humiliation in the sweatshop. Starting as a waitress at 16, she eventually transitioned to the kitchen and has been working as a cook for many years. Müge explained, "As a cook, you're always reporting to the boss. This stock arrived, this much was used, this much is missing. You're also responsible for the other employees, and that's exhausting too. Men don't take orders from women. So, I had to become harsher; I became like a man. You build a wall to protect yourself from people; you're forced to do so. Then they would say 'act like a woman,' and I would say 'you made me like this.' You're forced to become harsh. When I looked in the mirror, I would say to myself 'is this me?'"¹⁶

Another factor that adds to the appeal of this job is the possibility of earning more than the minimum wage, even if it means working long hours. During the Yemeksepeti resistance, I heard from many workers that, if they were only going to receive the minimum wage, they would prefer a safer job. As discussed in the detail in the last chapter of this dissertation, similar to various protests in different sectors in Turkey at that time, this protest was essentially an objection to working for the minimum wage. Ersin expressed, "If I were going to be paid the minimum wage, I would be a cashier at BIM (a popular supermarket), sitting warm at least, and not putting my life in danger."

Workers with relatively higher education levels also reported facing challenges in securing jobs that provide fair compensation. For example, a worker with 2 years of higher education in Oral and Dental Health recounted an experience of attending a job interview for a dental assistant position at a well-known chain hospital. Despite his qualifications, he was offered a salary below the minimum wage. When questioned about how this could happen, he expressed uncertainty, suggesting that the employer may have found a way to justify it.

¹⁶ "Aşçılıkta patrona çok hesap veriyorsun. Şu girdi, şu çıktı, şu zayı. Elemanlardan da sorumlusun, o da çok yoruyor. Erkek, kadından direktif almıyor. Bu sefer ben sertleşmeye başladım, erkek gibi oldum. İnsanlara karşı duvar örüyorsun, örmek zorundasın. Sonra 'bayan gibi davran' diyorlardı, 'siz beni böyle yaptınız' diyordum. Zorunda kalıyorsun sert olmaya. Aynaya baktığımda 'bu ben miyim?' diyordum."

Another worker, who was employed as a delivery person at the Post Office, mentioned that after the subcontractor system was introduced at the workplace, the workload became too intense, and the wages remained low. Consequently, he decided to quit his job and started working as an *esnaf-kurye*. Similarly, Yiğit initially worked as an office employee in the office of Getir when the company was newly established. Within a short period of 1.5 years, he experienced an increase in workload, being compelled to work without breaks, making working conditions difficult. Simultaneously, he faced escalating deductions from his salary every month, leading to a decrease in earnings. He also expressed dissatisfaction with the company paying his insurance premiums at the minimum wage rate, despite his salary being above the minimum wage. Due to these reasons, he eventually resigned from his job.

Furthermore, I encountered delivery workers who had completed their education at the university's faculty of education and chose to become *esnaf-kurye* because they were not appointed as teachers by the state. In other words, factors such as subcontracting, low wages, intensified work, and the state's insufficient appointments adding to the deterioration of formal sector, drive workers to become *esnaf-kurye*.

Workers' previous negative work experiences, such as dealing with strict hierarchies, subordinate relationships in factories, workshops, or the service sector, constant supervision by managers or bosses, continuous exposure to commands, verbal abuse, or harassment during work, coupled with the absence of better alternatives in the labor market, appear to drive workers toward becoming *esnaf-kurye*. Consequently, the prospect of relative autonomy, albeit limited, and the physical absence of managers or bosses serve as decisive factors for workers in choosing this occupation. Additionally, the experience of working long hours in their previous jobs, facing delays in salary payments, not receiving overtime wages, and the absence of social insurance for many workers have shaped their perspective, as these workers do not come from a secure standard employment model. Therefore, they do not perceive the potential drawbacks in these aspects as significant losses, given their prior experiences.

Semih had previously worked as a subcontractor in a large hotel, where despite promises of a permanent position every year, he was never hired as a permanent employee. The job was highly stressful, dealing with numerous people, including various administrative supervisors. Unfairly dismissed from this position, he transitioned to working as a delivery worker upon hearing from

friends that it was relatively comfortable. However, he soon encountered different challenges in the delivery job. While the detailed discussion of workers' problems related to delivery work is reserved for later sections, Semih's response to a question about his future plans provides insight into workers' aspirations for working in their own business: “My plan is to go back to our hometown. We have a house, we have land. I’ll plant crops, and I’ll start breeding cattle. The income is good. I won’t be working for someone else. I’ll be doing my own work. I’ll work like crazy, but at least I’ll be working for myself. It’s not that I’m offended by working for someone else; it’s the fact that they don’t respect my rights as a person that’s hurtful.”¹⁷

The drivers behind becoming as an *esnaf-kurye* must be understood within the broader social and historical context, considering workers' subjective experiences and the transformation of labor relations. The rapid growth of platform work is connected to the deterioration of working conditions within the formal labor market. This includes heightened control and exploitation of labor, a decrease in wages, often pushed to the minimum, rising unemployment rates, and a weakened bargaining position of labor against capital. Viewed through this lens, the decision to "choose" this job cannot be solely attributed to the self-styled desires or illusions of workers, which are often presented as independent of their prior work experiences and the general deterioration of working conditions. In reality, such a free choice is constrained by the broader socio-economic context.

A recent study conducted by the Istanbul Planning Agency (IPA, 2021), affiliated with the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, exemplifies this flaw in comprehending delivery work, resulting in a failure to address the overall precarization of labor. The research focuses on three distinct occupational groups in the service sector - shopping mall employees, motorcycle delivery workers, and private security guards - where young labor is predominant. The data on delivery workers are derived from a computer-assisted face-to-face survey (CAPI) conducted in January 2021, involving a total of 600 delivery workers across 23 districts of Istanbul, with the largest sample in this subject.

¹⁷ “Benim planım memlekete gitmek. Evimiz var, arazimiz var, ekim işi yapıcım, işi hayvancılığa çeviricem. Geliri güzel. Başkasının işini yapmıycım. Kendi işimi yapıcım. Eşek gibi çalışırım ama kendi işimi yaparım. Başkasının işinden gocunduğumdan değil, başkası benim insani haklarımı vermediği için zoruma gidiyor.”

According to the research, 41.8% of the delivery workers responded to the question "Why did you get into the moto delivery business?" with "Because I was unemployed during the pandemic." Additionally, 20.7% mentioned, "I did not do anything other than being a delivery worker," and 38.7% stated, "I entered to meet my needs during a period when I was unemployed (other than the pandemic period)." Younger respondents might have chosen the option "I have not done any work other than as a delivery worker" due to their lack of previous work experience. Indeed, 23% of the delivery workers mentioned that they did not work before becoming delivery workers.

Furthermore, 18.7% of delivery workers had previous roles such as waiters, busboys, cooks in establishments that closed during the pandemic, such as cafes and restaurants. About 10.8% had worked in positions like salesperson, store employee, cashier, accountant, secretary, and security guard, categorizable as store and office workers. Almost one-fourth (24.8%) reported previous employment in the manufacturing industry sector.

The report concludes that "delivery is a job that the unemployed and/or those who used to work in cafe-restaurants in positions such as waiters and busboys, as well as office and store employees, have to prefer out of necessity." However, it overlooks the industrial sector in which the highest proportion of delivery workers have previously worked and their experience in this sector. The delivery job is only associated with unemployment, whether due to the pandemic or not. The analysis is based on the premise that this job could be preferred only out of compulsion. However, when viewed in this way, all low-paid and/or precarious jobs may appear as the jobs chosen out of necessity. Therefore, such an argument has limited explanatory power. Moreover, for a vast number of individuals, capitalism entails the imperative to secure a livelihood, thus, to work under any circumstances.

The research notes that delivery work is a job taken for a temporary period by men from a broad age group who are unemployed and cannot find another job. As such, it presents a market, almost like a "waiting room". Workers at the store in shopping malls and private security guards also belong to the same market, which is described as "waiting rooms" within this framework. Hence "the temporary nature of the delivery work" is often emphasized in the research. However, "temporariness" cannot be considered an intrinsic quality specific to this or any other job. The separate categorization of delivery work as temporary work does not allow

precarization to be understood as a process inherent to capitalism. Precarity is precisely the concept that aims to capture the perpetuation of this temporary quality. In this context, platform delivery work presents just one of the examples where we can observe the transformation of the nature and organization of work in today's capitalism¹⁸.

The perspective grounded in the ideal of the standard employment model, which disregards the ongoing transformation of labor relations and upholds waged work as inherently superior in any circumstance, falls short of comprehending the process of precarization and the experiences of workers who have never been integrated into that model. Barchiesi (2011), within the context of post-apartheid South Africa, challenges the Left's reliance on the normative centrality of work and a productivist understanding of liberation in its political imagination. He highlights a contradiction between the emphasis on job creation as a marker of progressive politics by the government and the Left, and the deteriorating material conditions of work. In this context, Barchiesi argues that factors such as "job creation" and a "fixation with employment and productivism as norms of social order" not only fail to serve as a foundation for radical redistribution but also normalize the precarity of both jobs and lives. He contends that these buzzwords are increasingly incapable of signifying a decent existence for both the employed and the jobless alike (2011: 248).

All this is not to say that individuals working as *esnaf-kurye* consider the *esnaf-kurye* system to be just or fair, or that they are devoid of concerns about this type of work. For many workers, working as an *esnaf-kurye* becomes a necessity due to the absence of better options in the labor market. For example, a significant portion of Yemeksepeti's delivery workers were initially employees. The entry of other companies, like Getir, into the sector further reinforced the

¹⁸ Just five months following the release of this research, in February 2022, the same agency presented a study titled "Urban Workers on Two Wheels: Delivery Workers; Policy Paper on Current Labor Mobility and Division of Responsibility." The agency reported that they had engaged directly with delivery workers during the "Conference on Insecurity, New Inequalities, and Solutions," a collaborative effort with the International Labor Organization (ILO), and during this interaction that they sought to assess the problems and needs identified in their earlier research. Notably, in this policy paper, they assert that "delivery work is no longer a temporary waiting room but a permanent profession." The document highlights precarity as a significant concern. This marked shift in their analysis within a short timeframe is undoubtedly linked to the mobilization of delivery workers that unfolded across various cities in Turkey in January 2022, which led to increased visibility for delivery workers and their demands.

widespread adoption of the *esnaf-kurye* system in the delivery platform sector, and Yemeksepeti also began to force workers to transition from employee status to *esnaf-kurye*. Erdal, who actively participated in the Yemeksepeti protests, contended that the prevalence of the *esnaf-kurye* system in the sector led the company to discard insured staff and adopt an intimidating policy towards workers. "They tried to sacrifice us to avoid costs," he explained. During the Yemeksepeti protests, which I will elaborate on in detail in the final chapter, many workers expressed similar feelings of frustration, discontent, and anger. Although Erdal chose not to become an *esnaf-kurye* at Yemeksepeti and left the company, he subsequently started working as an *esnaf-kurye* at another platform company, Trendyol.

Berkay's experience is another illustration of the industry's imposition of the *esnaf-kurye* system on workers. Berkay initially worked 8 hours a day at Getir as an employee when he was 21. However, the company later imposed new conditions, stating, "We don't employ people on employee status anymore. If you want to work with us, become an *esnaf-kurye*. We can part ways with those who don't want to work with us. It doesn't matter." Consequently, he established a private company and began working as an *esnaf-kurye* for the same company, but now with extended working hours of 12 per day.

Moreover, as we previously discussed, household indebtedness has been on the rise in Turkey, placing significant constraints and obligations on workers. Nevzat, aged 57, previously worked as a delivery worker in the status of an employee. However, a quarter of his monthly salary was deducted due to loan debt foreclosure. Consequently, he decided to quit his job and transitioned to working as an *esnaf-kurye* at Yemeksepeti. This serves as an example of how indebtedness can also hinder individuals from securing a job that offers a stable fixed wage.

It follows that working as an *esnaf-kurye* does not mean that workers approve of this system. Being *esnaf-kurye* with the expressions of some workers: 'a fraudulent system', 'being cheated on', 'scam', 'slavery', 'colonialism', 'something like exclusion', 'living under God's good

will’, and “they shift all the responsibilities, risks and dangers on you; and they expect you to serve them”¹⁹. Despite these insights about the *esnaf-kurye* system they continue to do this job.

According to ILO research (2022: 71), while financial reasons and the lack of other options are prominent drivers for becoming a delivery worker, when it comes to the positive aspects of their profession, workers mention money and freedom the most. Although it may seem contradictory, their conception of freedom can be understood by considering that these workers do not come from a secure, high-paid, standard employment model. Their past work experiences involve low and irregular wages that often resulted in indebtedness, strict hierarchy, subordinate relationships in factories, workshops, or the service sector, and the constant presence of managers or bosses. In this sense, platform work seems to offer freedom, as it promises a liberation from the control of a boss and a certain level of autonomy. The attraction for workers lies in working "without a boss," not the illusion of "being the boss of one's own business."

Similarly, in his study, which involved semi-structured interviews with 11 delivery workers in Istanbul, Ceylan (2022: 120-2) observes a tendency among his interviewees to draw comparisons between platform-based delivery work and their past employment experiences, particularly in terms of work management. Ceylan notes that workers accentuate the freedom and flexibility afforded by platform work. Despite their diverse criticisms of platform-based delivery work, these workers, originating from various work backgrounds, stress the relative freedom in this type of work, especially when contrasted with the rigid management structures of their previous jobs.

Despite drawing on a different class fraction, it is worth noting the labor ethnography by İlyas (2022: 200), which focuses on the work and organizational experiences of freelancers in fields such as translation, journalism, IT, and the arts. She finds that the most important reasons for choosing freelancing include freedom from pressure in the workplace and having control over time and space. Additionally, she refers to a survey conducted by the “Ofissizler - Freelance

¹⁹ “dolandırıcılık sistemi”, “aldatmaca”, “sahtekarlık”, “kölelik sistemi”, “sömürgecilik”, “dışlanmışlık gibi birşey”, “Allah’a emanet yaşamak gibi birşey”. “Tüm sorumluluğu, riski, tehlikeyi sana atmışlar; senden servis bekliyorlar”.

Solidarity Network” among 112 freelance workers to assess their needs and situations. It reveals that over half of them started freelancing to have flexibility in their schedules, while nearly two-thirds cited problems and bullying in their previous workplaces (184).

In fact, the notion of freedom, which is prominent in both platform-based delivery workers and freelancers, correspond to negative freedom in the sense of “freedom as non-interference”. Legal anthropologist Acevedo (2017) reminds us that the courts determine an employment relation based on platforms' control over the work and worker, but they can also judge to the contrary, pointing to the flexibility of work schedules. Although these two decisions may seem to be opposite to each other, she argues that this contradiction arises from the ambiguity of the concept of freedom, namely “freedom as non-domination” and “freedom as non-interference”. Based on her ethnographic study with platform workers, she further states that these two interpretations of freedom do not only appear in court decisions but are also conceptualized by the workers themselves in both ways. This is why some platform workers complain of uncertainties at work taking away their freedom of decision and hence limiting their autonomy, while others may value being an independent contractor for reasons such as flexibility in work schedules.

We have previously noted that, despite Trendyol's requirement of a 45-hour working week and its limited flexibility in this regard, the delivery workers at this company emphasize the advantages of being able to choose their own work schedule. Workers also frequently describe freedom as the physical absence of a boss or manager in the workplace, allowing them to work independently. This aspect is consistently highlighted as one of the most positive aspects of platform work by workers across different companies.

However, this does not imply that the *esnaf-kurye* works without any pressure or does not have to deal with any superior at work or enjoys control over work with genuine autonomy. There are substantial obstacles to workers' autonomy and freedom in the platform-based delivery work, which will be discussed in detail in the following sections. For now, we will touch on the insight gained in a short time about the job by 29-year-old journalism graduate Tamer, who started working at Trendyol because, in his words, it was "a relatively bossless job" and he preferred not to have someone giving him orders.

Tamer expressed frustration, stating: “But of course, when I started the job, I saw that the idea that delivery work is boss-free is totally false. I think that this system is a total scam. They don’t give you the contract, they hold the paper while you’re signing. 15-20 pages. They show it to you quickly, just to say ‘sign here’, ‘and here’. You can’t take a picture, you can’t have a copy of the contract – they say ‘go to court’, if you’re not satisfied. The illegality starts there”.²⁰ Tamer also came to the realization that working 8 hours a day would not be sufficient to make a living in this line of work. He understood that to achieve the purported income in this industry, he had to put in longer hours and jeopardize his safety. He observed instances where colleagues lost their lives on the job. Additionally, he faced challenges where the company did not support the workers in issues such as access problems with motorcycles into gated communities, which will be elaborated on in the following sections. All this led him to quit his delivery job after 1.5 years.

For the past 5 months, Tamer has been conducting street interviews and sharing them through channels he created on digital communication platforms. Encouraged by his family's concerns about the increasing number of deaths among delivery workers, including acquaintances of Tamer, they financially supported him in acquiring the necessary equipment for this new venture. Tamer explained his motivation: "I didn't want to work in the media with a boss. The mainstream media and the journalism we learn in class are very different. I always had this idea in my mind." His follower count has now surpassed 20,000, and he has started to earn modest income.

Street interviews addressing economic, political, and social matters, disseminated through digital communication platforms, have gained considerable traction in Turkey. This surge in popularity is linked to the mainstream media's one-sided, pro-government programming policies and the growing engagement of individuals with digital platforms. This format offers people on the streets a platform to freely express their opinions, serving as an alternative to the one-sided, pro-government narratives prevalent in mainstream media that often marginalize

²⁰ “Ama tabii işe girdikten sonra bu patronsuz kurye olayının hiç de öyle olmadığını gördüm. Bu sistemin, bir sahtekârlık sistemi olduğunu düşünüyorum. Sözleşmeyi vermiyorlar, bir ucundan tutuyorlar kağıdın imzalatırken. 15-20 sayfa. Hızlıca gösteriyorlar, ‘burayı da imzala’, ‘burayı da’ diye. Ne fotoğrafını çekmeye izin var, ne de almaya, ‘git dava aç’ diyor. Hukuksuzluk daha orada başlıyor”

diverse perspectives. Additionally, it serves as a source of income for individuals like Tamer. He underscores the lucrative potential of this line of work, noting that individuals with 2-3 years of experience and a substantial follower base can earn approximately 150,000 liras per month.

This section posits that workers' previous unfavorable work experiences, characterized by strict hierarchies, subordinate relationships in factories, workshops, or service sectors, constant managerial presence, exposure to commands, shouting, or workplace harassment, alongside a lack of better options in the labor market, compel individuals to become *esnaf-kurye*. The potential for relative autonomy and the physical absence of managers or bosses emerges as decisive factors leading workers to this work. Moreover, the extended working hours in their previous jobs, delayed salary payments, non-receipt of overtime wages, and the absence of social insurance play a role in these workers' inclination.

4.4. The precarious realities of delivery platform work

Although workers enter this job with various perceptions explained in the former section, they soon face the fact that the platform job is not what they expected it to be. Companies keep workers under physical, psychological, and economic control through different means and technologies, and do not take any responsibility even in the cases of accidents or deaths of workers. The imperative to deliver the maximum number of packages in the shortest possible time, and companies' use of incentives such as bonuses direct workers to work excessive hours to gain a meaningful wage. In particular, the piecework payment system puts significant speed pressure on workers that lead to degradation in workers' health; it forces workers to work even at the expense of their lives. In this work arrangement, the financial insecurity of the workers does not only stem from the fact that they assume all the risks and costs associated with the job such as in the case of an accident or health problem, but their wage also becomes a target whose attainment depends entirely on their "performance". There is no wage security in this job, the wage is personalized, and the entire workforce is individualized.

In this section, attention will first be drawn to a critical issue: work-related diseases, accidents, and deaths caused by this work model. Following this, the piece-rate payment system, which not only exacerbates these issues but also poses other critical challenges for workers, will be scrutinized. Subsequently, the discussion will explore how workers experience incentives such as bonuses and promotions applied by companies, the effects of the *esnaf-kurye* work model on workers' interpretations of work and colleagues, relationships with customers, and how workers' masculinity is both (re)produced and (re)formed within this work context.

4.4.1. Hazardous work: excessive working hours, accidents, and fatalities

According to the 'Report on Delivery Workers' Deaths in 2022' by Kurye Hakları Derneği (Delivery Worker Rights Association), a minimum of 58 delivery workers lost their lives in Turkey in 2022 while on duty, with almost all incidents attributed to traffic accidents. Among the victims were individuals of very young age, migrant workers, and university students. These results have striking similarities with my field study. Almost every worker I interviewed during my field study had experienced either minor or major accidents. While many underwent at least one surgical procedure, the majority suffered from occupational diseases resulting from their work. As per a study involving 600 delivery workers in Istanbul (IPA, 2021), 55.7% reported health problems due to the adverse weather conditions and constant outdoor work. Additionally, 49.7% faced health issues resulting from traffic accidents and injuries, while 39.3% attributed their problems to prolonged sitting on motorcycles.

The workers I encountered during my fieldwork faced various health issues attributed to their work. For instance, 24-year-old Özgür is dealing with three hernias in his lower back, while Yiğit has a herniated disc. According to Yiğit, hernias tend to occur within 1-2 years of starting this job due to factors such as carrying heavy loads, the constant vibration of the engine, and navigating stairs while working. Additionally, Osman underwent meniscus surgery on his knee. Many workers I spoke to had experienced accidents resulting in broken arms, legs, or ribs. Some workers also suffer from otolaryngological or chest diseases due to prolonged exposure to wind, cold weather, and car exhaust in traffic. Additionally, as *esnaf-kurye* workers operate under a self-employed status, they lack paid leave rights. Their earnings are contingent on delivering packages, compelling many delivery workers to return to work before fully recovering when they are sick or have had an accident.

Based on the 2022 research by the International Labour Organization (ILO), *esnaf-kurye* in Turkey work an average of 12.8 hours per day, a number higher than delivery workers working for an individual establishment (15). Some interviewees of this study revealed enduring workdays stretching to 16-17 hours during certain periods. Operating in adverse weather, utilizing incomplete or poorly maintained equipment, facing intense pressure for quick order deliveries, and working prolonged hours, sometimes with minimal sleep, in hazardous conditions add to accidents and, tragically, fatalities.

In Turkey, a significant number of workers lose their lives annually due to extended work hours in perilous environments, often exacerbated by the absence of necessary occupational safety measures and a lack of attention to worker health. Shockingly, the year 2022 saw at least 1843 workers lose their lives in work-related incidents. The mortality rates are notably elevated in sectors like construction, agriculture, and transport, where long working hours, intensive labor, absence of insurance, and various irregularities prevail. The prevalence of precarious work is particularly prominent in these sectors, characterized by the absence or weakness of union organizations (İSİG, 2023).

Similarly difficult working conditions have resulted in the death of delivery workers in other countries as well. In South Africa, at least 70 delivery workers, predominantly in the food delivery sector, lost their lives (de Greef, 2019). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2019, 83 drivers/sales workers on motorcycles died while working in the United States, with 60 of them succumbing to transportation accidents (BLS, 2021). The collective *Ni Un Repartidor Menos*, founded in Mexico at the end of 2018, reports that at least 285 app-based delivery workers have died in traffic accidents and homicides since their inception (niunrepartidormenos.org). Similarly, in Brazil, app-based delivery workers who use motorcycles are among the most affected by work-related accidents. According to the Occupational Health and Safety Observatory (SST), there were 24,642 accidents involving these workers in 2022 (Globo, 2023).

In addition to traffic accidents, there are cases where workers succumb to excessive working hours. For instance, Zhao Wutao, a migrant delivery worker in Beijing, died in the hospital due to stress-induced heart failure and pneumonia caused by overwork. The number of packages he

delivered had tripled in three days on the eve of the annual November shopping holiday in 2022 (CLB, 2023). In South Korea, unions report that 21 delivery workers in the country have died from overwork during the pandemic. Death from overwork is so prevalent in South Korea that there is a term for it: "kwarosa" (Clark, 2021).

Many of the delivery workers I interviewed expressed that they leave home "as if they were going to war." Beyond other work-related issues, Tamer mentioned leaving the delivery business because he lost a friend who was a colleague. Deniz, who is only in his early 20s, also shared that he lost a close friend, which instilled a fear of using motorcycles, leading him to reconsider being a delivery worker. After returning from the military, Berkay, who plans to get married, intends to work briefly to cover marriage expenses. However, he doesn't envision continuing, as his wife opposes him riding a motorcycle. "My wife won't allow it," he says.

There are workers who express serious concerns about the escalating number of worker deaths, but there are also those who persist despite their fears and adopt a "Come what may" attitude. Some, like Osman, assert that "whoever cares about his life does not do this job anyway." On the other hand, although Ferhat endeavors to ride the motor cautiously to prevent accidents, he voices complaints about the discomfort of the equipment, particularly in the summer. He explains the challenges of wearing a helmet for extended periods, stating, "Of course, I know that it's important to wear a helmet – but did you ever try wearing a helmet for 12 hours? It weighs 1.5kg - put it on, take it off, over and over again, you go crazy after a while, and you think 'if I die, so be it!'"

Hasan acknowledges that nearly all delivery workers, himself included, routinely breach traffic regulations, including running red lights, driving on the sidewalk, and neglecting to wear all the required safety equipment. This flouting of traffic rules is perceived as a necessity for sustaining a livelihood in the existing system. Other workers support Hasan's assertions, highlighting the compulsion to work rapidly and the necessity to deliver the maximum number of packages in the shortest time, given that their compensation is structured on a per-package model.

4.4.2. Piece rate payment

Due to the piecework payment system, some scholars have likened platform workers to "piece-paid homeworkers of the previous century" (Dubal, 2020: 6) or "the Asian home-based garment workers integrated into the global supply chains" (Salmivaara, 2023: 172). However, platform work has not been systemically analyzed as a piecework payment system. Piece wage, which holds serious social, organizational, and political implications, not least in terms of endangering workers' lives, has been under-examined in the platform economy literature, despite being the paradigmatic form of payment and thus the defining feature of the platform economy (Joyce, 2020).

Platform economy "has repackaged a historic labor arrangement" that organizes the workforce "as a political technology" by "combining self-disciplining management with hyperprecarious labour conditions" (Reid-Musson and Johnston, 2023: 183). Marx, in Volume 1 of *Capital*, expressed that the piece-wage is evidently the most suitable form of wage for the capitalist mode of production. In a piece-rate wage system, the worker is expected to exert their labor power as intensely as possible, facilitating the capitalist's ability to elevate the normal degree of labor intensity more effortlessly. Furthermore, the extension of the working day becomes a matter of personal interest for the worker, as it results in an increase in their daily or weekly wages. However, the broader scope provided by piece-wages tends to foster individuality, with individuality the development of the worker's sense of liberty, independence, and self-control, as well as increased competition among workers. Consequently, the piece-wage has a tendency, while elevating the wages of individuals above the average, to lower this average itself (1990: 695-8).

The trends we witness in the platform economy today are consistent with the description of the dynamics as Marx outlined them over two centuries ago. Working hours are lengthening, work is becoming more intense, competition between workers is on the rise, and, simultaneously, average earnings are decreasing. The general strategy of the platforms, indeed, is to initially enter the market with prices low enough to undercut competitors, or with a wide range of discounts and promotions for customers, and wages high enough to attract a sizeable workforce. Only after establishing a stable presence in the market do they continuously reduce workers' units of payment (Shapiro, 2020).

In the second chapter, we emphasized that the platform economy, characterized by the reduction of work to the aggregation of specific tasks, represents a critical transformation in the nature and organization of work. In this context, the phenomenon of Uberization poses a significant risk by converting occupations into discrete tasks, where workers are engaged for specific assignments or "gigs" rather than being employed for comprehensive jobs (Davis, 2015: 502). Consequently, workers become "taskers," and their compensation shifts to piece-rate payments. This, as discussed earlier, has severe repercussions on workers' health and well-being.

In platform work, in addition to the piecework system, workers are incentivized to boost productivity through "promotions" or "bonuses." Workers frequently work extended hours, around 12-14 hours a day, to secure these bonuses and achieve a living wage. The utilization of such incentives is a widespread practice among delivery platform companies in various countries. In a study on Didi drivers in China, Qi and Li (2020) discovered that bonuses were extensively used, with drivers asserting they would "earn nothing" without them.

Apart from the fixed bonuses, the prices of which are announced during new payment structure announcement periods, companies also occasionally introduce specific bonus systems. For instance, in December 2022, Yemeksepeti offered a weekly bonus of 500 TL to *esnaf-kurye* who committed to working a minimum of three days a week, 10 hours per day without breaks. This bonus coincided with the company's transition to the *esnaf-kurye* system while simultaneously pushing the remaining waged delivery workers, who still constituted a substantial number within the company, to shift to being *esnaf-kurye* themselves.

In this context, van Doorn (2020) emphasizes that in platform work, the wage transforms beyond being merely an incentive and becomes an "object of prediction and experimentation". Cooper (2012) contends that the typical post-Fordist worker is no longer an employee but an independent contractor, where the wage itself evolves into a "speculative proposition". This speculation is contingent on various factors, including unspecified hours of unpaid work readiness, the achievement of performance indicators, or integration into the volatilities of the stock market.

4.4.3. Fraudulence, deceptive strategies, and individualization of the workforce

Despite platform wage manipulations and arbitrary wage cuts being a significant source of worker grievances globally, and the rise of algorithmic management as a prominent research topic in the platform economy, there is limited exploration of how workers understand and experience these issues, especially concerning wages (Woodcock, 2020: 67). The 2019 Report from the AI Now Institute (Crawford et al., 2019) reveals that platform workers at Instacart, Uber, and Lyft in the US reported a decline in earnings. Many workers perceive this as a deliberate tactic to foster dependency on the platform for wages. The platforms entice workers with the promise of a living wage, only to dramatically reduce earnings once workers have integrated platform work into their lives. The report contends that these platforms "treat workers as subjects of constant experimentation," creating uncertainty for workers about their income, schedule, or even their ability to work on a given day (15-6).

The integration of game elements such as scoring, ratings, levels, and bonuses in the platform economy has led to its examination in terms of the concept "gamification of work" (Cherry, 2011). However, companies constantly and unilaterally modify their algorithms, including worker evaluation systems and pay structures (Griesbach et al., 2019; Ravenelle, 2019; Woodcock, 2020), implying a scenario where the rules of the game are perpetually altered by these companies. Consequently, this manipulative gamification is described as the "gambification of work," drawing parallels to gambling where "the house always wins" (Dubal, 2023). Dubal's study on Uber and Lyft drivers in San Francisco reveals that drivers perceive the process of trying to earn not as a game but as a form of gambling. They view the changing algorithms, which lead to lower-than-expected earnings, as a deceptive strategy employed by the companies (2023: 28).

The lack of shared information between workers and companies, stemming from the non-disclosure of technology-generated data to workers, is argued to result in a significant information asymmetry crucial to labor process management (Heeks, 2017; Dubal, 2023; Griesbach et al., 2019). This exclusion of workers from the "market's informational infrastructure", or information asymmetry, ensures the effectiveness of "wage manipulations" in the form of incentives like offers and bonuses. Thus, "information asymmetries are a prerequisite of calculative asymmetries". Platforms monopolize calculative agency as they "maintain control over the design of the market's architecture and use this asymmetry to their advantage" (Shapiro, 2020: 172-3). In this manner, companies "personalize and differentiate

wages for workers in ways unknown to them” (Dubal, 2023: 6), paying them "algorithmic personalized wages" (Teachout: 2023). Hence, control over the labor process in the platform economy relies not only on the use of algorithms but also on the "panoptic disposition of the technological infrastructure", leveraging information asymmetries to limit worker behavior, and the obscured nature of their performance management systems (Veen et al., 2020: 388).

On the flip side, workers perceive this process as uncertain due to its opaque and constantly changing rules (Grohman et al., 2022). The algorithm's logic, largely unknown and unpredictable for workers, creates confusion about its workings and how it impacts their earnings (Woodcock, 2020). Workers are often "left to speculate" about it (Mason, 2018), leading to regular discussions filled with frustration and anger in online forums, whether in the US (Mason, 2018), Brazil (Grohman et al., 2022), or Indonesia (Nastiti, 2017).

The findings of this research are also aligned with this. Workers I spoke to as part of the research were of the opinion that it was a system of "fraud" and "scam," as the research in these countries I referenced suggests. Workers often describe being *esnaf-kurye* as ‘a fraudulent system,’ ‘scam’ or ‘being cheated.’ The *esnaf-kurye* system is widely regarded as a problem in the sector. While most delivery workers criticize it, not all may express their criticism in the same manner. However, the phrase "*Esnaf-kurye* system brings regret" is frequently uttered in online forums. As will be discussed in more detail in the last chapter, even those who organize by establishing a chamber of tradesmen - those who recognize *esnaf-kurye* as a tradesman, not a worker - point out that this system has disruptive effects on the workers. Even the president of the chamber himself, highlights a need for a serious regulation to limit companies. In other words, despite seeming contradictory, delivery workers working in this system criticize it, with variations in the harshness of the criticism and the way it is expressed.

Hasan, a seasoned delivery worker with 16 years of experience, who works as *esnaf-kurye* himself, draws a vivid analogy between starting to work *esnaf-kurye* and getting someone accustomed to drugs. He notes that the state, purportedly in support of young entrepreneurs, provides exemptions from insurance premiums and income tax for those entering this profession. Companies compounds the issue by deceiving potential workers through misleading advertisements that fail to disclose the high associated costs. Both the state and companies, in Hasan's view, contribute to this problematic process, likening it to harboring addiction. These

deceptive strategies lure young individuals into the job, only for them to later confront deteriorating working conditions, diminishing income, and escalating tax debts. However, according to Hasan, "once they are in, they are in".

Within the bonus system, as workers exceed specific package number thresholds, their per-package pay is increased. However, companies frequently adjust bonuses at different rates, exacerbating the division among workers. Let us provide a concrete explanation of the wage manipulations by companies and their effects on workers.

The payment structure is typically announced by companies in January and July each year when the new minimum wage is determined. While companies advertise their new payments on social media through various troll accounts, heated debates begin among workers about which company has the better raise rate. Some workers, accordingly, change the companies they work for. With the ever-increasing inflation, many workers are calculating the cost of fuel, engine maintenance costs, as well as the cost of living, and are saying that doing this job will no longer sustain them. For those who are unhappy with the new rates, supervisors advise them not to be prejudiced and to "experiment" it first. Companies, under the guise of accounts representing their delivery workers, post videos on YouTube with the main message "I tried the company's new rates; it pays very well," prompting debates in the comments section. Additionally, there are individuals, whose exact nature of the relationship with the company is unknown, producing videos to showcase how lucrative the new system is, essentially promoting the companies.²¹

Disagreements regarding new prices arise not only from the individual variations in how each worker assesses their cost of living but also from the fact that companies adjust bonuses at different rates based on package quantity. For instance, in its latest payment structure announced in July 2023, *Trendyol* increased the bonus by 39.6% for a worker delivering 28 packages per day and by 19.5% for a worker delivering 48 packages per day. Since each worker

²¹ Companies also utilize these individuals during periods of worker unrest to suppress potential uprisings by circulating messages on social media channels that defend the companies and claim that any action would be detrimental to the workers. Additionally, some workers reported that these individuals were contacted regarding problems such as the deactivation of workers' accounts, and that these individuals reopened their accounts in exchange for money. While some of these individuals are well-known among workers, the companies, when asked, claim that there are no such individuals within their organization, denying any relationships with them.

evaluates the raise according to their daily capacity to deliver packages, opinions on the raise differ. Ramazan commented, "The company is aware that workers are already delivering packages in the 40 band. Therefore, it did not provide a satisfactory increase in bonuses in this range." Burak also highlighted that the company consistently raises targets. He mentioned that when he joined the company in November 2021, bonuses were paid for delivering 14 and 18 packages, but over time, the company removed these thresholds and increased others as well.

During the same period when Trendyol implemented the aforementioned adjustments in July 2023, Getir disclosed its intention to modify its pay structure. The changes included distinct hourly wages and per-package wages in various regions, along with the discontinuation of bonus payments for package deliveries in certain regions. This wage differentiation triggered a legitimate backlash from workers in the regions receiving lower pay. Yemeksepeti also adopts varied pricing practices across cities and districts. In essence, the delivery platform companies in Turkey employ various tools to reduce, differentiate, and manipulate workers' wages.

Workers also report various issues with platform work, which they refer to as scams. Firat observed that when he approached the number of deliveries close to a certain bonus target, the system started sending long distance orders. He explained, "They keep you in the system longer. If I reach the target early, I will stop. They look at your work performance analysis. They know that you are going to push yourself to earn this money".

Workers express dissatisfaction when they receive orders from areas outside their usual working zones shortly before the end of their shift. Bekir pointed out, "While we are penalized if we enter the system 2 minutes late, the system assigns us to a distant point 5 minutes before the end of the shift. They make us work longer than our shift. When we call technical support and request the order to be taken from us, we are refused."

Burak, a delivery worker at Trendyol, perceived that new hires were receiving more packages. Initially informed that it would be ensured to give workers 3 packages per hour when they started, this practice changed over time. Burak, feeling discontent with the situation, visited the office a couple of times to discuss the matter with his superiors. However, seeing that the problem persisted, he eventually decided to quit the job. He expressed, "I was delivering packages by forcing myself, even speeding and putting myself in danger. In the same region as

me, the new worker was delivering 9-10 packages more than me in the same period. It could be 2-3 though. But you can't explain this difference to me. The application was sending us few orders, assigning orders from long distances. At the end of the day, these affect my earnings. You are stealing my earnings."

Workers with higher performance scores in both Yemeksepeti and Trendyol gain the privilege of choosing their working hours (slots) earlier. Workers with lower scores are left to choose from the remaining hours. During my interview with Ferhat, he shared that in the previous week, he could choose very few hours, let alone the preferred ones, due to his low-ranking score. It's worth noting that workers' performance scores decrease when they take leave due to reasons such as illness or when they work for short periods in the previous weeks. This setup implies that workers must maintain a high-performance level to sustain their work, as their previous work performance serves as a reference. The application is designed to foster continuous competition among workers, urging them to exert more effort and work harder.

In their examination of food delivery platforms in Ecuador, Cordero and Castro (2019) discovered that Uber Eats terminated the accounts of most experienced workers, who were the most informed about the application's escalating precarious changes. Additionally, the company's practice of hiring in large numbers every week prevents workers from forming connections and discussing the precarious conditions experienced by all.

Similarly, Firat, *esnaf-kurye* at Trendyol, believes that the company employs a deceptive strategy by continually altering its operational methods and pricing policies. This constant change hinders workers' analytical capabilities, resulting in that company encounter less resistance. According to Firat, "The company is changing the system; it takes 3-4 months until the worker gets it and understands its income and expenses. Besides, they say 'Don't say anything right now, work, try first'. Good or bad? Good for whom, bad for whom... It individualizes the process. It causes the person to blame himself, as if everything is in his own hands. Workers start to think like 'What if I work harder?' Everyone's perception becomes different, and very different dynamics are formed."

At this juncture, it is pertinent to highlight a tendency that I observed both during my field research and frequently encountered in discussions on online forums. In my conversations with

workers, when I relayed the negative experiences of other workers in the realm of platform work, I noticed a skeptical reception. Many workers even asserted that such practices did not exist and that the worker I quoted was lying. Similarly, in online forums, when a worker shares a work-related complaint or grievance, numerous others dispute the veracity of the claims, dismissing them as falsehoods. While acknowledging that some of these accounts might be troll accounts affiliated with the company, it becomes evident that the varied implementations of the platforms lead workers to rely solely on their individual experiences, perceiving their own encounters as the sole reality.

In platform delivery work, characterized by systematically variable wages, workers may also tend to blame themselves, as Fırat pointed out. Fleming (2017: 217) aptly notes that the "normalisation of mass self-employment, on-demand business models, freelancing, and the Uberisation of the workforce" leads to a "radical individualization of jobs and the workforce." This normalization reinforces the idea that "people are ultimately responsible for their own economic fate," ultimately legitimizing this perspective.

On the contrary, it is worth noting that there are workers, albeit fewer in number, who perceives the malfunctioning of platforms as more of a technical issue. Semih at Yemeksepeti pointed out that the system does not send the order to the nearest worker, and despite numerous complaints, the company has not addressed this problem. When asked why they have not fixed it, he remarked, "As far as I understand, they are using the trial-and-error method. But they still haven't understood that it's wrong." In this regard, he attributes the issue to supervisors lacking knowledge of the job and unqualified managers.

It should be noted here as well that the workers I interviewed often criticized team leaders and supervisors for perceiving themselves as superior to workers. They stressed that these superiors were not superior to them in terms of quality, and that their only difference is that they accepted spying. Many workers stated that they could be a team leader or in a higher position if they wanted, but they did not prefer it as it did not suit their character.

There are other workers like Berkay who highlight the incompetence of supervisors – individuals who have not worked as delivery workers, and therefore, lack understanding of the job. Berkay recounted an incident where the packaging of an ordered buttermilk was damaged,

causing the liquid to spill. In such cases, workers typically call online support to report the issue and request order cancellation, providing photos of damaged products as evidence. "However, they don't understand us. They don't get that this can happen when you're riding a motorcycle," Berkay expressed his frustration. On one occasion, the company summoned him to the office regarding an order cancellation. They asserted, "This is not how it works here," and had him sign a warning letter. Yet, Berkay does not solely attribute blame to the company or supervisors. He believes that some workers intentionally cancel orders by taking photos and claiming damage. According to him, the mistreatment he experienced may be connected to the actions of these fellow workers.

In this context, it is pertinent to consider Wood's insights (2018: 1069) on the repercussions of flexible scheduling for workers, in terms of platform economy. Wood suggests that when a majority of workers grapple with the uncertainty of working hours, they are less inclined to perceive such fluctuations as a form of control or discipline. Workers may fail to attribute this uncertainty definitively to managers or broader market forces. When there is a lack of demand in the market, workers may hesitate to hold the company exclusively responsible, considering it could be influenced by factors such as diminished purchasing power or other macroeconomic reasons. It is noteworthy that, at this juncture, some delivery workers direct blame towards the government for the continuous surge in gasoline prices and inflation, diverging from those who attribute these challenges to platform companies. Furthermore, certain workers highlight the government's apparent indifference to the *esnaf-kurye* system, suggesting implicit support for companies. They assert that the state's reluctance to regulate this system may stem from its collection of high taxes on workers.

The way workers interpret the challenges they face in platform work, including their decreasing earnings, and whom they hold responsible is a crucial aspect to comprehend their subjectivities. As elucidated above, workers hold various perceptions, with the attribution of difficulties to the *esnaf-kurye* system being common, and the companies' deceptive practices are widely emphasized. Some also point to the inadequacies of company staff in this regard. Additionally, there are workers who lay stress on the rising cost of living, due to inflation that the state fails to address, alongside their criticism about state's disregard, even harboring, for the *esnaf-kurye* system. While some workers grappling with low earnings introspectively question themselves, the upcoming section will delve into a pervasive tendency uncovered in this field research—

workers attributing the challenging conditions in the sector, hence their worsening situation, to their colleagues who, like themselves, operate within the *esnaf-kurye* framework.

4.4.4. Divided Realities and Workers, Disjointed Perceptions within Platform Work

The combination of the piecework payment system with bonus-like incentives transforms wages into a speculative target seemingly reliant solely on individual achievements. This dynamic significantly influences the relationships among workers, impeding them from collectively interpreting the nature of the work and the company with shared meaning, thereby fragmenting their sense of commonality. Embracing individualistic perspectives rooted solely in their own experiences, workers position themselves in opposition to each other. Essentially, this undermines collectivity, going beyond merely fostering competition where workers strive to outperform each other in delivering packages.

A special bonus program introduced by Trendyol in November 2023, exemplifies this situation. This bonus, applicable for that month, offered enticing payments to workers who surpassed a specific total package count. This incentive prompted a significant influx of workers into the system, with many opting for extended slots to maximize their earnings. However, the high demand led to a saturation of slots, prompting the company to announce that all slots were occupied. A worker, frustrated by this situation, recorded a video illustrating his inability to select a slot on his phone, shared it on an online forum, and criticized the company. The post garnered numerous comments within hours, primarily falling into two groups.

The first group contended that they managed to secure their slots on time, experienced no such issues, and criticized the worker who complained. They suggested that he wouldn't have encountered a problem if he had acted promptly. Their criticism was directed at the worker who posted, questioning his complaint against the company, which, in their view, provides a lucrative bonus and benefits workers. The second group consisted of workers who could not secure a work slot, like the worker sharing the post. However, this group also criticized those workers who usually do not participate extensively in the system or choose such extended hours but were now participating solely for the bonus. They accused these workers of hindering their

ability to work. Ultimately, both groups ended up blaming the colleagues for this challenging situation.

Hence, the practices implemented by companies go beyond merely instigating a competition among workers to outperform each other. Instead, these practices lead workers to perceive their colleagues as the cause for the limited number of assigned packages, thereby impeding them from achieving their desired earnings. This dynamic results in workers placing blame on one another, undermining the sense of shared interests among the workforce and fostering division among them. While this does not eliminate the potential for collective action among workers, as we will demonstrate in the final section, it poses, however, a considerable challenge and negatively affects their collective capacity.

A prevailing discourse and grievance observed among workers in the field is, indeed, that "anyone and everyone is doing this job"²², signifying a rapid increase in the number of platform workers. While this complaint is primarily directed at companies' extensive recruitment practices, it may also encompass other workers, particularly migrant workers. When the system fails to assign them sufficient orders, workers lament the hiring of too many workers, including migrants. Phrases like "everyone started working as a delivery worker" and "this job has become a job for kids," among others, are commonplace expressions of discontent. Workers also voice concerns about the escalating presence of migrant workers in the sector, irrespective of Yemeksepeti's recent hiring practices. Chat groups established to discuss responses to the rising gasoline prices and diminishing earnings, for instance, quickly become inundated with suggestions to complain about individual businesses employing migrant workers, often accompanied by racist remarks.

It is important to highlight that migrant workers experience racist harassment on the road ²³. They report incidents where car drivers deliberately cut them off, and both car drivers and motorcyclists make racist remarks and use offensive language towards them. Due to the increased instances of racism directed at Syrians in Turkey, Turkmen delivery workers often

²² "Önüne gelen bu işi yapmaya başladı"

²³ The Turkish state assigns vehicles belonging to migrants a special license plate starting with the letter M, representing the word Misafir (Guest), followed by two digits from MA to MZ. Consequently, migrants, including the migrant delivery workers, may become the targets of racist harassment and attacks in traffic.

affix a five-headed eagle symbol of Turkmenistan to the front of their motorcycles. This serves the dual purpose of distinguishing themselves from Syrians and asserting their Turkmen identity.

Workers appear to have internalized the mainstream economic notion that "an increase in labor supply leads to a decrease in wages." According to their perspective, migrant workers, in particular, are perceived as accepting lower wages in the sector, leading to the devaluation of the work. This perception existed even before Yemeksepeti hired migrant workers. While it is acknowledged that migrant workers at Yemeksepeti receive the same wages and, therefore, do not directly lower wages, the concern is that the sheer number of workers, including migrants, adds to a general lowering of wages.

The abundance of labor in the low-paid service sector makes workers replaceable, allowing companies to maintain lower wages unless there is collective resistance from workers to counteract it. While this understanding may be accurate as a determination, workers tend to blur the causes and effects of the problem. The consequence, namely the obligation of migrant workers to accept lower wages, is perceived as the driving force behind the problem. This perception is not limited to delivery workers in Turkey. Although workers, in general, may recognize that companies pay migrant workers less by taking advantage of their precarious conditions, the focus shifts from companies and is channeled to migrant workers within the environment of rising racism.

Kadir is one of these workers who subscribes to this mindset. In the fourth month of his employment at Yemeksepeti, following an argument with a supervisor, his account was deactivated, effectively resulting in his termination. He attributed this to the existence of flattering workers. According to him, "Blame is on our colleagues. They always flattered to the supervisors. Supervisors are also used to it and expect such treatment. If you don't do that, they fire you immediately²⁴". He further stated that the company had started hiring migrant workers, and this was a significant factor in his dismissal. While attending a delivery workers' action

²⁴ "Suç, bizim kuryelerde. Alıştırmışlar abi çekmeye, adamlar da böyle üst perdeden konuşuyor. Sen de ondan daha ağrısın diyelim, tak kapatıyor sistemini benim gibi."

together, he expressed frustration about the increasing number of migrant delivery workers, pointing out migrant workers' motorcycles along the way.

Before starting at Yemeksepeti, Kadir had applied to Trendyol in February 2022 but was not hired. Despite this, he continues to lament the ease with which "anyone can become a delivery worker." He attributes his lack of success at Trendyol to a personal issue during the interview, stating, "the girl who interviewed me got annoyed with me. I think it was personal." Kadir's overall discontent, even he was not hired by Trendyol, revolves around the perceived surplus of workers. He attributes his rejection merely to a female employee. While his frustration is directed at companies, this sentiment, however, relies on the companies' mass hiring practices, including migrant workers, meaning the issue of workers' abundance. Consequently, Kadir's anger oscillates between companies and migrant workers, in a way that has not yet found its target.

Mason (2018), within the context of the "gamification of work," on platforms, observes that when "players," or workers, face challenges and are unsuccessful, their dissatisfaction is directed not at the capitalist class that establishes the rules but at the obstacles within the game. She argues that "the inbuilt antagonism between the player and the game replaces, in the mind of the worker, the deeper antagonism between boss and worker." Accordingly, workers focus on discovering algorithms and learning how to cleverly operate within the game's parameters as the only conceivable option. This research, as exemplified by Kadir's case, suggest workers do not perceive their fellow workers solely as competitors in a game where they strive to deliver more packages. Instead, they view the very presence of other workers, including migrants, as a threat to both themselves and the job. Despite numerous workers expressing discontent with the deceptive practices of the *esnaf-kurye* system, there is also a prevailing sentiment among workers where they ultimately hold other workers responsible for their own negative situations, leading to calls for their "disqualification", if we continue to use the same analogy between work and play.

The piecework payment system, which inherently individualizes the workforce, is further exacerbated by the unequal incentives and discriminatory practices outlined in this section. This fractures the foundation upon which workers could form a shared perception, masking the common exploitation experienced by all workers. It obstructs the potential for a shared

understanding and conceptualization among workers, impeding the development of a collective identity and undermining the shared nature of their lived experiences. It wrongly shifts the target from companies to workers, and when endorsed by racism, to immigrant workers. Recognizing that a shared understanding is crucial for articulating common demands and building collective action, the profound divisive impact of this work regime on workers becomes increasingly evident. Essentially, it erodes collectivity—both in terms of the experience of sharing and the sense of shared experience. We will return to these themes in the final chapter, which examines the collective capacities of workers.

4.4.5. Managerial control strategies via customers, and workers' pursuit for integrity and agency

Platforms function as "evaluative infrastructures," restructuring organizational dynamics where control is decentralized, yet power remains centralized (Kornberger et al., 2017: 79). This shift diminishes the need for direct control over workers, relying instead on the vast user base and extensive data. Consumers play a pivotal role, contributing significantly to the centralization of platform power. In this way, platform companies not only establish a monopoly position (Kenney & Zysman, 2016) but also strengthen it through a "political alliance" between company owners/investors and consumers. The concentration of power is justified under the guise of "serving consumer interests" (Rahman & Thelen, 2019: 5).

Gandini (2019: 17) argues that the decentralized nature of the platform economy entails reputational evaluations for its functioning. Emphasizing the pivotal role of consumers, Stark & Levy (2018: 1202) assert that these "modern technical and social infrastructures of surveillance" have foregrounded a new subject position: "the surveillance consumer". The mobile and dispersed character of platform work not only signify a transfer of control from direct company oversight to customers but also involve workers, aware of this mechanism, delivering a "monitored performance," thus becoming integral to the overall supervision process (Anderson, 2016: 241).

The involvement of customers in controlling workers in the service sector has been previously explored by Fuller and Smith (1991) through the utilization of consumers' reports. They observed that customers are formally designated by managers as "accomplices in controlling

workers," effectively rendering workers subject to an "additional boss." However, they underscored that although it may seem that the power to control workers is shared with the company's customers, in truth, customer feedback enhances employers' control over the workplace by supplying them with an extra data source for control, assessment, and disciplinary measures (10-1).

During the same period, Leidner (1993) delved into the issue of workers' subjectivity within what she termed "interactive service work." She highlighted the challenge of routinizing service work due to the one-to-one interaction between customers and workers. Workers find themselves caught between meeting customer demands, fulfilling employer needs, and preserving their own sense of self. Leidner focused on how workers navigate this complex dynamic, particularly when their actions don't align with their feelings or when their feelings are manipulated to achieve a specific outcome (14). She explored the question of how workers protect their sense of self, noting that while personal characteristics and the nature of service interactions shape workers' reactions, their jobs inevitably necessitate an instrumental approach to their own identity and relationships with others. In contrast to Hochschild (1983), who emphasized the distress experienced by workers subjected to organizational exploitation of their emotions, Leidner found that not all workers resist the standardization of their inner selves; instead, many tend to construct interpretations of their work roles that align with their self-conceptions (22-3).

Similarly, this study observed that delivery workers refrain from identifying with difficult or unreasonable customers, viewing them as a problem to be solved or a situation to be managed. This perspective leads to the objectification of customers and an instrumental approach in dealing with them. It also allows the workers to continue their job without compromising their self-respect. Workers, at times using mild sarcasm, described scenarios where they had to "handle" customers.

For instance, Faruk, 57, recounted an incident about a female customer's complaint about him. The superior informed him, "You delivered the order to the customer, but you didn't show enough attention." Faruk responded with a laugh, saying, "She complained because I didn't show enough attention. How am I supposed to show attention?" He continued, "Everyone is a keyboard warrior, whether male or female. They quickly write about how the delivery worker

was this or that... The company doesn't support us. We are the lowest link, and those who come after us are basically beggars. They see us as unskilled workers. Whatever the customer says, they are right. No, they are not,²⁵" and eventually, his frustration shifted toward the company. Similarly, Ramazan emphasized the company's role, stating that "customer satisfaction is more important to them; the worker's satisfaction is not important at all."

In his research on service workers in subsidiaries of multinational retail companies operating in China, Gamble (2007) discovered that despite the use of customers as a tool of managerial control by their employers and the "rhetoric of sovereign consumer," workers were fully aware that the true source of power lay with their superiors in the company. He argues that from an objective standpoint although workers were to some extent under the influence of customer management, they subjectively seemed indifferent to this aspect (19).

Gamble (2007) also questions the generalization put forth by Korczynski (2002: 129), suggesting that managers prefer workers to associate with a collective, abstract notion of the customer to enhance productivity, while frontline workers may lean towards identifying with individual, concrete customers as interactions with specific customers hold significant meaning and satisfaction within the work. In contrast, drawing on his study, Gamble (2007) asserts that Chinese interactive service workers might align with customers on a more abstract level, especially in situations involving challenging actual customers (22).

Similarly, the delivery workers in this study associate with an abstract notion of customers, adopting an instrumental approach to protect their self-respect and avoid any controversy that might otherwise arise. When asked about what they pay attention to considering customer feedback, many emphasized that they do not do anything "special" or "extra." They assert that by being neat, proper, and polite, they are simply doing their job the way it should be done. Some workers who received low scores from customers stated that they did not care about this because they know they did not do anything wrong. It seems like they do not believe it is fitting to exert extra effort to have their performance appreciated and to earn points. This behavior can

²⁵ "Müşteriye siparişi götürmüşsün, ilgi göstermemişsin". "İlgi göstermediğim için beni şikayet etmiş, Benim nasıl bir ilgi göstermem gerekiyor? Herkes klavye delikanlısı, kadını erkeği. Hemen yazıyorlar kurye şöyleydi böyleydi... Şirket sahip çıkmıyor bize. Halkanın en ucuyuz, bizden sonrakiler dilenciler zaten. Vasıfsız eleman görüyorlar bizi. Müşteri ne dese haklıymış. Ya değil."

be interpreted differently along the axes of class and masculinity, which mediate emotions such as honor, dignity, and self-respect.

In their examination of Uber drivers, Rosenblat and Stark (2016: 3775) discovered that drivers provide passengers with amenities such as water and phone chargers and attempt to gauge passengers' preferences to determine whether to initiate a conversation. This indicates that these workers are involved in "emotional labor." Building on this, they contend that drivers in the Uber system engage in emotional labor in exchange for ratings rather than tips. Gandini (2019) further asserts that in the platform economy, "emotion work" is no longer an invisible form of labor but a very visible one, given that a worker's metrics, feedback, rankings, and/or ratings are prominently displayed on each platform.

In his examination on the attitudes of low-skilled unemployed men in the UK towards consumer-oriented interactive service jobs, Nixon (2009) contended that the considerable level of emotion management demanded in these jobs, particularly the necessity to display "deference to customers during the service encounter", requires skills and dispositions that are incompatible with the masculine working-class habitus. Consequently, these men rejected these roles that demanded high amounts of emotional labor as they grappled with the challenge of regulating their emotions and adopting a passive and deferential demeanor during service interactions and such work deprived them their usual coping mechanism to relieve their stress, such as shouting or swearing (319).

Most of the workers in this study frequently emphasized that they were polite to customers and that this was their main expectation from them. The workers seem to consider it a matter of self-respect and personal integrity to exhibit politeness and professionalism in service. Consequently, they tend to believe that their behavior is a voluntary expression of their own will and initiative. Rather than adopting politeness as a response to the perceived superiority of the other person, the worker sees it as an inherent quality that strengthens their sense of self and agency. This approach imbues the work and the customer relationship with a sense of voluntariness rather than obligation. Acting in a specific manner merely to meet customer expectations or avoid receiving a low rating is seen as a compromise to one's self and character. On the other hand, workers often complained about customers' rudeness.

Ferhat, working in a low-income neighborhood as *esnaf-kurye*, said that he avoids getting into any arguments with customers, but his consultant once called him and warned him that the number of customer complaints about him had increased. He recounted an experience where a customer did not even know the address of their house, questioning his ability to provide a fair rating. Another incident involved a woman customer agreeing to hang a basket downstairs but being overruled by a man's voice insisting that the worker should go upstairs screaming: "What are you hanging a basket for, let him go up and get it." Reflecting on such encounters, Ferhat expressed the internal conflict caused by such attitudes, stating, ""You hear this on the phone, you go up. I go home in the evening; I think about it. It hurts me. Who is that man? But I have to serve him. People have this attitude: 'This is your job; you have to do it'"²⁶.

In contrast, a worker operating in a high-income neighborhood shared an interesting perspective: "There is a customer in Koç University Dormitory. She stays in the S dormitory, next to the canteen near the Health Center. Every time it rains, she orders water. It is not a special brand of water. She walks through the canteen to buy water from us and buys it from us at a higher price. The people in Koç have this attitude: 'I had this done with my money, my order came to my doorstep.'" The worker conveyed this with a mix of surprise and disapproval, finding this attitude uncouth²⁷.

²⁶ "Ne sepet salıyorsun ya, çıksın getirsin!" "Sen bunu duyuyorsun telefonda, çıkarıyorsun. Kadına çıkışıyor sonra. Akşam eve gidiyorum, aklıma geliyor, zoruma gidiyor. O adam kim ki yani, ama ben ona hizmet etmek zorundayım. İnsanlarda şey var: 'Bu onun işi, yapacak'".

²⁷ It is crucial to highlight the absence of a study on the socio-economic profile of delivery platform users in Turkey. Drawing from their research across 13 European countries, Huws and colleagues (2019) posit that the dynamics of platform labor supply and demand, especially in Western Europe, suggest an intra-class phenomenon within the working class rather than a clear division between classes. The study indicates that, on average, 90.6% of individuals providing taxi and delivery services at least weekly through online platforms had also utilized these services at least once a year. From this observation, they contend that those engaged in providing these services should not be perceived "as a sort of servant class" catering to the needs of other households because "to a considerable extent these services are bought and sold among the same population"(129). The challenges in reaching conclusive results are not only due to the criteria of once a week for service supply and once a year for demand but also the significant presence of migrants in platform jobs in Europe, which raises questions about the persuasiveness of such conclusions. To ensure a more accurate evaluation, given the varying class composition across countries, the social class profile of the segment using platform services should be investigated on a country-by-country basis.

Burak expressed frustration about certain customers who, despite adverse weather conditions, leave notes on orders demanding fast delivery, stating, 'Fast delivery of my order!'. He perceives such customers as odd or lacking in manners. Additionally, workers mentioned instances where customers write rude and insulting words in their order notes. In response, some workers intentionally delay the delivery or cancel the orders, marking them as "couldn't find the house."

During the heavy snowfall period in 2022, delivery workers took to social media, sharing videos highlighting the challenges of performing their job in such adverse weather conditions. In response, the TEHİS union urged the governorship to prohibit motorcycle deliveries. Subsequently, the governorship implemented a ban on delivery work during severe weather conditions, and customers also started expressing sensitivity toward this issue. Notably, increased media coverage and social media discussions about delivery worker fatalities contributed to raising awareness of the risks associated with the job. It is noteworthy that some customers include notes in their orders, expressing that the prompt arrival of the order is not crucial and emphasizing the importance of prioritizing the safety and well-being of the workers.

Many delivery workers express a sense of pride in providing essential services during the pandemic, particularly when people were hesitant to venture outside. The significance of the work, in this regard, lies in the ability to fulfill needs that customers may find challenging to address themselves. This pride is often intertwined with perceptions of courage and fearlessness associated with traditional notions of masculinity. However, when the work involves catering to the private, potentially trivial, or unnecessary desires of the customer, traditional notions of masculinity may not support or align with the nature of the job. Beyond considerations of masculinity, the challenge arises when the boundaries of the work are dictated by the desires of the customer, posing a potential threat to the self-identity of the individual performing the work, regardless of whether that identity is imbued with masculinity.

This brings us to the inherent ambiguity in service work concerning its purpose, oscillating between addressing essential needs and fulfilling personal desires. While discerning the criteria for distinguishing between needs and desires poses a significant challenge, this distinction becomes less significant in personal service work. For instance, when considering a domestic worker engaged in household service, the individual is no longer perceived solely as serving a customer but as someone selling their labor power to an employer. Consequently, understanding

service work critically hinges on its organizational framework, with various types of service work exhibiting distinct dynamics and relationships.

Semih recounted an incident on a particularly rainy day when he received an order for six 1.5-liter bottles of water and dried pineapple from a customer residing in a gated community. Upon reaching the complex gate, Semih contacted the customer, suggesting she come down to collect the order. The customer explained her mother was unwell and requested Semih to bring the items upstairs. Sympathetic to the situation, Semih agreed, and the complex's security allowed him to enter with his motorcycle. Upon reaching the apartment door, Semih discovered two unopened water carboys placed there. It became apparent that the customer primarily desired dried pineapple but had added water to meet the minimum order requirement. Semih, feeling deceived, advised the customer against involving her sick mother in such lies. For Semih, the act of delivering water to an ailing mother in inclement weather holds a sense of purpose and utility, contrasting with the questionable nature of bringing dried pineapple to a less empathetic customer.

The social dynamics between customers and workers in platform-based employment closely resemble those found in personal service work rather than in traditional service establishments such as shops, restaurants, schools, or hospitals. This dynamic significantly deviates from the relationship between self-employed individuals and clients, where the agency of the worker is much more evident. The companies, by maintaining a certain level of invisibility, create a space where customers engage in purchasing a "personalized experience" or personal service. This is particularly noticeable in tasks related to cleaning and domestic work carried out through these platforms. Despite potential restrictions on the range of products available for delivery, the delivery worker is dispatched to the customer's address based on their specific order.

For instance, in platforms like Yemeksepeti, customers can place orders around the clock. This convenience is often lauded by corporate circles as "technology democratizing luxury" (Shah, 2020). Such convenience may serve to situations where customers make additional requests, such as taking out the garbage or buying cigarettes. While workers have the right to decline these requests, some refuse outright, while others consider it in exchange for a generous tip or when asked politely. However, the expansion of service offerings and procedures in favor of the customer, along with the personalization of services, inadvertently strengthens the

subordinate relationship. The boundaries of this relationship seem contingent on the acceptance or rejection of these additional tasks by the workers.

As mentioned earlier, at Trendyol, customers are asked to rate the service, taste, and delivery on a 5-point scale. Under "Delivery," there is a note that says "Evaluate Trendyol Go" in parentheses. The score given in the "Delivery (Evaluate Trendyol Go)" category adds to the worker's customer satisfaction score, influencing various aspects of the worker's job, such as the ability to choose a weekly slot. It is noteworthy that the company, by incorporating its own name in this context, essentially encourages its customers to rate the workers. In contrast, the platform companies themselves are not subject to customer ratings. Despite various factors influencing the delivery time, such as the business's delay in preparing the order, the platform's challenge in assigning the order promptly, or external factors like traffic or adverse weather conditions, any perceived "lateness" in delivery is often attributed by the customer solely to the delivery worker.

In this context, Tomassetti (2018) underscores the tendency for the direct interaction between the customer and worker to obscure the central coordination of service production by the employer. According to Tomassetti, this one-on-one interaction makes production seem less cooperative, and this effect is more pronounced and misleading in platform work compared to other interactive services. The emphasis on the worker-customer interaction leads to two misleading perspectives on the employer-worker relationship: a limited understanding of the service the customer receives and the mistaken belief that the worker's entire contribution to the employer is encapsulated in the customer interaction (19-20).

Consequently, workers navigate the complexities of their roles and interactions with customers by establishing boundaries that preserve their agency and uphold their self-identity, distinguishing between their personal identity and the services they provide. However, challenges arise when customers fail to discern this distinction, reducing the worker to the service rendered, prompting workers to perceive such instances as challenges to be managed rather than recognizing the individuality of the worker. Workers may characterize customers disregarding these boundaries as "ignorant, rude, or uncouth." Additionally, the interplay between their perceptions of self and the nature of their work becomes increasingly complex as the extent to which their tasks fulfill necessary social needs versus catering to personal desires

becomes unclear. The personalization of service work further complicates this dynamic, as the boundaries of the job can be extended by the service purchaser, effectively transforming personal desires into market demands. Platforms' concealment of their role as central coordinator of service production creates an appearance in which the work is embodied in the worker. In this setup, customers often tend to associate the worker with the service they receive, irrespective of personal sympathy. Hence, in platform-based work, while the social dynamic between customers and workers closely mirrors that of personal service work rather than traditional service establishments, it presents a notable contrast to the relationship between self-employed individuals and clients, where workers typically experience greater autonomy and agency.

4.4.6. Limits of “personal services”: the example of delivery work for gated communities

In this section, we investigate a shared experience among delivery workers that presents challenges, leaving them feeling degraded – described as being treated “like second-class citizens” - and prompting them to question the meaning and value of their work. Many gated communities in Istanbul prohibit delivery workers from entering on motorcycles. Consequently, workers are required to navigate the gated area on foot, delivering the order directly to the customer. This distance covered can be substantial, depending on the complex's size. Workers are often required to present their ID to the security guard at the entrance and may further encounter requests to traverse the parking lot or use the freight elevator. This situation creates tension with both the site's security personnel and the customers. Some workers resort to calling the customer, urging them to come to the security area to retrieve the order, otherwise the worker may need to cancel the order. Customers often react negatively, leading to potential issues for workers, including problems with the platform and the risk of account closure for a specified period. Workers also emphasize that individuals in roles such as cargo delivery or other service personnel with cars are not subjected to similar restrictions.

Furthermore, certain establishments prohibit workers from entering during the preparation of orders, requesting them to wait at the door. This becomes particularly troublesome for workers in unfavorable weather conditions, especially given the absence of a designated rest area for them. In 2023, Marmara Forum shopping centers announced restrictions on delivery workers

entering the premises on motorcycles. The rationale provided included concerns about "creating a security gap in the interior, entrance and service corridors of the shopping center, negatively affecting the comfort of visitors, disturbing density, and creating negative images for visitors in the common areas". This policy faced criticism for the potential loss of time and impact on earnings for workers, as "a delivery worker's time equals money; if you lose time, you lose money," as put by Burak. At the same time, it also drew backlash for implicitly viewing workers as potential criminals.

The experience of Tamer, who mobilized his colleagues to protest in front of gated communities, is noteworthy in this context. Tamer worked as a Trendyol delivery worker in a neighborhood abundant with gated communities. Initially, they had the option to cancel an order if the customer did not come down to collect it personally. However, the company later claimed that they were losing both customers and revenue to competitors. Consequently, the company threatened to terminate the contracts of workers who canceled such orders twice. Tamer considered this intimidation illegal and consulted approximately 10 lawyers to explore potential courses of action. Eventually, the workers pooled funds, granting power of attorney to a selected lawyer. Despite initiating the legal process by sending warnings to the gated communities, the lack of seriousness in response, coupled with ongoing intimidation by the company, deterred the workers. The prohibitive cost of legal proceedings further hampered their ability to pursue the matter.

During this process, however, Tamer found that some gated communities blocked public land, installed barriers with remote controls, declared streets as dead ends, and erected illegal structures. After filing a complaint with CİMER²⁸, the illegal barriers of some communities were removed. Tamer also regularly complained to the municipality. However, he claimed that the municipality provided false statements, saying, "We came and checked. There is no such issue. Delivery workers have access." When he escalated his complaint to the Ministry of Justice, the ministry referred it to the governorship, which, in turn, blamed the municipality. Tamer suspected that the municipalities were aware of the unlawful actions of these gated communities, such as blocking public land and illegal construction, and may have even

²⁸ CİMER (T.R. Presidential Communication Center) is a web service established in 2015 to enable citizens to forward their requests, notices and complaints directly to the presidency.

accepted bribes for these actions. When all these efforts failed to produce results, he and his colleagues decided to stage a protest in front of a gated community. On the morning of the protest, the company exerted pressure on the workers, with supervisors threatening legal action, alleging that the workers were damaging the company's brand value. Tamer defiantly responded, "Let something be done to one person because of this action; then you will see how I disgrace you, then you will see how your brand value decreases." And they proceeded with the protest.

Tamer also faced tensions with customers during this process. "I've heard it all! There were those who said, 'You're doing this job; you should deliver it like a mule.' So many things..." he recounts. However, he ultimately holds the companies responsible for all these issues: "They say, 'If you're not going to deliver on foot, quit the job.' Again, it's the greed of the companies. Shut down those sites for shopping. Let's see if even one remains within a month; they will willingly open them again."²⁹ He suggests that site administrations will be compelled to reopen entrances due to the high demand from customers residing in the sites who use delivery platforms. This problem frustrated Tamer to the extent that he eventually resigned from his job, citing this reason along with other negative aspects of delivery work. He added, however, that they succeeded in getting around 20 gated communities, including the one he lived in, opened to delivery workers.

Moreover, many workers point out that requests to traverse the parking lot or use the freight elevator imply a caste system, and they react by stating that they are seen as second-class citizens. It should be noted here that being viewed as a second-class citizen frequently emerges in workers' narratives in other contexts. One common issue shared by almost all workers, for instance, is being ignored and disrespected by other vehicles, predominantly by male drivers in traffic. In addition to the risk of accidents and fatalities, workers are also subjected to hostile attitudes and endangered by other vehicles in traffic. "We are treated again as second-class people in traffic," the delivery workers express. Some male vehicle drivers intentionally impede them in traffic or drive in a way that prevents motorcycles from passing. Bekir complains, "At least 2-3 people raise their arms and swear at you during the journey you travel in 1 hour."

²⁹ "Neler duydum ben! 'Sen bu işi yapıyorsun, eşek gibi getireceksin' diyen de oldu. Neler neler..." " 'Yürüyerek teslim etmeyeceksen çık işten' diyorlar. Yine firmaların açgözlülüğü. Siz kapatın o siteleri alışverişe. Bakalım, 1 ay içinde bir tane kalıyor mu, tıptış tıptış açacaklar."

Although workers generally attribute this situation to vehicle drivers, especially taxi drivers, there are also those who, once again, blame the other delivery workers. The attitude of "neighborhood delivery workers" working for individual businesses is not approved in this regard. Because of them, workers feel that they are also being mistreated. Berkay states, "This happens because of the vagrants who do this job, because of those who carry drugs and weapons." He adds that the police also treat them aggressively for this reason.

In relation to access to gated communities, again some workers, albeit few, draw attention to some delivery workers who speed unnecessarily within the community, causing disturbances. They feel that such behavior tarnishes the reputation of all delivery workers, while others argue that it is unfair to generalize the actions of a few. It is suggested that companies should reconsider providing services to these gated communities, which prohibits entrance of workers on motorcycles. Many workers share that they adopt a practice of canceling orders when customers do not come to pick them up at the community entrance, and they encourage fellow workers to do the same.

Although not all workers are struggling like Tamer did, the issue of accessing gated communities remains one of the most commonly discussed complaints among delivery workers on online forums and social media platforms. This ongoing challenge poses a significant hurdle to delivery workers as they navigate the complexities of defining their work as skilled labor. Unlike many other topics that lead to disagreements among workers, the problem of accessing gated communities is widely acknowledged and criticized. The case of gated communities highlights that platform companies prioritize the completion of tasks without regarding under what conditions and at the costs of what the worker provides the delivery. Their primary focus is on getting the job done and ensuring customer satisfaction to maintain a continuous demand for their services.

4.4.7. A “real” man’s job? Deploying masculinity in delivery work

Considering that platform delivery workers are predominantly male; it is crucial to acknowledge how masculinity is both (re)produced and (re)formed within the context of their work. It is particularly important to understand how masculinity operates in positioning workers against each other and is invoked, mediated, and asserted in discussions about work is

particularly noteworthy. This dynamic shed light on the intricate ways in which gender roles and expectations influence the experiences and interactions among male delivery workers within the platform economy.

In buildings without elevators, workers are compelled to deliver orders to apartments up to the 5th floor. In response to persistent complaints, Yemeksepeti has made carrying 29-liter carboys optional for workers, although those who decline worry about receiving fewer orders. This uncertainty has led to ongoing discussions among workers in online forums and social media groups about how to handle exceptionally heavy orders. Some workers take a firm stance, advising their peers to "Stop crying. This is our job. If you can't do it, quit." However, others argue against accepting such burdensome tasks, highlighting the lack of understanding from customers.

Online forum participants often dismiss complaints with statements like "don't do this job if you're going to cry," possibly associating excessive complaining with feminine traits and trivialize these criticisms by reducing them in merely whining. Conversely, workers interviewed in person are less inclined to accept the idea that their job involves fulfilling customer desires under all circumstances, irrespective of the nature of those requests. These workers question the reasonableness of such demands from their perspective and seek empathy from customers. While social media allows more reckless and incisive expression, it creates also a space where male workers can position themselves against each other engaging in a form of competitive masculinity. On these platforms, grievances about work are frequently met with dismissive responses like "don't cry" or "did they force you at gunpoint to take this job? If it's not to your liking, why not just leave?"

The masculinity reference system frequently serves as a cover for the precarious and subordinate position of workers. In their conversations with each other, work-related issues are often approached under the guise of masculinity. An illustrative incident occurred on an online forum when delivery work was prohibited by the governor's office in Istanbul due to snow. Some workers, seeking daily delivery work despite the dangers, boasted about the high number of packages they had delivered in the previous snowfall. Some other workers advised them not to do it because it was dangerous. Referring to the boasting workers, another worker, implied that excessive love for money might lead someone to send their wife to have dinner with another

man. It was later criticized as unmanly by others. The initial portrayal of the obligation to work in adverse weather as a masculine challenge was countered by an assertion that prioritizing earnings could compromise masculinity. Eventually, a different masculinity formulation, one that did not resort to below-the-belt comments, prevailed, and discredited the earlier attempt.

Previously a common issue among workers was highlighted, which involves being ignored and disrespected by other vehicles, particularly male drivers in traffic. However, it's essential to note that women delivery workers faced additional challenges. They expressed concerns about young men on motorcycles squeezing them in traffic, engaging in harassment by honking their horns and shouting at them. Some women mentioned difficulties in navigating these situations, especially if they were new to motorcycling. An alarming incident involved Kübra, who experienced a minor accident when a male motorcyclist abruptly swerved in front of her without signaling. This example underscores the intersection of various forms of harassment—physical, verbal, sexual—linked to masculinity. It illustrates how men's harassment of women, as a display and exercise of power, constitutes a serious form of violence that can jeopardize women's safety. Additionally, we also stated that migrant delivery workers face instances where male car drivers intentionally cut them off, and both car drivers and motorcyclists directed racist remarks and offensive language toward them.

Traffic serves as a dynamic stage where various masculinities intersect, compete, and clash, with class, gender, and national identity also playing significant roles. It becomes a battleground for reshaping the boundaries and parameters of hegemonic masculinity. In this dynamic and relational social space, different facets of motorcyclists' masculinity come to the forefront.

Motorcyclists often perceive car drivers, especially taxi drivers (who are frequently older), as aggressive and impolite. They frequently contrast this with the experiences in Europe, where motorcyclists are respected, and separate roads are designated for them. Urbanity becomes intertwined with the concept of masculinity, creating a space where motorcyclists can express their masculinity without feeling "less man" compared to traditional (perceived) men. The masculinity of motorcyclists in relation to car-driving men, in this regard, is rooted in a form of "urban" masculinity.

Their perception that they face greater danger than car drivers, engage in physically demanding work, use their bodies as a shield, exhibit speed, and navigate traffic more adeptly, by standing out from the crowd of cars, helps delivery workers mitigate the inferiority of their class position by leaning on masculinity. In discussions about the job's hazards, many delivery workers have conveyed to me the sentiment that "the body shell of this vehicle is our body"³⁰. This expression conveys a sense of vulnerability to dangers, yet it also harbors an implicit masculine pride.

In this context, masculinity serves as a coping mechanism, enabling workers to endure the challenges of their work and even find pleasure in it. The cultivation of a masculine identity provides them with the motivation and strength to persevere. The characteristic of endurance or hardiness, alleged to be entailed by masculinity, are (re)charged to facilitate for enduring the demands of the job. Consequently, the weight of their work experience feels lighter and more bearable when assessed through the lens of masculinity rather than through the lens of class.

The delivery worker, already exposed to the risks of accidents and even mortality while navigating a motorcycle, is additionally expected to confront potential challenges inherent in platform work. In this profession, workers are free to the extent they can afford it and strong to the extent they are willing to risk their bodies and physical health. The ability to carry out prompt deliveries and, consequently, earn a satisfactory income becomes a matter contingent on the worker's strength, endurance, and fearlessness. In this context, it is not coincidental that *Trendyol* labels its delivery workers as "tigers"³¹; this terminology is precisely aimed at whipping these sentiments socially perceived as men are supposed to embody; thus, the masculinity of the workers is called to duty.

4.5. Platforms' Repertoire of Labor Control Beyond Algorithms

In the literature, the method of controlling and managing workers in platform work is frequently labeled as "algorithmic management" (Lee et al., 2015; Rosenblat and Stark, 2016). The detailed data collected on the labor process and the ratings of workers accordingly, although

³⁰ "Bu aracın kaportası, bizim bedenimiz."

³¹ *Trendyol* employs the term "tiger" to refer workers in the application used by workers and in all correspondence, including messages and e-mails.

not explicitly dictated, actually determines how work is executed. It is also likened to digital Taylorism (Cherry, 2016; Altenried, 2022; Moore and Robinson, 2016) due to its resemblance to Taylorist management, which involves monitoring workers, measuring work, and implementing control through algorithms.

The distinctness of this form of management is argued to lie in the fact that the monitoring and evaluation of the workers are performed in an “individualized, continuous and remote way” (Haidar and Keune, 2021). Unlike “past forms of technical and bureaucratic control,” data collection is not solely employed for controlling and evaluating workers but also to influence their behavior by predicting their likely future performance (Kellogg et al., 2020). In this sense, algorithmic management is claimed to go significantly beyond Taylorism in terms of “both the kinds of data considered and the probabilistic patterns relied upon in machine learning” (Adams-Prassl, 2019: 29).

When a new labor regime emerges, scholars often concentrate on the uniqueness of this type of management, seeking to define and conceptualize the new work based on what they perceive as distinctive aspects. The concepts of algorithmic management or algorithmic control can be viewed through this lens. While attempting to elucidate novelty by highlighting distinct features is understandable to some extent, it can also be deceptive. Although the “features of algorithmic management expand the scope, scale, and purpose of surveillance and data collection,” relying solely on algorithmic activity to explain “any form of control” is misleading as it may lead to technological determinism (Boreham et al., 2007, cited in Veen et al., 2020: 312).

It is also important to emphasize that the conceptualization of algorithmic management here presupposes a seamlessly functioning technology operating autonomously. However, as a counterexample, consider the challenges faced by Yemeksepeti workers due to the inadequacy of the company's technological infrastructure. Despite this shortfall, the company recently adopted an application-oriented approach in labor process management by reducing the reliance on physical supervisors. To illustrate, the introduction of a contactless payment option for customers over the phone was not fully implemented, resulting in constant errors when workers attempted to collect payments. When workers sought assistance through live technical service, the only solution advised to them was to cancel the order and return it to the restaurant or warehouse.

As previously discussed, due to the constantly changing and unilateral nature of platform work's rules, coupled with the largely unknown logic of the algorithms, workers perceive this process as one of uncertainty, often confused about how it impacts their earnings (Grohman et al., 2022; Woodcock, 2020). A substantial number of workers interviewed during this research characterized the system as a "fraud" and a "scam" as well. However, regarding the functioning of algorithms, most workers' understanding is limited to the perception that companies frequently modify them, typically to the detriment of workers. Therefore, the general perception among workers that the *esnaf-kurye* system is a scam stems not mainly from the perceived unfairness of algorithmic operations but from the realization that the work is more precarious than initially portrayed. It is not as flexible, autonomous, or boss-free as promised, and the actual earnings are often much lower than advertised. Companies, instead of proportionally increasing wages with the workers' rising expenses, consistently alter the pay structure to the detriment of workers, resulting in a decline in earnings. Moreover, companies implement these changes not only through algorithmic wage manipulation but also through traditional arbitrary wage cuts.

Kübra disclosed that she faced consistent underpayment at Getir for several consecutive months. Rather than furnishing the required motorcycle equipment to workers, Getir sells it to them, a prevalent practice in the sector. The equipment cost is divided into installments and deducted from their monthly salaries. Furthermore, the company used to provide motorcycles for rent to those who did not own one (though Getir later discontinued this option).

Kübra explained, "My pay was short. They mentioned it was for equipment, okay. It was short again for the motorbike rental, and I accepted that too. Later, they said there was a mistake in the deduction. I asked when it would be corrected. They said it would be fixed by a certain date, but it wasn't. I waited, and there were continuous deductions. The same thing happened to my other two close friends. When I went for a meeting, they said it would be deposited on a specific day, but it didn't happen. They said it might be in the evening, but again, it wasn't deposited. Then, we went collectively for the second time. I raised my voice, and only then did it get deposited."

While the Yemeksepeti workers' protest in early 2022 primarily centered around the company's announced low wages, the revelation of the company deducting tips paid online also played a role in the unrest. In addition to the three companies examined in this study, there are numerous smaller platform companies, some of whose names have become synonymous with practices involving wage deductions, late payments, or even non-payment of wages among workers. Again, it is important to note that the practice of wage deductions for tardiness is not directly tied to algorithms, even though tardiness is identified through technological infrastructure instead of physical supervision.

Here, the critical role of various managers at different levels in labor management within the Turkish context should be emphasized. All three companies operate with a hierarchical structure, where managers hold positions above the workers, assuming titles like consultant, supervisor, field manager, chief, or regional manager. These managerial figures play a crucial role, especially during instances of worker unrest and protests, serving to pacify reactions and control demonstrations. At Getir, for instance, supervisors have authority over daily or weekly work schedules, mandating workers to labor for 12 hours a day. Workers are required to seek approval from these managers for leave. Workers, including those in the other two companies, could potentially be summoned to the office to address conflicts. The workers I interviewed often expressed criticism and had conflicts with team leaders and supervisors. As Ramazan from Trendyol articulated, "their job is to keep the workers in line." Consequently, when the workers fall out of line, they are the ones who address it. During protest periods, managers at different levels become more actively involved in the field, aiming to quell backlash and control protests. Therefore, it is more accurate to examine the widening repertoire of control mechanisms employed by platforms, rather than narrowly associating the platform economy with concepts such as 'algorithmic control.'

Similarly, Li (2022) critiqued the prevailing literature on platform labor control for its predominant focus on algorithmic management. In her case study of Didi in China, Li sheds light on the pervasive presence of numerous fleet management companies collaborating with Didi in its operations. She underscores their pivotal role in exercising organizational control over drivers, ensuring the enforcement of Didi's requirements at the local level. Li emphasizes that the evolution of the labor process in platforms toward a more fluid workspace does not entail the eradication of organization-based control typically seen in physical and formal

workspaces. She calls upon scholars to perceive platform labor control as a hybrid regime, characterized by both the persistence and revitalization of various managerial strategies commonly associated with flexible production.

We have stated that Trendyol oversees the workers' compliance with essential traffic rules during their work, through individuals who are mostly retired police officers. Within the framework of this supervision, in the event of a first violation, the worker is notified of the situation and issued a warning. A second violation results in termination of the contract signed with the worker, i.e. dismissal. When I talked to the laid-off workers at a time when the company was dismissing a large number of workers in this way, I observed that they did not believe in the reasons for their dismissal, even though there was concrete evidence against them. They were looking for reasons for their dismissals, such as participating in protests or the dismissal of former workers in the context of hiring new workers for the company. One worker even said that if the company was to actually implement this policy, there would be no workers left working, because every worker violated traffic rules at least twice. Even when workers violate traffic rules, they tend to attribute it to underhanded strategies of the company, far from attributing work situations to algorithms.

In essence, the predominance of piecework as the payment method in platform work cannot be attributed to the use of algorithms. Thus, understanding the organization of work in platform labor solely through the lens of "algorithmic management" may risk falling into technological determinism. As mentioned, companies utilize physical superiors, including during periods of worker unrest, for various purposes. Therefore, it would be more accurate to talk about a repertoire of control. Platform companies, in this regard, signify an expansion of the repertoire of control over workers by integrating new technological tools into the restructuring of work organization for their advantage.

It is important, in this regard, to recognize the inaccuracy of assuming that the management strategies of companies have historically followed a linear process of successive and mutually exclusive changes, transitioning from simple or direct control to technical control, and then to bureaucratic control. There has not been a simple, mechanical causal relationship between the stages in the development of capitalism and changes in the organization of work; the relationship between the logic of capital accumulation and the transformation of the labor

process is more complex and variable (Littler, 1990: 56). In this context, capitalist companies can employ different strategies of labor control simultaneously; these various forms of labor control cannot be treated as a dichotomy in which companies must choose one or the other.

The platform economy, which "has repackaged a historic labor arrangement" that organizes the workforce "as a political technology" (Reid-Musson & Johnston, 2023: 189) by reintroducing the piecework system, challenges the notion of unilateralism. The operationalization of control in platform work depends on network design and the asymmetry it provides. While the algorithm may be the point of application for labor controls, "it is always an iteration of the market's macro-architecture". Hence control in platform work is "pervasive feature of the market's configuration, not an artefact of its algorithmic execution" (Shapiro, 2020: 173).

Joyce (2020) aptly critiques the excessive focus on the novelty of platform work through technological determinism and the decentering of capital in discussions of its evolution. He proposes rethinking the social relations of platform work, emphasizing the labor-capital relationship that establishes "a cash nexus" between platform and worker. Joyce underlines the significance of pay as a mechanism for worker control, a factor underestimated in the literature on platform work, where controlling capacity is commonly attributed to algorithms or technological strategies. He argues that the power dynamics between platforms and workers are more accurately explained by the power of capital over labor than by informational asymmetries of algorithms. The tendency to overemphasize algorithmic control obscures the fundamental reality that what capital primarily demands from platform workers is the work itself, for which they receive payment.

Ascribing a central role to algorithms also affects the formulations of demands for the regulation of platform operations, as seen in the case of the demand for transparency regarding the use of algorithms. In her study on food delivery workers at Deliveroo in Scotland, Gregory (2021: 326) notes that the company has started sending emails to workers explaining the functioning of the algorithms that run the application. However, as one worker in the study pointed out: "it is pretty opaque. I don't think anyone really understands how it works".

Dubal (2023) highlights that even when platform companies release data, as required by court orders, minimal information is disclosed about the algorithms influencing workers' wage

systems. She therefore suggests that the ever-evolving nature of machine-learning technologies and the imbalanced power dynamics within the digitized workplace reduce the effectiveness of transparency efforts and might not alleviate the tangible and subjective consequences of algorithmic wage discrimination. Merely disclosing company information does not disrupt the power dynamics that enable algorithmic wage discrimination. While understanding the algorithm can empower workers, it might not significantly enhance their ability to control their work or establish equitable and predictable wages. The focus on transparency and legibility, without directly challenging the roots of algorithmic wage discrimination, falls short of addressing the resulting social harms. Instead, she proposes an approach directly addressing the issues: advocating for a legally mandated and irrevocable prohibition on the practice of algorithmic wage discrimination, encompassing measures such as eliminating remuneration through digitalized piece pay. In this context, she urges scholars to reconsider data governance not only narrowly in terms the legal aspects of post-collection data handling, but also “the legal abolition of digital data extraction”.

Barratt and colleagues (2020: 1646) underscore the increasing scholarly attention directed towards platforms' efforts to control labor, shape markets, and involve workers as contractors. However, they point out a significant gap in the exploration of worker agency in response. In a similar vein, Vallas and Schor (2020) contend that portraying platform work predominantly as algorithmic control tends to overstate its influence while neglecting worker agency. They argue that the conceptualization of platform work, where algorithms are perceived as the central source of power and control, obscures the role of capital, resulting in a characterization encapsulated in the metaphor of a “digital cage.” This perspective, which critically “questions what happens when the boss is an algorithm,” falls short by not incorporating an analysis of workers' resistance to algorithmic control and their broader counteractions, thereby overlooking the limitations of this control.

4.6. By way of concluding: Consent, Coercion, and Understanding Worker Subjectivities

In his renowned book “Manufacturing Consent” (1979), which is grounded in his ethnographic research conducted at the Allis Chalmers factory in Chicago, Burawoy delves into the question of how capitalists enable the “simultaneous obscuring and securing of surplus value,” which is

the defining essence of the capitalist labor process. His argument posits that this is achieved not through despotic management relying on coercion but through hegemonic management that produces workers' consent.

Burawoy highlights that, during the period he studied, employment guarantees and legal restrictions on managerial despotism prevented the arbitrary application of coercion. This situation, in turn, granted workers a degree of autonomy on the shop floor, allowing them to invest in labor by framing work as a "game." This game, called by workers "making out," operated on a piece-rate basis and provided workers with "extrinsic profits" such as emotional satisfaction and symbolic rewards, offering a counterbalance to the monotony and boredom inherent in the work.

Drawing on Gramsci's perspective applied to the workplace, Burawoy contends that "consent rather than fear prevailed on the shop floor." He employs the metaphor of the game as a means of understanding the reproduction of social structure and its patterns of domination, noting that "games obscure the conditions of their own playing through the very process of securing participation." He argued that much like one cannot play chess and simultaneously question its rules, workers cannot engage in the game of 'making out' on the shop floor while questioning its rules (Burawoy, 2012: 189).

Almost fifty years after the publication of Burawoy's book, we observe platform companies introducing gamification into the labor process. While these companies constantly alter the rules of the game, both workers supposedly engaged in the game and academics observing it from the outside are questioning these rules. However, those who adopt Burawoy's framework to illustrate the reproduction of the social structure argue, as Mason (2018) does, that when the "players" (i.e. workers) fail, their dissatisfaction is directed not at the capitalist class that sets the rules, but at the challenges within the game. This suggests that the inherent conflict between the player and the game, in the worker's perspective, substitutes for the deeper conflict between the boss and the worker.

The metaphor of the game, in this context, creates another form of "cage" that prevent workers to confront capital, precisely because this frame equates "game" with "consent", positing that "consent rests upon - is constructed through - playing the game" (Burawoy, 1979: 81). It is

crucial to differentiate between workers gamifying the labor process to find emotional satisfaction and symbolic rewards and companies gamifying to maximize surplus value.³². However, Burawoy's perspective treats the game almost as an ideology that serves the reproduction of capitalist relations, offering little agency to the worker. This framework, lacking a dialectical analysis (Clawson & Fantasia, 1983: 676), also falls short in comprehending workers' subjectivity, viewing worker motivations in simplistic "either/or" terms. The mere fact that workers engage in the game, whether with or without pleasure, does not necessarily imply established consent. Understanding consent requires an exploration of how the game contributes to consent (Osterman, 1982). To do this, consent must first be clearly defined. When framed as how workers consent to their exploitation, the essential task of defining consent is often overlooked, as continued employment is already assumed as the primary indicator of their consent.

In this chapter, we discussed the workers' inclinations to become *esnaf-kurye*, examining their prior work experiences within the broader socio-economic context of the country. We objected framing of this inclination as merely an illusion. This section posits that workers' previous unfavorable work experiences, characterized by strict hierarchies, subordinate relationships in factories, workshops, or service sectors, constant managerial presence, exposure to commands, shouting, or workplace harassment, alongside a lack of better options in the labor market, compel individuals to become *esnaf-kurye*. The potential for relative autonomy and the physical absence of managers or bosses emerges as decisive factors orienting workers to this work. Additionally, the extended working hours in their previous jobs, delayed salary payments, non-receipt of overtime wages, and the absence of social insurance enhance workers' inclination.

³² Woodcock and Johnson, in their article "Gamification: What it is, and how to fight it" (2017), differentiate between two forms of gamification: 'gamification-from-above,' which involves the optimization and rationalization of work practices by management, and 'gamification-from-below,' a type of active resistance against control at work. Their conceptualization of 'gamification-from-below' moves beyond Burawoy's game as it revolves around resistance. It implies not the improvement of work but its subversion through game elements. Drawing on Autonomism and Situationism, the authors argue that it is possible to transform non-games into games as a form of resistance, rather than transferring game elements from playful contexts to managerial ones. The article advocates for this 'gamification-from-below' as an ideal form of resistance against gamification-from-above and its appropriation of play in the pursuit of work.

However, upon entering the profession, workers face the fact that the job is not what they expected. Companies exercise control over workers through various means and technologies, neglecting any responsibility even in the cases of accidents or worker fatalities. The pressure to deliver the maximum number of packages in the shortest possible time, coupled with companies' use of incentives such as bonuses compels workers to work excessive hours to secure a meaningful wage. The piecework payment system, in particular, places significant speed pressure on workers, leading to deterioration in their health and forcing them to work even at the expense of their lives. In this work arrangement, the financial insecurity of the workers does not only stem from the fact that they assume all the risks and costs associated with the job such as in the case of an accident or health problem, but their wage also becomes a target whose attainment depends entirely on their 'performance'. There is no wage security in this job, the wage is personalized, and the entire workforce is individualized.

Yet, this cannot be framed merely as disillusionment that necessarily would prompt in total objection to *esnaf-kurye* system. The persistence of workers in platform work despite widespread criticism, is primarily rooted in the necessity of selling their labor power as the only means of livelihood - a predicament shared by many individuals lacking the resources to produce for themselves. Therefore, we emphasized the importance of interpreting platform work within the labor-capital relationship, establishing "a cash nexus" between platform and workers, subjecting them to a state of dependency on capital (Joyce, 2020). Additionally, control mechanisms cannot be fully understood through a simplistic dichotomy of coercion or consent. Platform companies employ a diverse range of controls that involve elements of both coercion and consent. The ways in which workers perceive, accept, cope with, or resist these mechanisms operate within a more intricate and dynamic framework. Whether workers' existing dissatisfaction about their work will evolve into opposition to their platforms, what or whom it will target, and why and how they will be absorbed, would be shaped within the complex power relations of a broader social context.

In this study on platform delivery workers in Istanbul, many workers attribute the declining, uncertain, variable wages to platform companies, viewing it as a form of fraud. However, there is a prevailing perspective among workers that links the devaluation of work to the increasing number of workers in the sector. The frustration of many workers, resentful of companies for job precarity, extends to the companies hiring large numbers of workers, including migrant

workers. There is a situation where workers ultimately blame other workers for their own precarity and desire them to be "disqualified," using the terminology of the game. This is also closely related to the recent increase in racism in Turkey. Therefore, the interpretation of workers' precarity is shaped not only by the analysis of labor processes but also by the composition of economic, political, and social forces at the macro level. The strength of the workers' struggle in a country, i.e., the position of labor vis-à-vis capital, plays a crucial role as well in how workers experience and interpret their precarity, or exploitation.

However, the emphasis on the individualization of jobs and the workforce, along with the mechanism of work that positions workers against each other, should not be misinterpreted as a bleak essence ascribed to individuals within a scenario of 'man wolfing man'. Given the overall weaknesses of the labor forces in the country, the workers' confidence in their collective power to compel the platform companies to backtrack or their motivation to build a united struggle is waning. The suggestion of relying on collective power, which they already perceive as lacking, does not appear realistic to them. While the erosion of collectivity presents a significant challenge and has a negative impact on workers' collective capacity, it does not eliminate the potential for collective action. The possibilities and limitations of collective action will be discussed in detail in the final chapter. However, before that, Chapter 5 will explore the mechanisms that enable the reproduction of labor for those engaged in delivery platform work in Istanbul. This examination will shed light on the social and gendered relations that both shape and are shaped by delivery platform work in Istanbul, which, itself, should be seen as a commodified and market-based solution to the issue of social reproduction.

5. Precarities, inequalities and invisible gendered labor in social reproduction within the delivery platform work

Drawing on research focused on food and grocery delivery workers in Istanbul, a group predominantly comprised of men, this chapter examines platform work through the lens of social reproduction. Exploring how workers ensure their reproduction, the chapter initially directs attention to workers' households, delving into the gender relations and gendered division of labor that both shape and are shaped by delivery platform work in Istanbul. The argument unfolds by demonstrating that workers' reliance on the family, specifically on women's unpaid reproductive labor within the household, enables them to sustain extended working hours despite declining earnings and worsening working conditions. The contention is that this gendered division of labor serves as the social pre-condition for platforms to offer only a partial solution to the problem of social reproduction through the market. The chapter examines the significant absence of women from the paid workforce in the households of delivery workers, contextualizing it within the inadequacies of elderly and childcare services and their gendered nature in Turkey. Consequently, the chapter asserts that the conceptualization of the commodification of social reproduction should not exclude reproductive workers' households from the equation - which otherwise once again would render unpaid female labor invisible.

The research emphasizes that the observed arrangement, which demands long working hours for men in the market and assigns women to take care of the household, including that of the worker, deprives both genders of a meaningful social life. This situation, intensified by the increasing commodification and monetization of life, profoundly affects these households. It compels workers to interpret and navigate their lives primarily based on financial considerations. Therefore, the third section of the study explores how the expanding commodification and the growing reliance on money shape workers' perceptions, relationships, and overall lives.

The circumstance where delivery workers endure extended work hours with a heightened risk of accidents and even death, coupled with the absence of entitlement to paid leave, and the obligation to cover their own social security premiums signifies a precarious situation that impacts both their present and future. This deprivation of conventional social rights leads to

their overall precarity. This chapter delves into the challenges faced by delivery platform workers, who find themselves compelled to relinquish basic health security, forfeit their social insurance rights, and incur debts. This examination is conducted within the broader context of the recent transformation of the health system in Turkey.

The concluding section encapsulates the chapter's discussions by examining the question of the social valuation of reproductive labor. It posits that the phenomenon of delivery platform work in Istanbul embodies a neoliberal-conservative coalition (Cooper, 2017) grounded in the privatization of social reproduction. This configuration reflects a dynamic aligned with the Turkish government's recent social policies characterized by both familism and marketization, which stands as an important obstacle to the collective appreciation of care.

Before examining the empirical findings, the introductory section will elucidate the rationale behind employing the social reproduction framework and clarify its intended meaning. This involves highlighting the inadequacy of most current studies that address platform businesses through a gender lens. The discussion will explore critical themes such as the crisis of care, the commodification of care, and the positioning of platforms within this broader landscape. Instead of relying on a dichotomy like (economic) production versus (social) reproduction, the framework is grounded in reproduction, signifying the continual (re)creation of individuals as physical, cultural, social, and beings (Glenn, 1992). This concept empowers us to illustrate the comprehensive social organization of life, encompassing both platform workers contributing to the reproduction of people in the market and women engaged in reproductive activities within their households. It enables an examination of its unequal composition, including unpaid, gendered, and racialized forms. This facilitates a thorough exploration of the social structure, recognizing its complexity and avoiding compartmentalization into distinct domains based on artificial dichotomies like economic/cultural. By anchoring the analysis in the framework of social reproduction, we can scrutinize the roles played by the market, the household, and the state in sustaining our lives, thereby integrating various levels into the examination. This approach addresses the fundamental issue of how society reproduces itself from a relational, dynamic, and comprehensive perspective.

5.1. A critical framework for the crisis and temporalities of social reproduction

Beginning in the 1970s, feminists theorized on the intertwined nature of capitalism and patriarchy by highlighting the significance of women's unpaid labor at home for capitalist accumulation. They critiqued the male perspective that narrowed capitalism to the production of commodities, revealing the relationality between the labor spent in commodity production and the labor dedicated on the production of the workers who create these commodities. This approach both sheds light on the gendered division of labor and aims to make women's labor visible while stressing its social value. The subordinate position of women in the paid labor force and their segregation in certain professions were also examined in connection to women's unpaid labor in the household. While the problematization of women's unpaid labor contributed significantly to social sciences, subsequent scholars have pointed out some limitations of this framework.

This framework encountered criticism for its reliance on a functionalist logic, which confined reproductive labor to the domestic sphere and reduced it to a function of productive labor (Weeks, 2020). Debates, such as whether unpaid domestic labor generates surplus value for capital, were accused of staying within the economic sphere it opposed, hindering a more comprehensive conceptualization of social reproduction that considers the reproduction of life beyond a capital-centered perspective. This binary framework prioritizes issues of gender and class, often theorizing them separately from race, sexuality, colonialism, and other constitutive social relations (Ferguson, 2016). Moreover, the emphasis on women's unpaid domestic labor and the presumption of a normative household structured around a nuclear family with a male head of household (assigned to production) and a female housewife (assigned to reproduction) overlooked the critical examination of paid forms of reproductive labor, including the labor performed by domestic servants within the household (Huws, 2019)

During the twentieth century, the nature of domestic work evolved, but modern labor-saving devices did not eliminate the need for labor. Technological advancements in household technology ironically increased the average housewife's productivity. The content of reproductive work expanded, yet households, as the space for this work, remained unchanged, and housewives continued to bear the primary responsibility for domestic labor (Cowan, 2023).

In recent decades, women have increasingly entered wage employment in many countries, particularly in the Global North. However, gender equality in the wage labor market remains

elusive, and the phenomenon of the "second shift" persists for most women. In other words, participation in paid employment does not mean that women are freed from housework responsibilities. While technological progress did not alleviate these challenges, the trend of governments withdrawing from public care services indicated a departure from the socialization of domestic labor. The rise in the aging population, the retreat of public institutions from welfare and social care services, and the growing involvement of middle- and upper-class women in the labor force (Gebrial, 2020; Huws, 2019) have prompted scholars to address what is commonly referred to as the "crisis of care" or a "crisis of social reproduction" (Altenried et al., 2021). These dynamics facilitated the commodification of domestic and care work, including the emergence of a transnational labor market, enabling some middle-class households to delegate these tasks to female migrant workers (Amelina and Lutz, 2018).

According to Farris and Marchetti (2017), commodification in Global North countries has occurred through both the "reconfiguration of the welfare state as a provider of monetary transfers rather than services" and the gradual "outsourcing of care services to private (for-profit and non-profit) care providers." This has resulted in care services remaining within the domestic sphere, with care-seekers hiring others for these services. The marketization of care involves the ways in which "states promote the growth of private care providers (both for-profit and not-for-profit)," indicating that states support the expansion of private care actors rather than providing care directly. Within the commodification and marketization of care, the authors further highlight the increasing role of corporations in the current reconfiguration of care in the Global North, referring to it as the "corporatization of care."

The proliferation of platforms is related to the shift of social reproduction from households and states to the market, thus closely linking it to the commodification of social reproduction. However, there has been insufficient attention in the literature to the implications of the direct or indirect intervention of platform companies in the sphere of social reproduction, i.e., the mediation of reproduction of life by platforms, and how this reinforces or restructures the gender division of labor both inside and outside the household (Huws, 2019; Wallis, 2021). Moreover, while there is often emphasis on the absence of conventional labor rights for platform workers due to their non-recognition as employees, the repercussions of the lack of protective mechanisms by both corporations and the state, along with the exploration of alternative protective mechanisms they rely on, have yet to be thoroughly investigated.

In Chapter II, we already mentioned that literature on platform work has predominantly concentrated on the male-dominated ride-hailing and delivery sectors in the Global North (ILO, 2021). The consideration of gender and exploration of gendered experiences in platform work have only recently gained attention in platform studies and remain insufficiently researched (Morell, 2022; Hunt and Samman, 2019; Kampouri, 2022). In the past few years, the growing body of gender studies on the platform economy has primarily fallen into two categories. The first group comprises quantitative studies that investigate the composition of platform labor and explore the ways in which women participate in this context. The second group consists of qualitative studies that examine platformization within female-dominated sectors such as housework, cleaning, and care (Benvegnù & Kampouri, 2021: 736), in which gendered relations are often reduced to the experiences of women workers.

While acknowledging that women primarily undertake both paid and unpaid reproductive labor within households, the social reproduction perspective avoids equating reproductive labor with "women's work" and rejects confinement to the domestic sphere or narrow definitions tied solely to the renewal of labor power (Benvegnù & Kampouri, 2021). In the context of platform work, this perspective involves analyzing the network of relationships, including those receiving services from platform services, those providing these services, and their households, by illustrating the dynamics through which these relationships intertwine.³³ This viewpoint presents a comprehensive picture of social interdependencies. Fundamentally, social reproduction, as intended here, implies the reproduction of society as a whole (Arruzza, 2014). It encompasses tasks that "sustain and reproduce life together, both daily and generational" (Hester & Srnicek, 2018) and involves activities that (re)create people "as cultural, social, and physical beings" (Glenn, 1992).

³³ In his comprehensive ethnographic study, "A Precarious Game: The Illusion of Dream Jobs in the Video Game Industry," Bulut (2020) explores the video game production industry, with a focus on a Midwest-based studio predominantly composed of white male workers. Amid ongoing discussions about automation and the end of work, Bulut emphasizes the pivotal role of placing social reproduction at the forefront. The study incorporates detailed interviews with the partners of the workers, integrating their perspectives into the research. Bulut underscores that social reproductive labor carried out at home not only enabled workers to find satisfaction despite enduring long working hours but also relied on this labor for the rapid growth of the studio (35-6).

Platform work emerges as a market-based response to the challenges of social reproduction. Beyond food delivery and grocery shopping, platform workers address various social needs, including transportation, domestic, and care work through applications. These workers mainly take on roles that were traditionally handled, to varying extents, by public institutions, servants, and unpaid women. This also denotes a "massification of 'servant' tasks through their decomposition," in which instead of hiring one servant for all services, one hires household or personal consumption services for each task. With this decomposition, these services become affordable for those who cannot hire a servant, and the market for reproductive work ultimately expands due to the provision of these services at lower costs (Collier et al., 2017). Platform companies in this way bring households closer to the global market by transforming the organization of social reproduction and creating new types of consumption through the diversification of services (Cordero, 2022). Capital circles label it as "technology democratizing luxury" (Shah, 2020), or as epitomized in Uber's advertising slogan: "Everyone's Private Driver".

Within the context of platform work, a space is established where customers obtain a 'personalized experience,' essentially representing a form of personal service. This differs from traditional service interactions, where customers visit a specific establishment and receive service according to the establishment's procedures. It is important to emphasize that these workers, lacking genuine autonomy, also differ from individuals who traditionally roamed neighborhoods selling products or true self-employed professionals like handymen whom people contacted when in need. The structure of platform work shapes the interaction between service recipients and providers in a way to give rise to distinct societal dynamics.

In the context of platform work, the dynamics discussed by Simmel over a century ago within the framework of the acceleration of life in modern societies, influenced by factors such as technological developments, urbanization, and the increase in monetary exchanges, seem to find their full expression. According to Simmel, money, functioning as a universal medium of exchange, erodes personal ties and emotional connections, fostering more impersonal and instrumental interactions. It introduces a quantitative aspect to social interactions, facilitating the measurement and comparison of various values, impacting judgments of worth, and reinforcing the commodification of relationships. This phenomenon transforms the qualitative, personal nature of interactions into a more quantitative, transactional framework, wherein social

ties can be perceived as commodities subject to purchase, sale, or trade. With the advent of contactless service options, initiated during the pandemic and now a permanent practice, where customers may not even see the service provider, and subsequent evaluations are based solely on ratings, the platform service stands as an exemplar of the evolving nature of social interaction expounded by Simmel. He argues that the money economy, inherent in metropolitan life, involves treating individuals as mere numbers, converting qualitative values into quantitative distinctions, specifically in terms of 'how much'. This process does not focus on specific individuals but rather on interchangeable functions. Furthermore, such a relationship does not require frequent or prolonged interaction; it is short, ephemeral, and instrumental. Consequently, this dynamic results also the individualization of time, enabling individuals to negotiate and determine the value of their own time, once again in terms of money.

In the context of the acceleration of city life with time constraints, Huws (2019) emphasizes the "squeeze on the time available for housework," driven by factors such as the growing participation of women in the labor force, urban migration, and the intensification of work with spatial and temporal expansions. This has led to an increased demand for paid domestic services, including those provided by platform services. Huws observes a pattern where the "needs of time-poor households are met through the labor of money-poor" households. It's noteworthy that the CEO of Getir (Ögütcü, 2019), for instance, stated that the primary thing the company sells is time, not products.

However, Sharma (2018) conducts a thorough critique of the time poverty concept within the supply-demand relationship proposed by Huws (2019). Sharma's analysis centers on the Taskrabbit app, a platform encompassing various domestic and self-help services, established in 2008, a year prior to Uber. Marketed with the slogan "We Do Chores, You Live Life," Taskrabbit, founded by a former IBM software engineer who experienced time constraints, promises customers more time for their lives, while concurrently claiming to offer workers a new temporal experience where they can control time during work. Sharma contends that such platforms reinforce to the devaluation of social reproductive labor, portraying it as a "useless pursuit of time" and, consequently, "deflating the political potential of care as grounds for solidarity" (70).

Sharma observes that platform workers express satisfaction in having control over their time. However, this perceived freedom for workers translates into a paradoxical "trade-off for caring less" for customers (2018: 67). The assertion of "I control my own time" is often voiced while adapting to the time demands of others and undertaking tasks devalued by some as less significant uses of their time. Notably, this phrase is also employed by those who, in reality, control the time of others by outsourcing all their tasks (2017: 149). The notion that time-control is an individual endeavor is, in fact, symptomatic of the expectation that everyone should function as their own time-control entrepreneur.

What remains obscured is the underlying reality that "one's productive life and sense of time well spent runs on the energy of other more expendable bodies - other temporalities" (Sharma, 2017: 149). The delegation of care labor to undervalued individuals does not instigate a reevaluation of cultural values attached to care; instead, it simply redistributes and perpetuates its devaluation within the realm of a perceived useless pursuit of time. The celebration of free time overlooks social interdependence, reinforcing "gendered and classed preconceptions of what is a meaningful versus useless pursuit of time" (Sharma, 2018: 69).

Furthermore, the services labelled as "needs" lose their essence in terms of sustaining life, with care becoming entangled with notions of "frivolity and privilege". This broadens the definition of care while simultaneously signaling a societal departure from essential questions regarding "what is needed to sustain our lives" (2018, 69). The politics of care necessitates the acknowledgment of human interdependence on a social and cultural level, but because this is precisely what is denied in TaskRabbit, platforms like TaskRabbit are a major obstacle to the politicization of care.

Essentially, platforms arise as a capitalist response to its inherent problem rooted in the neglect of how to sustain and reproduce lives. While the specific structure of platformization may vary in different contexts, it is evident that platforms embody a privatized, commercialized, and corporatized approach to a crucial social issue—social reproduction. Importantly, the intention here is not to assign personal responsibility or criticism to those utilizing these services. Platforms may, to some extent, contribute to people's reproduction by acting as a coping mechanism for households grappling with the consequences of decades of individualization and the (re)privatization of reproductive tasks (Piletić, 2022). The goal is to shed light on the

network of unequal relations engendered by this mechanism, its operation within the framework of pre-existing social, racialized, and gendered inequalities, and to emphasize the acknowledgment of human interdependence, advocating for a collective rather than a partial solution to the challenge of people's reproduction.

From the standpoint of platform workers, these platforms perpetuate the one-sided shift of the social reproduction crisis from customers to workers (Stingl, 2023), implying an intensification of precarization for platform workers. The subsequent section, focusing on workers' households, explores how delivery platform workers in Istanbul ensure their reproduction. The analysis scrutinizes the gender relations and gendered division of labor that both shape and are shaped by this work. The argument unfolds by underscoring the pivotal role of workers' dependence on the family, specifically relying on women's unpaid reproductive labor within the household.

5.2. The Nexus of Platforms and Family: Women's Unpaid Reproductive Labor

In the preceding section, we offered critiques regarding the reduction of the concept of social reproduction to the mere reproduction of labor power. We argued in favor of adopting a broader perspective that situates social reproduction at the core of life, recognizing it as an expression of our interdependence. Without conflicting with this theoretical outlook and political imagination, the present section aims to analyze the current state of reproduction relations by examining the households of delivery workers.

In the process we describe, characterized as the shift of social reproduction from households and states to the market, particularly emphasized in terms of the Global North experience, certain segments of society are increasingly satisfying their self-reproduction needs through markets. However, it's important to note that simultaneously, there are still others who remain significantly dependent on public institutions or the family for their reproductive requirements. Even in the provision of social reproduction through markets, states and households continue to play a role. The former withdraws from public services and promotes the privatization of care through various means, while the latter reproduces the workers employed in this market. This occurs through enabling privatized paid care work, facilitated by the unpaid reproductive labor of women in households.

This intricate interplay underscores the multifaceted nature of the shift in social reproduction mechanisms, highlighting the varied, intersected, and dependent ways in which different segments of society navigate their self-reproduction needs. Turning to the labor that reproduces workers allows us to understand the links between the market of social reproduction and the households of reproductive workers. This, in turn, enables us to analyze both the social conditions of the market of social reproduction, which delivery workers serve in the platform economy, and the social and gendered relations it affects. In this way, we underline the fact that reproductive work in a capitalist society is not the free reproduction of life and human beings according to people's desires but is itself subject to the conditions imposed on it by the capitalist organization of work and relations of production (Federici, 2020: 99).

Within the scope of this research, 25 delivery workers underwent in-depth interviews. While I had the opportunity to meet and converse with the spouses and other family members of some workers, I did not conduct in-depth interviews with them. Despite the limited sample size, discernible patterns emerged, providing insights into the reproductive relations that facilitate workers in sustaining extensive work hours and continuing their employment. The workers' reliance on the family, particularly women's unpaid labor, to facilitate their work represents the social relation that enables platform work. Simultaneously, this work functions to strengthen the family unit, rendering it indispensable as the locus of social reproduction. This relationship underscores the dynamic interdependence between household dynamics and the nature of platform work.

The majority of the workers I interviewed come from families that migrated to Istanbul, with themselves being born in the city or arriving at a very young age. In some cases, it was their grandparents who initially migrated. Certain workers' family elders still regularly return to their hometowns, to attend to their land there. Additionally, some family members may have returned to their villages after reaching a certain age, although not necessarily engaging in agriculture or livestock farming. On the other hand, there are families with no ongoing connection to the villages they migrated from, choosing to permanently reside in Istanbul. Furthermore, a small group of workers migrated to Istanbul as adults, either alone or with part of their family. In summary, the workers who participated in this research are generally the children of migrants who grew up in Istanbul.

Among the delivery workers I interviewed in Istanbul, only two lived alone. One of them was an individual who migrated to Istanbul as a teenager due to a lack of job opportunities in his hometown. However, he eventually returned to his hometown as he found it challenging to afford the significantly increased cost of living in Istanbul with the wages he earned as a delivery worker and could no longer do the additional jobs he used to do.

Two workers were living with friends. One is a migrant worker from Turkmenistan, residing with others from Turkmenistan. The other is a Kurdish young man who came to Istanbul from Mersin for university studies and continued to live in the city afterward. He shared accommodation with his brother and two friends in Kadıköy, a central district of Istanbul. Both he and his brother worked for 8 hours each, operating under his brother's *Trendyol* account. Subsequently, he relocated to a tourism city where another brother lived, opting to join him in the transportation business. This decision was influenced by both the imminent demolition of their house as part of urban transformation and the soaring rent prices in Istanbul. Additionally, he desired to shift away from working as an *esnaf-kurye* due to numerous challenges faced in this role. Indeed, it is noteworthy that those living alone or with friends are individuals whose families do not reside in Istanbul. The significant and swift increase in rents, particularly in metropolitan areas such as Istanbul, driven by the commodification of housing, poses substantial challenges for these individuals.

The remaining single workers, including some in their 40s, do not live alone or with friends, typically reside with their families. In these households, the mothers of most workers do not have paid employment. Besides the activities like cleaning and cooking, these mothers assume responsibilities such as caring for the elderly, tending to the sick, and looking after their grandchildren. Among the workers I interviewed, only three had mothers engaged in paid employment. Notably, one of them was a divorced woman, while the husband of the other was not working. The mother of the third worker occasionally took on cleaning jobs at other houses. Additionally, neither of these workers had small children requiring care.

The wives of the vast majority of married workers are also not engaged in paid employment. Among those who are working, an example is the wife of a Turkmen worker who is employed in caring for an elderly person. Notably, their two children reside in Turkmenistan and are cared for by the worker's parents. Another worker's wife, who is in her late 50s, works as a babysitter,

and their grown-up children are currently studying and working. Yet another worker's wife, also in her 50s, expressed a desire to work. However, she voiced concerns about the long working hours, the excessive workload placed on the worker, and the inadequacy of wages.

The female labor participation rate in Turkey stagnated for decades but has shown signs of improvement in recent years, albeit still lower than in many other countries. According to data from the Household Labor Force Survey conducted by TurkStat, it stood at 23.3% in 2004, increased to 30.3% in 2014, and further rose to 35.1% in 2022. Turkey, in this context, diverges from the global trend of increasing women's employment since the 1970s. Typically, with the declining share of the agricultural sector in national economies, women's employment initially decreases. However, as factors such as increasing urbanization and the development of the service sector in cities come into play, women's employment tends to rise again, transitioning from agriculture to the service sector. The divergence of women's employment in Turkey from this anticipated U-shape development has been addressed by various scholars, including Buğra and Yakut-Çakar (2010), Toksöz (2011), and İlkaracan (2012). Buğra and Yakut-Çakar (2010, 18-9) argued that difficult working conditions, low wages, and the unavailability of care services play a significant role in the female low participation rate in Turkey. Essentially, a different dynamic is at play than what the feminization of labor hypothesis predicts.

Childcare and elderly care responsibilities assigned to women are recognized as significant reasons for low female employment rates (Ecevit, 2012). The Turkish state has offered limited institutional care services for the elderly and disabled through public institutional care and rehabilitation centers. Primarily, care for the elderly, disabled, and sick has occurred through the informal economy, where migrant women workers, mainly from Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Black Sea, are typically involved (Akalm, 2007; 2015). Nevertheless, in 2006, the government introduced a new law granting private entities the right to establish rehabilitation and care centers. The number of private rehabilitation and care centers saw a substantial increase, from 10 in 2007 to 231 in 2019, surpassing the public sector (Akkan and Serim, 2019).

In 2007, the government initiated a policy based on cash for care. Care providers receive a cash benefit, slightly less than the minimum wage, and must be a family member or a relative residing in the same household, providing 24-hour care to the disabled person. The disabled person must have a minimum 50% impairment, certified by a public health institution, and the

total household income must be lower than two-thirds of the minimum wage (Atasü-Topçuoğlu, 2022). The scheme currently covers almost 700,000 women as caregivers (Dedeoğlu, 2022: 6). However, these women have not been included in the social security system. Furthermore, the government incorporates them into the employment rate, explaining the slight increase in the labor force participation rate in recent years (Toksöz, 2016). The social policy on elderly and disabled care can be summarized as outsourcing to the private sector and delegation to women in poor households, alongside the persistence of unpaid family care and an informal economy primarily relying on undocumented migrant women workers (Bezmez and Porter, 2022).

When analyzing female employment rates based on marital status, it is evident that divorced women exhibit the highest employment rates, followed by women who have never married (TurkStat). Married women with children, however, have lower rates, highlighting the significant impact of childcare responsibilities. Additionally, Turkish law mandates employers to provide childcare centers for children aged 0-6 only if they employ more than 150 female workers. Given that the majority of enterprises in Turkey are small and medium-sized, often with limited female employees, this law holds little practical significance for women.³⁴ The linking of daycare center requirements to the number of female employees reflects a sexist perspective that perpetuates the notion of childcare as solely women's responsibility.

The absence of public nurseries and childcare centers further compounds the challenge. Turkey lacks public institutions catering to children aged 0-3, and the availability of public facilities offering pre-school education for children aged 3-6 is notably inadequate. According to the Turkey Child Survey 2022, published by TurkStat (2023), the rate of children aged 0-2 years attending pre-school education is a mere 0.9%, increasing to 4.7% for children aged 2-3 years. Even when considering children aged 0-6, this rate only reaches 26.8%. It's crucial to note that,

³⁴ Pınarcıoğlu and Seçkin (2018: 7) highlight the challenges in accessing data on workplace nurseries, attributing the difficulty to workplaces not providing necessary notifications, coupled with a lack of inspections on this matter. As an illustrative example of inadequate inspections, they refer to former Minister of Labor and Social Security Faruk Çelik's response to a parliamentary question. According to Çelik's statement, the number of public sector workplaces with over 150 insured individuals in Turkey is 1,658, and private sector workplaces number 7,204. In 2012, inspections were carried out in 299 workplaces employing more than 100 women. Among the inspected workplaces, 76 out of 172 that are required to have a nursery were found to be without one. For more detailed information, please refer to the original source: Pınarcıoğlu & Soyseçkin (2021).

despite public institutions charging lower fees compared to private ones, the cost remains a barrier for many households. Consequently, the lack of free childcare services compels many low-income women to assume childcare responsibilities at home. Those who can afford turn to the informal economy, where low-income women often shoulder this caregiving role.

Gökmen (2022) emphasizes that formal childcare services, while more widespread in Turkey than informal care services, have stricter limits on service hours (averaging 5.6 hours in public and 7.4 hours in private facilities). Given the long working hours, this limitation doesn't effectively support women in simultaneous employment. On the other hand, informal care services provide an average of 9 hours of support for women with a child. Gökmen's calculations reveal that women benefiting from informal care services for at least one dependent-age child are twenty-seven times more likely to be employed than those without any childcare services. In contrast, formal childcare services only double this employment probability. Furthermore, women with access to childcare services exhibit higher rates of employment in full-time, regularly waged, and professional positions. Notably, a greater proportion of women benefiting from informal care services are employed in full-time regularly waged jobs compared to those relying on formal care services. This highlights the significance of the duration of the service received, with women opting for informal care services to accommodate their full-time work, as formal institutions often lack the capacity to provide adequate long-term care for sustained employment.

This scenario reflects a polarized labor market for women, which is also closely linked to their educational attainments. In 2020, the labor force participation rate underscores this disparity, with a rate of 12.4% for illiterate women, 24.1% for women with less than a high school education, and a notably higher rate of 65.6% for women with higher education degrees. Akkan and others (2023) emphasize that the expansion of early childhood education and care in the 2000s has predominantly occurred through market-driven services in the absence of free preschool education. This observation sheds light on the class characteristics of this dynamics, underscoring that women from lower socio-economic groups experience the gendered nature of familialist social policies to a much greater extent.

Among the workers I interviewed, even though the wives of some married delivery workers had previously been employed, they had all quit their jobs upon having children to take care of

them at home. The response of 35-year-old Osman, one of the workers I interviewed with two children, to the question of why his wife does not work echoes the situation described above: "If she works, we will give what she earns to the babysitter or daycare center. When she takes care of the children at home, we are in the same cash balance." When asked about his contribution to housework and childcare, he responds, "Frankly speaking, we use the house as a hotel." He mentions that most of the time he falls asleep while holding the children.

Beyond the perspective that equates women with childcare, there is a related viewpoint that sees the potential salary of a woman as equivalent to the cost of childcare. Since the woman's salary would barely cover daycare fees, it is not considered a significant contribution to the family budget. Therefore, it is preferable for her to do care work at home free of charge. Although both scenarios seem equal in terms of the household's monetary income and expenditure, it is clear that the two will create qualitatively very different dynamics for both the woman and the household. Moreover, when a woman stays at home, she does not only take care of the children. In this narrative, other tasks that she does at home, including those for men, are also overlooked. However, the low monetary value assigned to women's labor in the market makes it challenging for women to contest this established configuration, further compounded by societal expectations that imposed children should be cared for by their mothers at home. Similarly, Ramazan, a 39-year-old father of three children, mentions that his wife was a kindergarten teacher, but when the children were born, she quit her job to take care of them.

On the flip side, I observed that the aspirations of single men to become family providers were damaged, as they lacked confidence in their financial ability to support a household and were thus apprehensive about marriage. Deniz candidly stated that he wasn't contemplating marriage because "marriage is a standard of living that is difficult to maintain now." Özgür, who is single, mentioned that he doesn't have a partner, and even if he did, they would likely break up due to the demanding working hours. Many workers complain about the same situation.

Berkay, on the verge of marriage, plans to work temporarily for wedding expenses and then leave his job. This decision is influenced by both his future wife's concerns about the high risk of accidents and death in the delivery sector and Berkay's skepticism about maintaining a successful marriage while doing this job. Some expressed their disappointment in finding someone trustworthy based on negative experiences with women, while others highlighted the

challenges of sustaining a marriage in today's conditions. As their work and life circumstances, perceived as obstacles to realizing their dream family life, erode their self-confidence, they grapple with concerns about the viability of their marriages. While attempting to sustain a family on their own would be challenging, most also seem hesitant to adopt a different arrangement or division of labor for their sustenance.

In one of our conversations, a worker said that a woman who earns her own money would have no respect for a man. He did not say “she wouldn't need him” or “she should be dependent on him”. He said, “she won't have respect for a man”. It seems as if the respect he will gain in the eyes of the woman, in fact his value, is related to the role of earning money that he ascribes to himself as a man. Of course, we cannot apply this view to all male workers. However, for example, a much larger number of male workers seem to not accept a wife who earns more money than they do. Many workers express a desire to create a life that does not necessitate their wives to work. This nuanced discourse does not imply a prohibition on women working; instead, it conveys a sense of self-sacrifice and protection. However, it also indicates the internalization of the gendered division of labor, with workers viewing the task of providing for the household as a duty that falls on them as men. They appear less inclined to consider the implications of this division of labor, including the dynamics of masculinity and power in relationships.

In addition to single workers who say that they do not see a problem with their wives working, there are also married workers who say that their wives can work. However, after saying that their wives can work, these workers add that their wives are currently taking care of the children. They take it for granted that childcare is a woman's job. The roles of cleaning or cooking, on the other hand, are tasks that most workers claim they do not engage in, while some state they contribute. Ultimately, reproductive roles primarily fall on women in these households.

Benvegnù and Kampouri's research (2021), which is based on in-depth interviews with platform workers in the ride-hailing and food delivery sectors in Paris and London, presents a different perspective. In their findings, childcare stands out as the only aspect of reproductive work prominently featured in male platform workers' interviews, while they remain silent about other domestic tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and elderly care. Male workers tend to view childcare

"as a 'choice' or 'contribution to women's work'", which frequently becomes "a source of personal pride for men" or earns praise from their peers. Childcare is valued much more than other tasks as the "most educational, rewarding, and desirable 'choice' that male workers can make."

Researchers argue that male workers experiencing the "double burden" as a new phenomenon face challenges similar to those traditionally faced by female workers in terms of time constraints and the increasing pressure to balance work with childcare. They contend that work and care are intertwined for platform workers, challenging stereotypical gender roles of male provider and female caregiver, leading to fragmented subjectivities and gendered dilemmas. However, as the researchers themselves highlight, the workers remain silent regarding other domestic tasks, despite valuing childcare as a source of pride. Therefore, the assertion that the partial contribution of male workers to childcare is sufficient to claim the erosion of the gendered division of labor is not well-founded. Moreover, characterizing the experience of a "double burden" for male workers seems premature at this juncture.

In another study, Kampouri (2022) suggests that the flexible working hours of platform workers offer opportunities for a more balanced division of labor within households. Freed from the temporal and spatial constraints of traditional, masculinized employment, male workers could potentially contribute more significantly to domestic and care responsibilities. However, she notes that the increasing algorithmic pressure pushes platform workers to shift resources from households to work, resulting in overwork and exhaustion as they strive for a work-life balance. Kampouri calls for an examination of work-life balance in platforms, underscoring the importance of exploring the gendered subjectivities of care.

As previously emphasized, platform work, characterized by a piecework paradigm, contradicts the idea of flexible work, as platform workers frequently find themselves working extensive hours to meet their financial needs. Additionally, we stated that single workers predominantly reside with their families. In this context, a scenario emerges where single workers dedicate long hours to their work while residing with their families, and the women at home assume responsibilities for cooking and caregiving. In this arrangement, instead of male workers adapting flexibly and taking on household tasks, the observed flexibility proves functional primarily in contributing to the household budget for both the family and the worker.

In periods of heightened household debt or financial strain, such as when a family member quits their job or is on the brink of marriage, workers allocate a larger portion of their earnings to the household. Conversely, during phases of more stable household budgets, they might allocate more funds for personal expenses or savings for their future plans. Hence, this combination not only ensures the reproduction of the worker, who might be unlikely do it if he lived alone, but also the household. In this way, it plays a crucial role in sustaining platform companies by enabling them to restrain worker's reproduction, and also strengthens the family unit as the only protective mechanism available for workers. It is noteworthy to mention that in Turkey, even trade unions do not calculate poverty rates for a single worker but for a 4-person family. This underscores what Federici (2020) refers to as the "double character of reproductive work", which reproduces individuals not only for their integration into the labor market but also against it. In a patriarchal society, however, this protective mechanism against capitalist relations takes the form of the family, based on an unequal gendered division of labor, as illustrated in this configuration.

Consequently, in this work configuration, there is little to motivate, direct, or enable male workers to engage in housework. Platform companies assume that reproductive labor occurs outside the organization and depend on this labor to sustain their operations. As we will delve into later, these companies do not offer protective mechanisms, failing to cover situations such as illness or accidents. Due to the absence of sufficient social services, the reproduction of these workers' households, including the care of elderly and children, primarily rely on the family. i.e., on the women in these households. In this context, the findings of this study align with the liberal-conservative coalition identified by Cooper (2017), which has found common ground since the 1970s regarding family values, particularly the privatization of social reproduction. While delivery workers contribute the reproduction of various individual households, their own reproduction is based on their family.

5.3. "I have no social life": Monetization and erosion of social life and 'free time.'

All workers, whether married or single, share a common experience of platform work consuming their time to the extent that it leaves little room for social lives. The sentiment "I have no social life" resonated with nearly all the delivery workers I interviewed. Hamza

expressed a desire to spend his day off with his wife and child, but due to his constant motorcycle deliveries, he found rest at home more appealing. Bekir expressed frustration, stating that he and his wife were unable to engage in any activities together, recalling that they used to go out more frequently when he worked in the factory. Ferhat, a fine arts ceramics student who had put his studies on hold, lamented his inability to engage in activities on his day off, revealing that he had not even painted in two years. Firat highlighted the financial constraints that make social activities prohibitively expensive. Osman recalled that in the past, they would visit their hometown for significant events like funerals or weddings, but the increasing bus fares have made even this impossible. Many workers find the idea of going on vacation financially unattainable.

Ironically, workers express a fondness for their job as it inherently offers a social aspect. They encounter a variety of people and explore different places as they navigate the city. Some workers emphasize the importance of not being confined to a single closed space, with the mobility provided by a motorcycle giving a sense of freedom. When discussing the positive aspects of the job, Ferhat, for instance, appreciates being outdoors and seeing the sky while working. Another worker, again ironically, mentions the ability to enjoy coffee during work. Many workers, indeed, attempt to address their basic needs between orders. Due to the lack of specific and adequate break times, they hurriedly consume meals in these brief intervals. Work doesn't appear as a distinct component of life; instead, workers strive to find small moments for life within the context of their work. The line between work and free time is blurred, and the extensive working hours eliminate any meaningful opportunities for leisure. This intrusion of work into life reflects a trend towards the genuine subsumption of society to capital (Haidar and Keune, 2021).

Coffeeshouses serve as one of the scarce social spaces where workers gather in the evenings post-work to engage in activities like playing gin rummy. Conversations in these settings often revolve around financial matters, involving constant calculations and discussions about what might be more advantageous. In a previous section, we highlighted how workers often engage in extra work, such as motorcycle repairs, selling motorcycle equipment or second-hand motorcycles, and taking on additional tasks like delivering documents or products by motorcycle after their regular work hours. Even their journey home is considered wasted if it does not make money. This perspective extends to various aspects of life, exemplified by

considerations like viewing an empty room in an apartment not as a potential guest room but as a financial loss, especially in the context of commodification through services like Airbnb. People often think, calculate, and organize their lives using concepts reminiscent of neoclassical economic principles, such as opportunity cost. Fleming (2017: 266), in this context, echoing Simmel, underscores that monetarization represents the prevailing commercial perspective today, fixated on money and the reduction of both individuals and everything else to a negative exchange value.

Some delivery workers engage in social media groups dedicated to their work, which function as informal platforms for arranging individual orders. Workers use these groups to find extra work, checking for nearby delivery orders when they are available. The founders of the group are usually people who have been or still are delivery workers and they get a commission on each order. As an example of the dynamic which Gago (2017) defines as "neoliberalism from below", workers are not only subjects exposed to neoliberalism, but they also reproduce its logic through their own informal networks of relations. Some even view this as a form of resistance against established platforms. Burak, employed by Trendyol, has transitioned to earning a living solely through social media groups, considering them to be fairer. Conversely, Hasan highlighted that entering these groups often requires at least two references, and criticism of delivery fees or other issues can lead to expulsion from the group. He believes that the administrators of these groups can be more exploitative than formal platforms. In contrast, Yiğit, along with some fellow delivery workers, established a delivery platform where they don't charge any commission to workers, and the entire delivery fee from the customer goes to the worker. When asked if this resembles a platform cooperative, Yiğit explained that they adopted this policy due to having a limited pool of workers but planned to introduce commissions once their worker base expanded.

When it became known that the platform *BanaBikurye* evaded paying necessary taxes to the state, passing the burden onto delivery workers who were subsequently fined by the Ministry of Finance, affected workers convened a meeting to address the issue. A social media group was formed to coordinate an action against the company, and the number of participants rapidly grew. A few more meetings were held. A worker, who had constantly voiced the need for delivery workers to establish their own platforms in these meetings, ultimately established a platform company in this process. This worker incorporated the platform's logo into the group

photo and declared that the group now represented the company. When union members within the group pointed out that this wasn't the original purpose of the group, the individual who initiated the platform company responded with "What's done is done, now let's move forward", claiming that its mission to serve workers hadn't changed. Consequently, the unionists chose to leave the group.

Platform companies often feature uniforms in bright and vibrant colors, like pink, orange, and purple. When I initially embarked on my field research, I was intrigued by how the predominantly male workers perceived their work uniforms and the potential connection to their masculinity. Surprisingly, many workers did not frame it in terms of masculinity, but rather in terms of money. They considered that it was a way for companies to advertise for free on the back of their workers, and that they should therefore pay the workers for this. Subsequently, I discovered that workers could face fines in traffic for having company logos on their boxes. Despite this, the notion of equating work uniforms with advertising provides valuable insights. These anecdotes collectively underscore the tangible impact of neoliberalism on society, as it asserts itself in social relationships, permeates various aspects of life, and, in doing so, defers its own potential demise by embedding itself in the social fabric.

Conversely, there are workers who attribute this situation to the workers themselves, asserting that they prioritize money above all else, stating they "worship" money. During a discussion with Deniz about workers' ideological views, I inquired about their political orientation. Deniz insisted that their perspective was primarily monetary, resisting attempts to delve into a broader conversation. Reminding the fact that *esnaf-kurye* workers receive weekly payments and are responsible for covering necessary costs, including taxes, from these payments, Kerem emphasizes that the substantial circulation of money provides workers with a sense of self-employment - albeit with little remaining after covering expenses. He contends that this feeling is more appealing to workers than receiving a fixed wage, as it creates an illusion of financial abundance, even if it means deferring payments and incurring debt.

This monetization of life profoundly influences how workers perceive each other, work, and life in general, with money becoming the sole reference point. Some workers recognize and lament this situation, expressing dissatisfaction with a work regime that seemingly leaves no room for alternatives. Erdal articulates this sentiment, stating, "In essence, we don't really live.

You have to work all the time; you don't have time to think. Workers can't even contemplate why this is so or why they are living like this."

In an environment where the struggle for making a living is intense and quick earnings are a necessity, it is unsurprising that many workers do not aspire to pursue higher education. Instead, they view education through a financial lens. Numerous workers expressed the belief that investing time and effort in education would not yield a sufficient income. Common phrases such as "I did not see a future in education" were frequently voiced. While economic conditions may have compelled them to start working at an early age, when asked whether they would pursue education if given the opportunity, many workers still responded negatively. Their lack of interest in further education stems from the awareness that the departments or universities they might enter would not guarantee adequate future earnings, given the socio-economic circumstances of their families. Moreover, the general socio-economic conditions, where even those who graduated from prestigious schools faced unemployment or low wages, reinforced their disinterest in pursuing education. Some workers emphasized the observable living conditions of those who pursued higher education, concluding that such endeavors did not bring about economic returns and were not sufficiently valued in society. The prevailing sentiment was that studying would not generate income; on the contrary, it would involve a specific opportunity cost, even if the workers did not explicitly use this term. Therefore, their inclination to forego education appears to align with a "rational" cost-benefit analysis considering both their individual material circumstances and the broader socio-economic conditions of the country.

Ferhat articulated his perspective as follows: "I observe a guy - he purchased his own car, established his own business. So, for me, the only viable path in this country is to start a business. I mean, studying, etc., was good; I enhanced my skills, and I don't regret it. I believe everyone should attend university. However, when you realize that it doesn't go beyond personal development and doesn't yield any income, it becomes unsustainable. One day, a professor from Istanbul University, a friend of my teacher, contacted me. I thought it was a job offer, but it turned out to be a form of charity work. They wanted me to go to a small workshop with an oven and give ceramic classes as a hobby. However, he said, 'We can't provide you with any money - perhaps we can assist with obtaining a certificate or something.' I'm not saying education is bad or anything, but it's an unnecessary expense. And if you don't have backer, it's

futile. I realized this when I was just 13-14 years old." Özgür, who did not attend university, shares a similar viewpoint, expressing that he believes education is not inherently bad, but deems it unnecessary and expensive.

We have conceptualized social reproduction as the comprehensive process involving activities that sustain life and contribute to the (re)creation of individuals as physical, social, and cultural beings within society. The value assigned to these activities is shaped by the dynamics of capitalist relations in which we are embedded. In a society where life is increasingly commodified and money holds central importance, activities like education are often assessed based on their potential financial benefits. Sectors corresponding to women's traditionally unpaid work at home are frequently undervalued, labeled as low-paid, unskilled, and lacking worth in the market.

Amid a lack of childcare providers or supportive institutions, women perceive entering the paid labor force, marked by challenging and unequal conditions and low compensation, as less appealing. In contrast, male workers, despite facing deteriorating working conditions, are reluctant to relinquish their role as primary breadwinners. This division serves as a mechanism that platforms rely on, potentially relieving them of the obligation to consider the comprehensive reproduction of their workers.

Survival in a society where the dominant value is money necessitates organizing life around this value. The escalating monetization and the growing difficulty of sustaining life without it deepen workers' reliance on money, reinforcing their subordination to work and strengthening the dominance of money. This trend results in longer working hours and increased labor. The extended working hours of male workers reinforces to the intensification of the gendered division of labor. Clear distinctions between money-generating activities and non-money-generating activities, paid and unpaid work, and roles assigned to men and women become more pronounced. Tasks aimed at reproduction are devalued to the extent they don't generate monetary returns. As work infiltrates every aspect of life, lives become devalued. This not only signifies the erosion of social and cultural life and their commercialization but also poses a significant threat to physical well-being, as people work at the expense of their lives.

5.4. Health and social insurance: obstacles and inequalities in a monetized and privatized system

Platform companies offer *esnaf-kurye* workers private health insurance, applicable only in the event of accidents while working. However, the cost of this insurance is deducted from the worker's wages. Yemeksepeti, while employing workers in an employee status, also provided this insurance and deducted the expenses from their wages. In reality, the term "to oblige" rather than "to provide" more accurately describes this arrangement. Furthermore, to qualify for this insurance, workers must not have any outstanding debts to the social security system, a condition that is often challenging for workers to meet, as we will elaborate on shortly. Some workers I interviewed discovered this deduction later, while others were still unaware that it was being taken from their earnings. The coverage spans accidents occurring from half an hour before the start of work until half an hour after the end of the work shift. Companies are not obligated to pay *esnaf-kurye* during days of medical leave. Some workers mentioned receiving partial in-kind and cash assistance from the companies during these periods, expressing gratitude for the support, even though the companies are not legally bound to provide it. However, numerous workers expressed grievances about having to work while ill to earn money. They also complained about returning to work after accidents before fully recovering, as economic pressures often outweighed the need for a longer recovery period recommended by doctors.

As mentioned earlier, *esnaf-kurye* workers bear all expenses associated with their work, including cell phone and motorcycle procurement and maintenance, helmet, and other motorcycle equipment. Companies also sell work uniforms and delivery boxes to the workers. Additionally, workers are required to hire an accountant and are obligated to pay various taxes, such as a 20% VAT on delivery orders received monthly, income tax every six months, and stamp duty. Many workers I interviewed held the belief that the state refrains from regulating or abolishing the *esnaf-kurye* system because it generates substantial tax revenue from this industry.

As self-employed individuals, *esnaf-kurye* workers are responsible for paying their own social security premiums. These contributions grant them access to health services and the potential to receive a pension in the future, contingent upon meeting the required number of premiums.

In Turkey, self-employed individuals, including *esnaf-kurye* workers, are obligated to make monthly premium payments amounting to 34.5% of the gross minimum wage. This fixed rate is applicable within the lowest earnings category among self-employed individuals. It represents a considerable cost, corresponding to twice the contribution made by employers for minimum wage employees (csgb.gov.tr). Given the substantial financial burden, including various other costs, a significant majority of workers find it challenging to afford these premiums, resulting in an accumulation of debts to the social security institution. To gain a deeper insight into this debt relationship, a brief overview of the health and social security system in Turkey is necessary.

The health system in Turkey underwent a significant transformation process with the introduction of the Health Transformation Program in 2003. Prior to this, there was an unequal status-based system in which civil servants, workers, and self-employed individuals were affiliated with separate social insurance institutions, each benefiting from health services in different ways (Keyder, 2007). These were unified under the Social Security Institution (SGK). Compulsory Universal Health Insurance (Genel Sağlık Sigortası) was introduced in 2008 to cover all citizens of Turkey. The financing of the health system is primarily based on the SGK (Yılmaz, 2017).

Under this system, individuals are required to pay premiums regularly based on their wages and incomes to access health services. For instance, the self-employed, a category that includes *esnaf-kurye* workers, must have no more than 60 days of premium debt to be eligible for health services. If the household income per person is less than one-third of the gross minimum wage, the state covers the health insurance premium. To determine this situation, individuals must apply and undergo an income assessment test to demonstrate financial insufficiency³⁵.

³⁵ However, this amount is only slightly above the hunger threshold calculated by trade unions and one-third below the poverty line. This criterion significantly narrows the eligibility for free health care, constraining the state's welfare responsibilities to the most vulnerable segments of society living below the hunger line. Moreover, social assistance, including conditional cash transfers determined based on needs assessments and received continuously, is also considered part of the household's "income." For a detailed analysis of the income assessment test, refer to Dertli (2015).

However, these were not the sole innovations brought about by the program. The new financing model not only reinforced the social insurance-based financing of the Turkish health system but also introduced additional sources of health financing, including co-payments for hospital visits and medication. All hospitals, whether public or private, were categorized as "contracted healthcare providers" (Öztürk, 2021). While public hospitals were directed to adopt private sector management techniques, such as implementing a revolving fund system where the institution's generated revenues are distributed to health workers based on performance, it also facilitated the growth of a substantial private healthcare sector. The number of private hospitals increased from 271 in 2002 to 575 in 2019 (Öztürk, 2021: 11). Many private hospitals began accepting public health insurance following the reform, subjecting patients to a co-payment with a ceiling set by the SGK to access health services at these institutions. At the outset, these contribution amounts were at reasonable levels, allowing a substantial portion of the population to access services from these hospitals without facing significant financial difficulties. Between 2002 and 2011, the private sector experienced the highest increase in total public health expenditures and total SGK expenditures. During the same period, while public hospital admissions grew 2.7 times, admissions to private hospitals surged by 10.5 times (Erol and Özdemir, 2014: 22). In essence, SGK bill payments to private hospitals saw a consistent rise (Dertli, 2015).

Over the years, both patient co-payments for public hospitals and the charges for healthcare services from private hospitals have experienced a notable increase. In less than a decade, the co-payment rates that private hospitals can impose on patients have surged from 20% to 200% (TTB, 2015). While this has resulted in fewer insured individuals being able to afford private hospital services, these healthcare institutions have pivoted towards a new market: the health tourism sector. This shift has been facilitated by substantial state support and incentives (Demirbaş and Akalın, 2022; Tengilimoğlu, 2021). Over the past two decades, the number of individuals visiting Turkey for health tourism has surged nearly tenfold. In 2019, the Ministry of Health established USHAŞ (International Health Services Incorporated Company) to engage in international health services and health tourism. The company aspires to position Turkey as the world's foremost brand in health tourism (ushas.com).

The reform also introduced an additional source of financing: private and voluntary Complementary Health Insurance. The narrowing scope of services provided by the

Compulsory Universal Health Insurance, excluding certain health services, coupled with a significant increase in co-payment fees for private hospitals, contributed to the promotion and widespread adoption of Complementary Health Insurance. This system facilitates access to health services in private hospitals without additional fees. According to data from the Insurance Association of Turkey (TSB), the number of individuals with complementary health insurance increased from approximately 60,000 in 2014 to nearly 3.5 million by the end of 2022, marking a more than fivefold increase in this short period. Consequently, this new system has imposed an additional financial burden on the public, adding to taxes, general health insurance premiums, and co-payments for public health services – constituting a fourth payment made by the public to access health services (TORAKS, 2012).

In summary, the entire reform process has resulted in the marketization and privatization of health services, essentially commodifying health. Eliminating inequalities based on occupational status has not led to equal access to healthcare for all. The plan has created a new inequality based on income, resulting in "an income-based stratification in citizens' access to health services" (Yılmaz, 2017: 107).

According to the Report of Istanbul Medical Chamber (Demir and Kılıç, 2021: 18-20), as of the end of 2020, there are around 10 million people over the age of 18 who are not working, are not students and have no social security, thus not covered by social insurance. In addition, there are approximately 6 million people who are integrated into the social security system but are indebted due to their inability to pay their premiums on time. Every year, the state issues decrees to write off the interest on citizens' premium debts, to restructure the debts at a lower rate or to postpone them. Considering that there is an election almost every year in the country, this is evidence of the government's populism to ensure the continuity of the consent of the poor in its health policy, which it has established as a "synthesis between neoliberalism and populism" (Yılmaz, 2017: 163). For a few years, it has also announced that those in debt can receive services from public hospitals only by paying a co-payment, but that they must pay for their own medication. Indeed, these indicators suggest that the intended reform is not achieving its objectives.

Moreover, patients attending hospital emergency departments are entitled to free care. However, in 2022, the number of emergency room visits soared to 130 million, exceeding the

population by 1.5 times. A notable portion of these visits did not involve conditions necessitating urgent medical attention (Bahçetepe, 2022; Trthaber, 2023)³⁶. Consequently, *esnaf-kurye* workers frequently recommend checking in at the emergency room. Not all workers are aware that they can undergo examinations even if they are indebted to the insurance system. Additionally, many public hospitals may unofficially impose high charges on workers. This is again related to the fact that the reform process described above has transformed the management of public hospitals into private businesses. Even if workers receive healthcare, meeting the cost of their own medicines becomes daunting, particularly with the recent significant surge in medicine prices. Consequently, workers turn to emergency services even for common illnesses like the flu. In emergency rooms, they may be unfairly charged extra fees, resulting in conflicts between workers and hospitals. The resolution of whether the money is paid often hinges on the worker's persistence in the argument. Some workers reported having to pay, while others successfully contested the charges or even evaded the hospital to avoid confrontation.

Delivery workers are exploring various strategies to cope with their escalating debts to the social security system. A small fraction of the workers I interviewed has opted for debt restructuring programs, but there are still those unable to meet their restructured installment payments. Some have had their debts to the insurance system pardoned as part of amnesty initiatives. However, availing themselves of this amnesty comes at a cost: workers agree to forfeit their pension rights, with their premium days also expunged. The escalation of the retirement age and the inadequacy of pensions to sustain livelihoods are factors influencing this decision. A potential but uncertain future pension does not hold much appeal or realism for them today; instead, they prefer to at least alleviate their debt burden. This is because workers also grapple with work-related tax debts and personal or household credit debts. Essential expenses such as gasoline and engine maintenance for work execution, as well as necessities

³⁶ Additionally, the high numbers in emergency room visits can be attributed to the difficulty of securing free consultation appointments in public hospitals, which are further constrained to a 10-minute limit. This situation not only significantly increases the workload of healthcare workers but also coincides with a growing number of doctors migrating abroad in recent years. Despite its aims, the social security system deficit, a key concern the health plan sought to alleviate, has not diminished over time and is still being offset by budget transfers. These factors underscore the substantial challenges posed by the health reform. For an in-depth analysis, refer to Demir and Kılıç, 2021; TTB, 2015.

like food and shelter, consume the majority of workers' wages. Despite their critical importance, substantive healthcare and social insurance are deferred. In the face of pervasive marketization and monetization, emergency services emerge as the sole respite, albeit with distinct concerns on the part of the state.

5.5. Conclusion: An argument for the valorization of reproductive labor

Conceptualizing care as a 'social capacity and activity involving the nurturing of all that is necessary for the welfare and flourishing of life,' as presented in 'The Care Manifesto' (Chatzidakis, 2020: 11), encourages a reconsideration of care by placing it at the very center of life. This entails "recognizing and embracing our interdependencies". This chapter can be interpreted as an exploration on why the call to prioritize care often remains unheeded in the fabric of our societies, unveiling the intricate dynamics that hinder the recognition of care as a web of mutual dependencies. Consequently, addressing these challenges becomes not only an analytical endeavor but also a political tool with the aim of reshaping societal relationships toward a new vision of society where the reproduction of life takes precedence.

This chapter argues that the delegation of reproductive tasks within the platform economy fails to prompt a reevaluation of the social values associated with reproduction; instead, it merely redistributes and perpetuates its devaluation. Unequally distributing reproductive labor across existing societal inequalities not only complicates the valorization of this labor but also hinders its organization on a more just and collective basis.

Given the historical roots connecting slavery to domestic work and the ongoing situation where reproductive work, predominantly performed by women at home, continues to be predominantly unpaid, a significant challenge arises both conceptually and politically in framing and valuing this labor (Cordero, 2022: 8). This challenge gains added complexity when examining the organization of reproductive work within the market and its intersection with various unequal axes. Examining the dynamics surrounding the valorization of reproductive labor becomes crucial in this context.

The ambiguities surrounding the value of reproductive labor, particularly in determining what is deemed "essential" for the survival of society, were also underscored during pandemic. For

instance, the labor of delivery workers during the pandemic played a crucial role in meeting the daily needs of a significant portion of the population. Working under life-threatening conditions, these delivery workers were referred to as "heroes" by companies within discursive appreciations. The public also appeared to recognize these workers for saving them from potential risks. Despite the fleeting and apparent appreciation during the pandemic, there was no corresponding improvement in the conditions and compensation of these workers. The term "essentiality" holds different interpretations for capitalists, and this recognition was far from novel for them. Hence, the persisting lack of change arises from their enduring awareness of the indispensable role of workers' labor - its devaluation, contrary to its appreciation.

The question of the valuation of women's labor has been a focal point for feminist scholars and activists from the 1970s to the present, reflecting on the interconnectedness between capitalism, patriarchy, and the gendered division of labor. Early critiques aimed to illustrate the social value of women's unpaid domestic labor, emphasizing its integral role in capitalist accumulation and attempting to make it visible. Subsequent scholarship has further nuanced and expanded these perspectives. Moving away from a dichotomy such as (economic) production versus (social) reproduction, the concept of social reproduction is framed to consider the various roles that sustain life both on a daily and generational basis through a unified lens. Here, beyond emphasizing that these tasks are predominantly carried out by women and are essential for capitalist accumulation, the focus is on the vitality of this work for the continuity of life itself.

In this regard, Federici's evolving perspective on theorizing social reproduction, as one of the pioneers of "The International Wages for Housework Campaign" in the 1970s, is noteworthy. Federici (2020) describes a gradual shift in her views on domestic labor from "refusal" to "valorization" since the 70s, now considering it as "expressive of a collective experience." She elucidates that, while striving to illustrate why, as women, we should oppose this labor, particularly in the way it has been structured within capitalism, she gradually grasped its significance not only for the capitalist class but also for our struggle and the process of our reproduction. Through her involvement in the women's movement, Federici realized that the reproduction of human beings is the foundation of every economic and political system. She emphasizes that the problem is not reproductive labor itself but its capitalist form, organized in a way that deepens social inequalities.

This chapter argued that the valuation of this labor, which was already not recognized as a collective experience, has become more challenging with the introduction of platforms, as this work has become more deeply integrated into the capitalist organization. The rise of platform work within the commodification of care further intricately entangles the dynamics of social reproduction, with platforms both shaping and reflecting existing inequalities. The gendered consequences of platform work, the role of platform companies in reinforcing the gender division of labor, its impact on social relations, and the broader implications for the valuation of social reproduction demand thorough examination.

Platforms, while providing a personalized experience, not only reinforce to the privatization of social reproduction but also devalue it by framing it as tasks to be delegated to others, rather than a meaningful contribution to society. This outsourcing perpetuates existing gendered and class-based preconceptions, hindering the politicization of care. Essentially, platforms represent a capitalist response to the social reproduction crisis, commercializing a fundamental societal issue. The analysis underscores the importance of recognizing the network of unequal relations perpetuated by platforms, rooted in pre-existing social inequalities. From the perspective of platform workers, the shift of the social reproduction crisis from customers to workers intensifies precarization. Therefore, the increasing penetration of capitalist market relations prompts contemplation on "how the reproduction of society can be maintained without exacerbating existing hierarchies of class, race, and gender" (Hester & Srnicek, 2018).

By linking platform work to workers' households, this analysis brought to light the overlooked yet essential role of gendered household relations in the predominantly male-dominated platform delivery sector. It demonstrated that these workers depend on unpaid domestic labor for their own reproduction and that the broader economy of social reproduction they serve relies on these households. In essence, this gendered division of labor acts as the social precondition for platforms to provide only a partial solution to the issue of social reproduction through the market. Therefore, the chapter argued that the conceptualization of the commodification of social reproduction should not erase reproductive workers' households from the equation - excluding them would once again render unpaid female labor invisible.

It is crucial to recognize that this division of labor not only enables platform work, but conversely, the reliance on family, particularly women's unpaid labor, reinforces the family unit. In this context, this chapter argues that the phenomenon of delivery platform work in

Istanbul crystallizes a liberal-conservative coalition (Cooper, 2017) grounded in the privatization of social reproduction. Consequently, it mirrors a dynamic aligned with the recent social policies of the Turkish government, characterized by both familialism and marketization. The households of delivery workers embody this dual dynamic. In the commodified care environment, women often refrain from engaging in paid employment as they take care of children and the elderly, while men undertake paid reproductive work by delivering meals and groceries to other individual households. Amid the increasing marketization of social services and the dominance of financial considerations, these households encounter challenges in reproducing themselves both socially and physically. Workers strive to manage their social security debts, but strategies such as debt restructuring and amnesty initiatives come with trade-offs, often requiring sacrifices of pension rights for temporary relief—essentially trading their future for daily survival.

In summary, all these aspects underscore the importance of pondering the fundamental question: "What is being reproduced, for whom, and with what purposes and consequences?" (Bakker, 2007). Addressing this necessitates a collective approach that acknowledges human interdependence, advocates for comprehensive solutions to the complexities of social reproduction and avoids reliance on existing social hierarchies without amplifying the already profound divisions between different class fractions and gendered and racialized inequalities.

6. *Esnaf-Kurye* Workers' Collective Dynamics: Exploring Challenges in Organizational Capacities

In the preceding two chapters, we conducted a detailed examination of the challenges faced by *esnaf-kurye* workers, who entered this profession with the anticipation of attaining autonomy, flexibility, and increased income, while analyzing the interconnectedness of these work-related issues with their household arrangements. This chapter scrutinizes workers' collective coping mechanisms, building collectivity, cooperation modalities, organizational forms, and ways of resistance against these challenges. In essence, we explore the realm of collective action, delineating its potential and constraints. To commence this exploration, the initial section provides a brief introduction to various existing forms of delivery workers' organizations, encompassing associations, unions, committees, and the recently established chamber of tradesmen. Additionally, we will depict the utilization of digital media, including social media groups initiated by workers themselves. These groups, fostering a broader worker network, serve various purposes and play a significant role in fueling protests against companies.

The subsequent section delves into specific protest instances, focusing on the three most significant waves of dissent, all primarily triggered by discontent with companies' announced wage structures for new periods. Firstly, we elucidate the activism of Trendyol Express delivery workers with cars in January 2022, an action that brought the *esnaf-kurye* system to public attention. Thereafter, we scrutinize the immediately following resistance exhibited by Yemeksepeti delivery workers in employee status, starting in the beginning of February 2022 and lasting nearly 60 days. This section culminates with an analysis of the activism undertaken by Trendyol delivery workers in July 2023. These three instances represent the actions that mobilized the largest number of delivery workers ever undertaken in the platform sector. All three organized primarily to demand a pay increase, shedding light on the limits of workers' organizations, albeit from different angles.

In the third section, as it asserts that the existence of such actions disproves the notion that the precarious cannot organize, it underscores the limitations, contradictory dynamics, and challenges unfolding within these actions. This section is dedicated to exploring possibilities of

a long-term, consistent, and self-reproducing collective capacity that can capture the subjectivity of *esnaf-kurye* workers. Consequently, the chapter emphasizes the crucial necessity for an organizational perspective that takes into account both the material conditions of workers - where work consumes a significant portion of their time, dominating their lives in an increasingly monetized environment - and their expectations from work, as reflected in their inclination towards becoming *esnaf-kurye*. This perspective entails addressing critical issues such as stringent subordination relations, lack of autonomy at work, a demanding working regime that allows no time for living, let alone organizing, the absence of collective mechanisms for workers to depend on, and the challenges arising from movements' limited self-reproductive capacity, which complicates the organization of workers. These considerations are argued to be pivotal not solely for *esnaf-kurye* organizations, but also for the development of a resilient and powerful labor movement positioned to counter the escalating trend of precarization.

6.1. From Associations to Chambers: The Fractured Landscape of Delivery Worker Organizations in Turkey

In Turkey, the establishment of delivery worker associations initially began in major cities in the mid-2000s. Particularly in recent years, there has been a rapid increase in their numbers, with courier associations emerging in various cities and districts within metropolitan areas. These associations within different districts of a city unite to form federations, and those in different cities come together to establish confederations. Presently, there are nearly 70 associations across Turkey, although these organizations typically have a relatively small number of active members. They address all workers engaged in motorcycle deliveries³⁷.

The activities of these associations include initiatives such as facilitating job opportunities for workers, communicating with employers in case workers encounter problems at their jobs, offering workers the opportunity to purchase equipment or motorcycle maintenance at prices below the market rate, providing affordable reflective vests, organizing occasional social events and training, participating in national and religious festivities, and presenting worker issues to

³⁷ The factual information presented in this section about the organizations is primarily derived from the research titled "Overview of Delivery Worker Organizations in Turkey," conducted by the Delivery Worker Rights Association, to which the author of this dissertation also contributed. For further details, you can access the research at: <https://kuryehaklari.org/moto-kurye-orgutlenenlerini-genel-bakis>

relevant authorities such as municipalities and governorships. Additionally, they conduct interviews with local and national media outlets. Notably, many individuals in leadership positions within these associations also hold managerial roles in subcontracted delivery companies, and some even own their own delivery businesses³⁸. Ideologically, leaders within these associations often align with right-wing, nationalist, and conservative worldviews³⁹. It's important to note that the participation of these associations in mass delivery workers' actions and protests is extremely limited.

Associations utilize dedicated social media communication groups for their internal communication, announcements, and job postings. These platforms also serve as spaces where members can engage in transactions related to buying and selling motorcycles and equipment. Associations with close affiliations often collaborate to establish a unified periodic pricing policy for delivery workers, ensuring that postings below the agreed-upon wage within their groups are not allowed.

In recent times, there has been a trend towards the formation of confederations among these associations. This is driven by the belief that such confederations can enhance their representation across Turkey and bolster their credibility, both in their collaborations with private companies and in their interactions with the central government. While some associations cooperate to establish confederations or jointly address issues, there are also instances of tension and competition between them, evident in their efforts to become part of a confederation.

Apart from associations, there are labor unions organized under three union confederations, as well as independent unions, committees, or solidarity networks. One of the unions affiliated

³⁸ As the name suggests, the Eskişehir Jet Courier Motorcycle Couriers Association is associated with the Jet Courier company. The association and the company share a single social media account. See: <https://www.facebook.com/esjetkurye>

³⁹ The Motorcycle Delivery Worker Association, established in 2007 in Istanbul, presents itself on its website with the following statement: "We are citizens and individuals who value moral principles, customs, and traditions. We are the head of a family, husband, father, partner, or a child in a household. First of all, we are human". (Ahlaki değerlere, örf ve adetlere değer veren birer vatandaş ve bireyiz. Ailesi ve evde bekleyeni olan aile reisi, eş, baba, sevgili ya da bir evin bir çocuğumuz. Her şeyden önce insanız.) <https://motkurder.org.tr>

with the confederations is the Öz Taşıma-İş Union, which is affiliated with Hak-iş and was established in 2012; however, it does not have significant engagement related to delivery workers. The other two much older unions are Nakliyat-iş affiliated with DİSK and TÜMTİS affiliated with TÜRK-İŞ. Both unions operate in the transportation sector, encompassing workers with employee status, including delivery workers. These two unions endeavored to organize workers with employee status at Yemeksepeti, aiming to become the authorized union with the right to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement with the company⁴⁰.

In January 2021, when Nakliyat-İş was approaching the required 40% organization to become the authorized union, Yemeksepeti reported a change in the business line from the 'Transportation Sector' to the 'Commerce, Education, and Office Sector' in some workplaces where Nakliyat-İş members were prevalent. This situation led to a significant decrease in the union membership of Nakliyat-İş. Despite the union's objection, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security issued a negative authorization determination. During this period, TÜMTİS applied to become the authorized union based on the sufficient number of unionized members in the workplaces that remained in the transportation sector, where the company did not report sector alteration.⁴¹ The Ministry granted authorization to TÜMTİS, but Yemeksepeti also

⁴⁰ In Turkey, gaining the right to collective bargaining for a union is quite challenging. In enterprises consisting of a single workplace, the union must have 50% of the workers as members. If the enterprise operates in multiple workplaces, the union needs to have 40% of the workers in the enterprise as members. Additionally, the relevant law defines twenty sectors of activity. Enterprises report the sector they operate in based on their activities. For a union to gain the right to collective bargaining in an enterprise, it must have 1% of the workers in the sector to which the enterprise belongs as members. After meeting these criteria, unions can apply to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security for authorization. Nevertheless, enterprises have the right to object to this application. Unions remain deprived of the right to collective bargaining until the court decision becomes final. Legal processes can last up to two years, during which companies take advantage of the time to dismiss unionized workers, ultimately thwarting unionization. Another tactic employed by enterprises to impede unionization in this context is to falsely claim that they have changed the sector in which they operate (Birelma, 2022).

⁴¹ The driving force behind the unionization efforts within TÜMTİS is attributed to Yemeksepeti Workers Committee. The Committee outlines the progression of events as follows: In October 2020, the Committee, with a proactive group of workers from various cities, initiated activities aimed at unionization. Subsequently, in November 2020, the Committee engaged in preliminary discussions with Nakliyat-İş in accordance with their decision. However, consensus on the unionization strategy eluded the Committee and Nakliyat-İş. While the Committee aimed to maintain the confidentiality of unionization activities, Nakliyat-İş chose to publicize the

objected to this and subsequently terminated the employment of three TÜMTİS member workers (Gazetenisan, 2021; Nakliyat-İş, 2021).

This was also the period when the company transitioned to the *esnaf-kurye* model. In the end, after legal processes, neither of the two unions obtained authorization. As detailed below, during the workers' protests initiated by employees in February 2022, the company did not meet the wage demands and continued to recruit *esnaf-kurye* workers. By mid-2023, *esnaf-kurye* workers had become the majority at Yemeksepeti, meaning there were no employees left to organize for the unions. However, this process has only added another layer to the existing rivalry⁴².

Another notable actor in the field is the independent union TEHİS (Turizm, Eğlence ve Hizmet İşçileri Sendikası) [Tourism, Entertainment, and Service Workers Union], established in the year 2020. This union is working to organize low-wage service sector workers; accordingly, it is also engaged in efforts to organize delivery workers. Due to legal constraints preventing *esnaf-kurye* workers from becoming union members, TEHİS, in collaboration with *esnaf-kurye* workers, established the Motorcycle Delivery Workers Association (Motorlu Kurye İşçileri Derneği) in mid-2023. Both the union and the association take a more assertive stance against companies and distances itself politically from the approaches of other mentioned associations. TEHİS has been a vocal supporter of delivery workers' mass protests, which will be detailed below. Moreover, the union has taken initiatives on issues such as workers being compelled to

Yemeksepeti organization through press releases and tweets. Another source of contention was the establishment of workplace committees. The Committee contended that unionization should be anchored in workplace committees established within each workplace, advocating for a form of worker democracy. According to the Committee, when attempts were made to organize union unity through distributing flyers in front of workplaces instead of utilizing workplace committees secretly, the Yemeksepeti employer became aware of the situation and changed the sector. Throughout this process, discord between the Committee and Nakliyat-İş intensified, leading the Committee to decide to unionize within TÜMTİS. For the assessment of the process by the Committee, please refer to GazeteNisan, 2021.

⁴² The origins of this hostility date back further. In the early 2000s, it escalated into violent clashes among their members, involving incidents of knife and gun attacks that tragically resulted in fatalities. See: Bianet, 2002; Evrensel, 2004.

work in adverse weather conditions and the increasing number of worker fatalities. Additionally, it has filed a lawsuit challenging the classification of one *esnaf-kurye* worker.

Apart from these, there are structures organized as independent unions, committees, and solidarity networks. Umut-Sen, involved in the protests to be explained below, defines itself as a collective aiming to strengthen the class's union struggle. The union does not have a separate organization for delivery workers. It opposes bureaucratized unionism and yellow unionism, advocating for workplace committees and council structures. However, it also supports workers in their decisions to either establish new unions or actively oppose management by staying within existing unions. Formations such as Motorcycle Courier Cargo Workers Union (Motokurye Kargo Çalışanları Birliği), Motorcycle Courier - Cargo Workers Solidarity Network (Motokurye - Kargo Emekçileri Dayanışma Ağı), and The Power of Labor Motorcycle Couriers Committee (Emeğin Gücü Motokuryeler Komitesi) have also emerged in the last few years. These groups are left-leaning initiatives advocating grassroots struggles and have shown support for delivery workers' protests as well.

The Delivery Worker Rights Association (Kurye Hakları Derneği) was established in November 2022. The Kurye News team, with a large following among delivery workers on social media channels, is one of the founders of the association. The association defines its purpose as researching the issues of delivery workers, identifying problem areas, publishing reports on these matters, and creating awareness. In a short time, the association has published various reports on the field. It can be characterized as more in line with a civil society organization in the context of its scope of activities, thus representing an effort to fill a gap in the organizational network outlined earlier.

Finally, in November 2023, a chamber of craftsmen was established in Ankara under the name Ankara Chamber of Trades and Crafts Supporting Freight Transportation Services. Efforts to establish chambers in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and Bursa commenced in 2022. However, the initiative in Ankara is the sole one that has successfully reached the required number of 500 members for the establishment of the chamber. Ongoing efforts are underway in other cities. This initiative has garnered significant support from the government. Establishing a chamber for *esnaf-kurye* workers essentially involves officially registering them as self-employed individuals. The founders of the chamber generally articulate their goal as regulating the system

of *esnaf-kurye*. Targeted initiatives include transitioning *esnaf-kurye* workers to a simple tax payment method for lower tax payments, removing the Special Consumption Tax on motor and equipment purchases, providing credit opportunities to workers, and establishing rest areas for workers to take breaks in the cities where they operate. Moreover, the chamber aims to certify *esnaf-kurye* workers who want to start their profession by providing them with training, including advanced and safe driving training and communication with customers. The goal is to obtain professional qualification certificates for workers through the chambers (kuryehaber.com).

However, despite government support, the chamber has encountered challenges in appealing to delivery workers. A significant reason for this is the substantial financial requirement for membership in the chamber in the initial stages, along with the mandatory monthly fee system after becoming a member. The widespread perception among both the workers I interviewed and online forums is that those establishing the chamber are primarily seeking to create a source of income for themselves.

In summary, the increase in the number of delivery workers in recent times, the proliferation of the *esnaf-kurye* system, and the heightened visibility of workers' issues in the public domain have led to both increased organization in this field and a diversification of organizational forms⁴³. Before 2019, the number of delivery worker organizations was around 10-15, but between 2019 and 2023, dozens of organizations have been established. It is observed, however, that the majority of existing associations do not adhere to a militant labor movement line; in fact, they are often engaged in various relationships with existing companies. On the other hand, with Yemeksepeti, previously hosting a significant number of employees, transitioning to the *esnaf-kurye* model like other platforms, the sector of food and grocery delivery has shifted away from the focus of confederation-affiliated unions. Independent unions, committees, and solidarity networks, which are more militant structures, have low active membership numbers, regular activities, and consequently, organizational capacities. The chamber of craftsmen, despite efforts to address a broader audience of delivery workers beyond its founders' circles, has not yet appealed to a wider audience and has achieved the required number for

⁴³ In August 2022, the Women Couriers Association, the first association in Turkey dedicated to female delivery workers, was established in Ankara. However, it closed down after approximately one year due to insufficient interest and support (<https://kuryehaklari.org/moto-kurye-orgutlenenlerini-genel-bakis/>).

establishment only after a prolonged preparation process in a single city. In such a landscape, it is not surprising that the mass protests to be described below have been initiated by the workers themselves. Workers, in organizing these protests, have rapidly increased their numbers, and mobilized using social media communication tools. These channels also serve other functions among workers, such as mutual assistance. Therefore, before delving into worker actions, the following section will explore social media as an increasingly vital organizational tool and space for workers.

6.2. Social Media

Delivery and ride-hailing platform workers quickly mobilize by communicating through social media channels, a finding observed in numerous studies conducted in different countries worldwide (Chen, 2018; Heiland and Schaupp: 2021; Woodcock, 2021). Research by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 11 countries across South America, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa involving approximately 5,000 app-based delivery platform workers, conducted in 2021, reveals that almost none of the workers are members of a union. However, a significant number of workers are members of a social media group related to their work.

These channels not only assist in swift organization during periods of worker unrest but also serve various other purposes among workers in general. There are diverse activities, such as announcements about lost or stolen motorcycles, sales of used motorcycles and equipment, reporting accidents, sharing police checkpoint locations, discussing issues like low wages or other work-related problems, exposing businesses that exploit workers' rights, and renting out platform accounts. Furthermore, there are relief groups where workers can find replacements to cover their shifts when they want to take a day off.

While there are groups where members can address several issues, there also specific groups dedicated to each of these topics, such as job search groups, some boasting membership numbers in the range of 2000-3000. In these groups, posting ads below the prices set by group administrators is generally not allowed. In some groups, only administrators can make announcements, while members cannot. While some groups claim to be specific to certain topics such as job listings or equipment sales, participants often share various other issues.

General work-related problems, work-related news, cost of living, rising fuel prices, and complaints about the hiring of migrant couriers can be discussed. Sometimes, discussions can escalate, creating tensions. Migrant workers, on the other hand, have their own separate groups where they facilitate their communication.

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, there are business groups, where founders announce delivery job orders, and workers who are available can accept the orders. For each order, the founders take certain commissions. Access to these groups is usually by referral, operating similarly to an informal platform with interpersonal connections.

To sum up, there are hundreds of groups where workers express a wide range of needs and issues. Due to the rapid dissemination of group invitation links among workers, company executives can easily infiltrate groups established, particularly for taking action against a company. For instance, it was noted that company managers joined a group created in 2023 to discuss issues at Yemeksepeti. Upon realizing that company accounts of group members were deactivated less than an hour after the group was formed, this situation became apparent. This has been identified as a challenge to workers' organizing efforts in other countries as well (Le, 2023). Recently, workers in using these channels for organizing, especially, have become more cautious in accepting new members to their groups.

Additionally, delivery workers create videos illustrating the challenges they face in adverse weather conditions, such as snow or storms, and share them through social media platforms. They urge authorities to ban delivery work, encourage customers to stop placing orders, or call on workers to exercise their right to refrain from work. In this regard, Kurye News also serves as a forum where delivery workers share videos addressing a wide range of issues, sparking discussions related to the situations in the comments. Workers also expose gated communities where they are not allowed entry or businesses where they face problems.

This issue is not unique to delivery workers in Turkey. For instance, in Brazil, a food delivery worker took to sharing videos depicting confrontations with customers who refused to come down to collect their orders, or videos showing the worker consuming undelivered orders. A particular video gained widespread attention, featuring the delivery worker singing a song with the invented lyrics "Se não descer, eu como mesmo" (If you don't come down, I'll eat it anyway)

while dancing with fellow delivery workers. The video went viral on TikTok, amassing over 7 million views. This not only garnered support from fellow workers but also sparked a trend where others created similar videos. Workers have also actively conveyed their demands to local lawmakers, resulting in three cities where workers now have the right to refuse deliveries inside buildings. Moreover, there are ongoing discussions on proposed laws in several cities, aiming to grant workers the right to reject door-to-door deliveries (Martins, 2023).

Aside from these, although not a form of resistance, YouTube is filled with videos created by workers depicting how much platform companies earn and their working conditions. When companies announce new payment structures, they engage individuals close to the company to create content. These individuals produce videos to showcase how lucrative the new system is, essentially promoting the companies. During periods of worker unrest, companies also utilize these individuals to suppress potential uprisings by circulating messages on social media channels that defend the companies and claim that any action would be detrimental to the workers. While some of these individuals are well-known among workers, when asked, the companies claim that there are no such individuals within their organization, denying any relationships with them.

6.3. Delivery Workers' Collective Actions

In Turkey, the actions of delivery workers and related organizations began in the spring of 2021. Various organizations led press statements addressing issues such as the increasing deaths of delivery workers, the pressure for swift deliveries, and barriers that pose a danger to motorcycle drivers. They called for the recognition of the profession as highly dangerous and the removal of speed rating systems on platforms. Workers also initiated independent protests, such as convoys held in response to increasing fuel prices and assemblies in front of establishments or gated communities where they had faced violence. Singular examples include a demonstration in front of gated communities that barred entry to delivery workers, a press release conducted in front of the Getir center following the dismissal of a worker from Getir, and a protest against Vigo's regionally differentiated pricing system.

There was also collective participation in funerals for workers who lost their lives while working. In 2023, after the death of a Yemeksepeti *esnaf-kurye* worker in Mersin, colleagues

held a press statement at the cemetery (İlerihaber, 2023). In November 2022, the case of Trendyol worker Samet Özgül, who was stabbed in a traffic dispute in Ankara and died in the hospital, was followed by his family, workers, and various associations, keeping the issue on the agenda. Due to public pressure, the perpetrator received a life sentence (Birgün, 2023). An action that can be cited as an example of international solidarity was the support demonstration organized by the TEHİS union for the strike of Foodpanda workers in Myanmar (owned by DeliveryHero, which also owns Yemeksepeti) in June 2022.

While these initiatives have led to a broader awareness of the delivery workers' issues in the general public, the most widely participated actions were protests, primarily triggered by discontent with companies' announced payment structures for new periods. Although some organizations became involved in the resistance process and provided various forms of support, these actions were fundamentally initiated by the workers. This section focuses on the three most significant waves of dissent. Firstly, it elucidates the activism of Trendyol delivery workers with cars in January 2022, an action that brought the *esnaf-kurye* system to public attention. Thereafter, it scrutinizes the immediately following resistance exhibited by Yemeksepeti delivery workers in employee status, starting 1st of February 2022 and lasting nearly 60 days. The section culminates with an analysis of the activism undertaken by Trendyol motorcycle *esnaf-kurye* workers in July 2023.

6.3.1. The Spark of Trendyol Express Car *Esnaf-Kurye* Workers

We stated that platform companies announce their payment structures twice a year, in January and July, coinciding with the new minimum wage adjustments. The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) reported an annual consumer price index of 36.08% for 2021⁴⁴. In January 2022, the Turkish government raised the net minimum wage by 50.51% compared to the previous year. Nevertheless, on January 24th, Trendyol declared only an 11% increase for Trendyol Express workers - those handling deliveries with their panel van cars in the *esnaf-kurye* position.

⁴⁴ It is alleged that the institution intentionally miscalculates inflation to portray lower figures in recent years, leading to the establishment of independent initiatives by economists to accurately calculate inflation. One of these initiatives is the ENAG (Inflation Research Group), founded in 2020, and it calculated the annual inflation rate for 2021 as 82.81%, against 36.08% reported by the Turkish Statistical Institution. See: <https://enagrup.org/?hl=en>

This insufficient raise sparked significant anger among the workers. Responding promptly, they mobilized through the Telegram group they had established and gathered in front of the Trendyol headquarters in Istanbul's Maslak district in the late afternoon. Crowds began forming in front of the headquarter, but no representative from the company made an effort to meet with the workers. The protest gained participation from workers in other cities as well, as the social media group includes several workers from different cities.

Internally, the workers established a representative committee. The following day, they called for a work stoppage and simultaneous rallies in Maltepe on the Anatolian side and Yenikapı on the European side. The company, taking advantage of the heavy snowfall in Istanbul on this date, released a statement attributing potential delivery delays to this reason. Support for the protest came from some left-wing organizations, including the unions Nakliyat-İş and Umut-Sen. The subsequent day saw highly attended events with workers using their van vehicles on both sides of Istanbul. The company's business operation was greatly disrupted. A concise statement was read, articulating their demands, which included a 50% wage increase, an end to pressure and mobbing in the work process, discontinuation of the second round of deliveries requiring workers to go to the depots again in afternoon to pick up deliveries, and no sanctions against participating workers.

Following the rally in Yenikapı, a convoy was formed, with horns resonating throughout the city. The spontaneous nature of the protest meant there were no signs or writings expressing its content. At red lights, pedestrians and adjacent vehicles inquired about the purpose of the demonstration. The police intervened at several points, instructing the workers not to honk and not to disrupt traffic flow. After returning to the headquarters and continuing the protest for a while, the workers eventually dispersed. Posts related to the resistance circulated on social media channels.

The next day, the company declared that all workers should report to their depots, where a statement would be made. However, a significant number of workers once again assembled in front of the Maslak headquarters. Confronted with substantial opposition, the company was compelled to reverse its decision, ultimately disclosing a 38.8% wage increase. Representatives from the unions Nakliyat-İş and Umut-Sen announced it to the workers gathered in front of the company.

The activism of Trendyol's *esnaf-kurye* workers, resulting in a wage increase within 3 days, inspired hope among workers on various platforms, triggering actions. *Esnaf-kurye* workers in platform companies such as Hepsiburada, Scooty, as well as cargo companies like Aras Kargo and Sürat Kargo, held demonstrations in the same week. However, these actions, occurring with the participation of a limited number of workers without sufficient preparation, took place more as a reflex. Most of them remained as single-day actions consisting of a single press release.

On the other hand, when Trendyol's *esnaf-kurye* workers gathered in front of the company's headquarters on the first day, their numbers were substantial. On the second day, their ranks swelled even more, and the volume of workers participating in rallies and going on strike significantly disrupted the company's operations. The company was not anticipating such a development and was unprepared. The *esnaf-kurye* were workers using their own vans for deliveries. It was not easy for the company to swiftly replace them with other workers under the same conditions. The company was also likely concerned about potential support from customers, the possibility of a boycott, or a decrease in sales due to the workers' actions. Consequently, the company announced an increase slightly above the inflation rate disclosed by the Statistical Institute, without further escalating the issue.

It is essential to highlight that this period witnessed strikes and protests among workers in various sectors across the country, spanning from textiles to shipbuilding and from warehousing to transportation. The primary catalyst for the unrest stemmed from the inadequacy of wage increases offered by employers amid significant inflation and the escalating cost of living. Many workplaces had declared wage increases below the minimum wage rate, thus, in a sense, expressing dissatisfaction as their earnings approached the minimum wage. In the initial two months of 2022, a total of 108 strikes occurred, with the majority unfolding in February, and only one of them was legally sanctioned. Most strikes were organized by workers not affiliated with any union, or supported or orchestrated by radical independent unions.

6.3.2. Yemeksepeti Workers' Long Resistance

Delivery workers employed as regular employees at Yemeksepeti were anticipating the company's announced wage increase throughout the month of January. As mentioned earlier,

the company had initiated the hiring of *esnaf-kurye* in 2020. However, at the time of the protest, the majority were still employed under regular employee status. Finally, on the night of January 31st, the company disclosed the new salaries. A wage increase of 32.7%, falling below the raise in the minimum wage, was announced.

In response, the TMTS union issued a call for a press release in front of Yemeksepeti's Levent headquarters the following day at 11:00 am. Similarly, Nakliyat-i called for an event on the next day, February 2nd. Approximately 300-400 delivery workers attended Tmtis' press release, expressing visible anger. Tmtis conveyed their demands, including a net monthly salary of 5,500 TL, improvements in meal allowances and additional benefits, the withdrawal of the sector alteration, and the withdrawal of objections to the union's authority in the unionization process (Kızılarlan, 2022). However, the union opted not to proceed with a strike. Instead, they decided on work slowdown actions. On the other hand, Nakliyat-i advanced its action by a day, moving it to the afternoon of that day. Numerous workers stayed in the area, joining Nakliyat-is press release as well, resulting in an increased number of workers gathered in front of the company. Umut-Sen and TEHS unions also lent their support to Nakliyat-i. The statement reiterated the demand for a net monthly salary of 5,500 TL, the withdrawal of the sector alteration, and the reinstatement of the sector into the transportation industry. They declared their intention to strike alongside participating workers and urged all workers to assemble in front of the headquarters again the next morning.

In the first week, around 500 workers gathered in front of the company's headquarters every day. The workers were enthusiastic and hopeful. Many workers who did not come to the center either did not work or slowed down their work. Workers in many other cities also went on strike, and various actions were taken. In Istanbul, many *esnaf-kurye* initially supported the strike. However, due to various pressures from managers and the necessity to work for their subsistence as they earned on a per-package basis, they had to go back to work. Some *esnaf-kurye* workers did not support the strike from the beginning. Meanwhile, the contract of a worker working as an *esnaf-kurye* through a subcontractor and actively supported the strike, after his dispute with the subcontractor company, was terminated. However, Yemeksepeti did not dismiss workers with employee status during the activism process, fearing public backlash. Instead, the company took various official reports on workers, requested written defenses, and attempted to intimidate workers through supervisors.

Some members of parliament from opposition parties and artists visited the resistance area. The unions called for a boycott of Yemeksepeti platform. Nakliyat-iş union announced that the order rate had dropped by 70% during that period (dokuz8haber, 2022). Numerous posts related to the strike were shared on social media. While not widely covered in mainstream media, it was reported by many press outlets, and workers participated in various interviews. Solidarity actions with workers were organized in some countries, including in front of the Delivery Hero company's headquarters in Berlin. Additionally, a press release was held in front of the German Consulate due to the company's owner being the German company DeliveryHero. To facilitate the participation of workers living on the Anatolian side, another gathering was organized in Kadıköy.

However, over time, the number of workers participating in the strike decreased. The company did not take any steps back. Two workers were selected to negotiate with the company. Throughout the process, the company consistently refused to engage in any discussions with the workers. Unions attempted to hold gatherings in front of the company not every day to maintain the number of participants; however, this strategy proved unsuccessful. Workers, feeling disheartened and believing that the strike would not yield any results, gradually stopped participating. Some others joined them as they observed the decline in numbers. Ultimately, with the decreasing number of participating workers over time, after approximately 50 days of activism, the strike faded out without achieving any gains.⁴⁵

After the conclusion of the activism process, there were attempts to rekindle the movement. For example, in Gaziosmanpaşa, an employee working in the warehouse was terminated for failing to deliver the vehicle to the warehouse on time after the end of the shift, a new regulation

⁴⁵ In early March, Nevzat Aydın, the former CEO of the company and current Board Member, sparked controversy with a Twitter statement: "Thank goodness Mert is in charge; if it were up to me, my first action would be to dismiss all the ungrateful people slowing down the work." (İyi ki Mert işin başında; bana kalsaydı ilk işim, o işi yavaşlatan nankörlerin tamamını göndermek olurdu). This remark faced significant backlash from the workers. Subsequently, during a gathering in front of the headquarters, a banner was displayed, bearing the message, "You're the Ungrateful One, Nevzat Aydın." (Nankör Sensin Nevzat Aydın). The backlash against Nevzat Aydın persisted on social media for some time. On March 23, Nakliyat-iş lodged a criminal complaint against Nevzat Aydın at the Istanbul Courthouse. The final action in the resistance process was indeed the press release held in front of the courthouse in response to this legal complaint, with a limited worker participation.

implemented by the company. With the support of socialist organizations in the region, the worker initiated a solitary sit-in protest in front of the warehouse, demanding reinstatement. However, during the first week, only a few workers showed support, and he failed to garner backing from the wider community of delivery workers. As the workers dispersed, the momentum of resistance had already diminished. Eventually, the worker concluded the protest after some time.

Post-strike, the company implemented new regulations hindering worker continuation, including the removal of weekend leave. Furthermore, instances of existing mobbing against workers escalated, with practices such as reassigning workers to different regions, dispatching them to other depots for support, and assigning them long-distance orders becoming more prevalent. Hence, in the spring and summer of 2022, a substantial number of workers were forced to leave their positions. Some opted to become *esnaf-kurye* for alternative companies. Some workers as groups of 10-15 individuals pursued legal proceedings against the company, citing violations of their rights during their tenure. Others, initially obtaining long-term health reports for conditions such as herniated discs, subsequently resigned. As part of an endeavor to restore its tarnished public image, the company also underwent rebranding, changing its logo and the names of specific operations. Ultimately, during this period, the number of workers in employee status experienced a significant decline, and the company entrenched the *esnaf-kurye* system.

Before exploring the reasons behind the lack of gains in the activism process, let us closely examine the factors that fueled the dissatisfaction leading workers to initiate the strike. Initially, many workers noted that their salaries, when they first joined the company, exceeded the minimum wage by more than 50%, and their bonuses and overtime pay were consistently paid in full. However, they later observed that the subsequent wage adjustments fell below the minimum wage, eventually reaching the minimum wage level. Workers were of the opinion that a perilous job like theirs should not be remunerated at the minimum wage. Furthermore, the company had started to withhold bonuses and overtime payments. Erdal shared that he joined the job with the belief that, being a corporate entity, his rights would be safeguarded, and his earnings would not be deducted. However, they discovered that the company even made deductions from online tips. Other workers also revealed that their salaries were consistently

underpaid each month. When they reported the issue to the company, they were assured that it was a mistake and would be rectified, yet the problem persisted in the subsequent months.

Some highlighted that the company was increasingly treating them as disposable, and they felt marginalized post-pandemic. They were denied access to facilities such as the gym, game room, and restaurant that were available to them previously. Invitations to staff nights organized by the company were not extended to them. While social activities were arranged for other employees, delivery workers were excluded. They noted that even basic items like coffee and teacups, which the company used to regularly provide in depots, were no longer supplied. Despite working in the same company, they perceived themselves as being treated as second-class citizens.

The swift success of the Trendyol strike had ignited their enthusiasm. However, during the first week, despite the gathering of a large group of workers, the company remained silent. In this context, the company's explicit aim of establishing the *esnaf-kurye* model played a crucial role. Many workers already perceived that the company had sacrificed them and aimed to transition entirely to the *esnaf-kurye* system to eliminate the workers. Despite a substantial decrease in orders and financial losses, they believed the company did not retreat for this reason. Company executives had been urging workers to become *esnaf-kurye* for quite some time.

While the company remained determined in its goal, the divergent approaches of the two unions from the outset, their failure to unite on a common stance despite identical demands, and their formulation of separate roadmaps were among the significant weaknesses of the resistance. Moreover, throughout the resistance process, they perpetuated a hostile relationship, resorting to the use of derogatory expressions against each other⁴⁶. In an evaluation article on an online news site, a delivery worker highlights that the resistance commenced with two distinct press releases, issued successively from the very first day, conveying almost identical demands. He argues this led the workers to question, "Our problems are the same, our demands are the same, so why did the unions, purporting to defend our rights, take separate paths?" Furthermore, he identifies the lack of any organization declaring the end of the protests through a statement as

⁴⁶ See Lordoğlu, 2023, for a discussion on the destructive consequences of union competition, specifically based on an exploration in the textile sector, and its impact on the decline in workers' trust in trade unions in Turkey.

a deficiency that could erode the workers' trust in future organizing efforts. He emphasizes the responsibility of organizations, as the summoners of the strike, to provide an assessment of the process (Kaya, 2022).

Similarly, Kerem pointed out that, as a result of the unions' misguided attitudes, right-wing delivery workers, who were already skeptical of unions, grew even more disenchanted. He observed that union representatives, even in the workers' protest area, uttered unspeakable things about the other union. Kerem suggested that, following the mindset of "let it be mine," the unions dissipated the emerging energy and squandered it on their internal conflicts.

Some of the workers I talked to were genuinely skeptical of unions, claiming that unions' sole purpose was self-enrichment by enrolling members for their dues. A worker, formerly a subcontractor in a hotel, shared his experience of joining the union but remaining in a precarious position even after three years without a permanent transfer. He noted the union's inaction and later discovered that the union and the employer are on the same side. A right-leaning worker, who returned to work at the end of the third week of the strike, expressed frustration, stating, "We went and came back; nothing happened." He was also misinformed about unions collecting union dues. The same worker also expressed discomfort with the presence of flags from different left-wing groups and some opposition MPs coming to the area over time.

Throughout the resistance, the associations, described mainly as right-wing above, consistently propagated against the unions, alleging that the unions harbored different agendas. They promoted these claims on social media as well. Although initially absent from the area, these associations made occasional visits to the site as the protest persisted. One worker highlighted that the primary objective of these associations was to promote workers to corporate firms. He said, "While it's normal to take advertisements and sell equipment, it's inappropriate to stand beside workers and sell them to companies. Instead, you should negotiate with companies and enhance workers' conditions." Moreover, he recounted an incident during the protest when a representative from one of these associations contacted him, stating, "They seemed to support us during the protest, but in the evening, they took me aside and said, 'Resolve this issue. We've connected with a company that will offer you better rates.' When I asked why, he said, 'I couldn't tolerate this situation.' They just reveal themselves. They have an interest in this. If they were genuinely with us, they would participate from the beginning, not at the end".

The lack of unity among the unions, the incomplete establishment of trust between the workers and the organizations, combined with a decrease in the number of workers in the resistance area, has created an environment where counterpropaganda could find a ground. Given that the workers hail from different ideologies, predominantly from right-wing perspectives in alignment with the country's political landscape, it becomes crucial for unions or labor organizations to convincingly demonstrate that they are solely committed to advocating for the workers and safeguarding the common interests of the class without succumbing to sectarian divisions. This is not only essential for gaining the trust of the workers but also to prevent them from retreating to the ideologies they already inclined towards.

Another notable weakness in the strike was the absence of a solidarity fund. With the workers not engaged in their regular work, they were deprived of their earnings coming from bonuses and overtime payments. The strike unfolded in the plaza district, where the sole option for tea was in an expensive shopping mall. Soup was distributed only once in the area, and tea a few times. Workers had to bear all the expenses, including the cost of gas needed to come to the area from their own pockets. Many workers later shared that the budgetary strain during that period set them back for several months. The ongoing struggle for survival played a role in the dwindling number of protesters after two or three weeks. The primary motivation for the workers' presence was, after all, to earn a livelihood. However, the unions overlooked this crucial aspect, neglecting the issue of reproduction of both the workers and the strike.

All these limitations ultimately constituted significant weaknesses against the company's goal to consolidate the *esnaf-kurye* system. Many workers perceived that the company had already abandoned them to transition to the *esnaf-kurye* system. Despite a considerable decline in orders and financial losses, they thought the company did not retreat for this reason. Some workers believed that the company might be receiving government support, potentially covering its losses. This belief arose from the recent success of Trendyol workers who triumphed in their struggles with their own activism. Similarly, workers at the Migros warehouse had achieved victories in their battles. They believed that their success would have inspired hope in other workers, initiating a widespread wave of worker protests and propagating the notion that victories could be attained through resistance.

It is worth noting that a few workers with left-socialist views, who were prominent in the struggle, expressed that they did not view it as a loss. They asserted that they had inflicted significant damage to the company by causing financial losses and a decline in its stock value. However, this perspective was not widely shared among other workers. Just as these workers interpreted the events through their worldview, some others, aligning with their own political inclinations, but this time encoding the struggle in their minds with more pessimistic thoughts and feelings about the potential of collective action. While some remember that period as an exciting time, for others, it left an economic imprint on their lives by setting them back. As the mentioned worker pointed out, attempting to derive a shared meaning or lesson from this failure, to reconstitute it as a collective experience in the minds of individual workers, would serve as a reference for future collective actions. This is because the ability of movements to reproduce themselves relies on the power of collectivity and the trust in solidarity in all terms, including material and affective.

6.3.3. Trendyol *Esnaf-kurye* Workers' Protest

In this chapter so far, we discussed the strike involving Trendyol *esnaf-kurye* workers who use cars for delivery and the protest by Yemeksepeti delivery workers up until now. The most recent example we will explore is the protest initiated by Trendyol motorcycle *esnaf-kurye* workers that erupted in January 2023, precisely one year after these two incidents came to light.

While the protest may have been sparked by the perceived inadequacy of the new fees announced by the company, there was also underlying anger accumulated from the increasing pressures and restrictions in the work process, along with the absence of a satisfactory pay increase during the preceding period of announcing the payment structure. Some workers even claimed that their income had decreased as a result of shrewd adjustments made in the previous period. On January 16, when the new prices were revealed, workers initiated mobilization by contacting colleagues in their respective work areas during the afternoon. A group of workers formed a convoy on motorcycles and proceeded to the company's office in Alibeyköy. The content shared on social media quickly gained traction. Workers declared their intention to move towards the company's central building in Maslak. Mobilized on the Asian side, workers who had visited the office there also began the journey towards the central building.

As the number of workers in Maslak increased, a decision was made to form a representative committee consisting of 10 workers. However, this process was more of a self-initiative or a recommendation by friends, lacking a clear and distinct procedure or method. The committee was determined relatively quickly, with the timeline accelerated by the actions and the presence of workers who arrived at that time. For instance, despite the suggestion that workers from different regions, given that the number of regions is much more than 10, should be part of the representatives committee, the result included two individuals from the same region. It is worth noting that simultaneously, the police engaged in conversations with some workers, pointing out union members from TEHİS and socialist newspaper reporters⁴⁷. These workers approached the unionists, expressing their anger and stating that they only wanted Trendyol workers and no one else. Despite the unionists and journalists stating they came for support, this small group maintained its aggressive tone. After tense discussions, the argument was eventually concluded, and the union representatives remained on-site. However, the entrance to the building was on a slightly elevated platform, accessible by stairs from both sides. The police closed both entrance points, allowing only the representatives' group to remain upstairs and directing others downstairs. Nevertheless, in the subsequent hours, association executives, for example, easily gained access to the platform.

The Representatives Committee, placing its foremost demand for a payment of 1300 TL for 30 package deliveries, crafted an 18-item list of demands encompassing various aspects of the job, including break usage, orders to shopping malls and gated communities, order distances, bonus criteria, and waiting times at establishments⁴⁸. Meanwhile, the Motorcycle Courier Cargo Workers Solidarity Network involved one of their lawyers in the committee. The plan was to present the list of demands to the company management within the building. However, with no authorized person reported in the building at that moment, the workers were instructed to disperse, and communication indicated that a meeting to discuss the demands could be arranged for the next day.

⁴⁷ When the protest occurred, I had not yet discovered that Trendyol has an outsourcing agreement with a security company. Through this arrangement, they employ individuals, often retired police officers, to monitor workers in traffic. Consequently, I cannot confirm whether there were police officers working for Trendyol among those present at the protest site.

⁴⁸ See SolHaber, 2023 to view the list of demands.

The workers did not disperse. As midnight approached, the crowd had grown to around 500 workers. A megaphone was located, and a person from the representatives' group, who would later serve as the spokesperson for the committee, began addressing the workers from the platform. Newly arrived workers inquired about the speaker's identity, and those who had arrived earlier briefed the newcomers on the situation's progress. Around midnight, a vote was held to decide whether to stay overnight or return the next day morning. Given the absence of any authority inside and the extremely cold weather, the decision was made to reconvene the following day.

The next day, the gathering had grown even larger, with approximately 700-800 workers present. The person who became the committee spokesman occasionally gave warnings with a megaphone. Other than that, no speeches were made. After a wait of 2-3 hours, the management agreed to meet with the workers, and the representatives' committee entered the central building. They stayed inside for about 4-5 hours. Meanwhile, the atmosphere outside was quite tense. Information about a journalist who had previously been imprisoned for political reasons was shared on social media groups, along with a photo, and the post claimed they were a terrorist. Associations were once again involved in this. A group of workers tried to remove the journalist from the area. Additionally, a delivery worker who had come with a union vest and others accompanying him had brought a music sound system. In Turkey, it is common during protests to play halay music and dance. This worker played a song for dancing halay. Some workers immediately objected, stating that it was not a wedding venue and demanding the music be stopped. They also expressed their disapproval of the union and asked the worker to remove the union vest. The worker turned off the music but did not remove the vest. Somehow, a compromise was reached, and tension calmed down. These reactions came from individuals with more right-wing, conservative views in the area.

In addition to this, there was tension in the air due to uncertainty and a lack of trust. Most workers did not know the representatives' group, or only knew a couple of them. As the time they spent inside extended, the outcome remained uncertain. The most frequently chanted slogan by the workers was, "You called us lions and tigers, but you've eaten our rights," referring to Trendyol labeling the workers as tigers. Later, the representatives inside conveyed a message during the meeting, requesting that slogans not be chanted as per the management's

preference. Workers sat in groups, waiting with those they knew, and some played recent pop music on their phones.

The workers finally left around 8 p.m. The person who served as the spokesperson for the representative committee, almost taking on the leadership of the protest, provided information. The company had requested time to evaluate the demands. It was decided to have another meeting one week later. During this interim period, the workers would not abandon their jobs; they would continue working. The majority of workers applauded the decision, but there were still doubts among a segment regarding a positive outcome.

The company released a written statement to the workers that evening, asserting a productive meeting with their business partners and claiming to have listened to their demands. They indicated ongoing efforts to simplify and clarify the earnings system. Essentially, the company was implying that the announced wages were favorable for the workers, but the workers did not fully understand this. They seemed to dismiss the demand for a pay increase. However, they stated that they would persist in listening to operational improvement requests, with technical teams already working on potential enhancements, and a prompt response regarding these improvements as soon as possible.

Before the assembly dispersed, the spokesperson who made the announcement shared his own Instagram account for workers to stay informed about developments. Additionally, a social media communication group had been established, but it was merely an information group where only administrators could post messages. The worker's Instagram follower count, which was initially below 100, had already exceeded 1000 by the next day. The worker started conducting live broadcasts in a chat-like atmosphere at night, answering questions, although he did not provide any substantial news regarding the resistance.

The second day of the meeting arrived, and workers began to gather in Maslak. At the last minute, the company requested a change of location, asking for the meeting to be held at the Alibeyköy office. Although the committee initially resisted, they eventually accepted and proceeded to the meeting. After another long wait, committee members arrived in Maslak in the evening after the meeting. The spokesperson announced from the megaphone that they had succeeded, but he could not provide detailed information as they had agreed to let the

management make the announcement. However, at that moment, the company had already started a Zoom meeting, presenting a slideshow explaining the new regulations. There was nothing about the main demand, which was an increase in the rate for delivering 30 packages, and there were no significant improvements in the new regulations. Alongside a few improvements, there were also changes that were unfavorable to the workers. However, the company presented the regulations as an improvement with embellished words. By the time of departure from the area, minds were left thoroughly confused.

The spokesperson initiated another live broadcast on Instagram 2-3 hours later that night. Comments flooded in, with accusing the representative group of being 'for sale' and insinuating that they betrayed the workers for money. Some comments escalated into insults, while others observed that the spokesperson was already seeking fame and aiming to boost his follower count. Interestingly, a worker I spoke to believed that the company orchestrated these comments, intending to divert attention from themselves, blaming the spokesperson and the representative committee, and considered the company successful in doing so. According to him, the committee had fallen into the trap. However, the majority of workers did not share this belief.

In a remarkably short week, the person taking on the role of spokesperson had almost behaved like a social media phenomenon. Delivering monologues, he responded to questions about the protest's course often without providing information, yet continued live. Moreover, the speech he made in the resistance area after the second meeting with company management, announcing that they succeeded, was recorded and circulated immediately. Additionally, the next morning, the company sent a text to the press claiming that the new regulation was positive for the workers. These led even left-socialist media to report that the struggle had succeeded.

The spokesperson, accompanied by a few committee members, conducted another live broadcast in response to social media reactions. They asserted that their discussions with the management at the table were not as described and hinted that they felt deceived by the management. To gauge worker satisfaction with the outcome, an online poll was conducted, where the majority, consisting of over 1000 workers, expressed dissatisfaction. Subsequently, the spokesperson announced the intention to issue a call to action and urged workers to await further information. However, on the morning of the scheduled action, he declared the

cancellation of the gathering, citing the identification of malicious individuals infiltrating among the workers to ensure participant safety. This further eroded the already diminished trust towards the committee. Meanwhile, individuals closely associated with the company shared threatening messages on social media, claiming that they know the company well and warning of potential consequences if the workers organized another protest. These messages suggested that the company would impose sanctions with no possibility of reversal for the workers. Throughout the protest, the company had already been intimidating workers by having consultants contact them.

A worker I spoke to expressed that, in the end, the battle won in the field was lost at the negotiating table. He mentioned that while the workers put up a strong resistance, the representatives could not stand firm, demonstrating that not everyone is fit to be a representative in such cases. Although this implies a more individualistic interpretation, it still does not appear as dark as the perspective of other workers. A significant number of workers I spoke to were inclined to believe that the committee's shortcomings were more about receiving money than their lack of capacity. In my conversations with workers, as I tried to point out the lack of collective organization of the process or the company's cunning tactics, the workers found me naive and too trusting.

I conducted an in-depth interview with a committee member who mentioned cutting ties with even close friends due to being labeled as "for sale." He expressed regret for engaging in the protest, stating that it was not worth it for these workers and that he would not participate if given the chance again. In the end, the mobilization of hundreds of workers, despite the risks they took, concluded with the erosion of trust among the workers and the disruption of belief in collective action. This outcome may have been even more damaging than the non-fulfillment of the pay increase demand.

The events narrated here should not be seen as the inevitable result of workers spontaneously organizing a strike in the absence of an established union. Yellow unionism is already a widespread practice, and workers often believe that many unions claiming to represent them have agreements with employers. Instead, this case should be interpreted as an illustration of the vulnerabilities in organizing a sudden and spontaneous resistance, particularly in a situation where workers, who often lack pre-existing connections beyond their own working regions, do

not know each other well. It also indicates how easily such vulnerabilities can be exploited by companies in their favor using various means. This case underscores the lack of workers' organizational mechanism that precedes the resistance through collective processes. Ultimately, the success or failure of any action cannot be attributed to the members of the formed committee. The democratic and inclusive nature of the processes in creating and operating committees or other preferred mechanisms is a fundamental assurance on which the movement can rely.

It would be insightful to explore the productive counter-effects that emerged from the trust erosion among the workers I mentioned earlier. In a conversation with workers from the Motorcycle Delivery Workers Association regarding this action, one worker proposed the idea that future negotiations with companies should be live streamed. Another worker raised questions about the necessity and adequacy of appointing a representative committee for negotiations, given the risk that the committee could be manipulated. Several other workers concurred, asserting that since the demands are clear, there is no need for a representative committee; workers must stay in the area until the company declares that the demands have been met. They added as well, throughout this process, any meeting requests from the company should be declined.

Therefore, the erosion of trust in the representative committee, observed while the frustration of workers was still fresh immediately after the protest, may not necessarily imply the disruption of collective action. Workers, by problematizing the notion of representation, might explore different channels and methods beyond conventional representation, operating authentic mechanisms. Similarly, the classification of workers by platform companies as independent contractors, paradoxically, highlights an opportunity for workers to bypass restrictive strike regulations applicable to employees (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020). Workers who are not bound by such a restrictive framework when initiating a strike do not need to adopt traditional institutional schemas and mechanisms in organizing the strike.

Ultimately, the resistance process I described above resulted in diverse experiences for each worker. It is crucial to collect and amalgamate these experiences, continuing the journey by seeking paths guided by this collective experience. Only then can these actions transform into a continuously burning flame, warming and sustaining workers, rather than flickering sparks

that appear and disappear during pay announcement periods. The following section will scrutinize some contradictory dynamics, dilemmas, and challenges that have emerged within the permanent organization of *esnaf-kurye* workers. It aims to explore the possibilities and limits of a collective organization that is long-term, consistent, and self-reproducing. While it could serve well for protests during wage increase periods, its significance extends beyond that.

6.4. Facing the Challenges: Analyzing Shortcomings, Constraints, and Complexities in Collective Action

The two cases we described above involved *esnaf-kurye* workers, one delivering by car and the other by motorcycle. Like delivery workers with employee status, a decrease in their earnings also prompted them to engage in protests. Furthermore, the activism of workers, especially those working on food delivery platforms in other countries (Cant, 2018; Vandaele, 2018), practically refutes the claim that precarious workers cannot organize. Additionally, we had drawn attention to the findings of the global research by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung on app-based food delivery workers' labor unrest (Trappman et al., 2020), which was the first of its kind.

The FES study encompasses 527 instances of labor unrest in 36 countries from January 2017 to May 2020. The primary catalyst for labor unrest among delivery workers globally was pay, motivating almost two-thirds of actions (63.4%), except in the United States, where employment status emerged as the predominant driver for unrest. In North America and Australia, legal action predominated, primarily led by mainstream unions. In contrast, in Asia and South America, informal groups played a major role in workers' actions, accounting for 97.7% and 89.4% of all incidents of labor unrest respectively. While strikes and log-offs were the most prevalent forms of unrest in Asia, constituting 64.7% of actions, demonstrations took the lead in South America with 53.9%. The research highlighted a significant regional difference: the demand to be classified as an employee is the dominant driver in the Global North, while it is not a top priority for platform workers in the Global South. In analyzing the results, the researchers noted that the prevalence of pay as the most dominant factor for labor unrest suggests that platform work, in this sense, does not differ significantly from other conventional sectors, contrary to the emphasis on employment status and algorithmic control in the existing literature.

Indeed, this is not entirely unexpected, considering that, despite the recent increase in studies conducted in other regions, the literature predominantly concentrates on studies in the Global North. Moreover, there is the simple fact that even if individuals are not salaried employees, they tend to protest when their income decreases, and they face financial difficulties. Those working to make a living often make demands and subsequently protest, aiming to reduce their work-related expenses or increase their payments. They direct these demands to the authorities they deem responsible for the situation, with the goal of improving their earnings.

In this context, the protests initiated by *esnaf-kurye* workers, as we elaborated, align with the broader trend seen in other sectors during the same period, primarily driven by increased inflation and, consequently, the demand for higher incomes. However, whereas the initial case involving drive-in *esnaf-kurye* workers substantially disrupted work and compelled the company to implement pay increases, the recent action we described did not exhibit this capacity. Similarly, the actions of workers operating as *esnaf-kurye* for various companies immediately following the drive-in *esnaf-kurye* workers' strike were characterized by limited participation and a reflexive level.

However, on the flip side, the voices of ride-in *esnaf-kurye* workers have not resurfaced in activism, increased demands, or work-related issues for about two years following their successful strikes. Despite the ongoing increase in the cost of living, this silence is more likely a result of the company's intensified control mechanisms and potential policies aimed at suppressing organizational efforts, rather than an indication of worker satisfaction. Therefore, this situation warrants case-specific research, and it also highlights the necessity for further exploration of the organizational constraints faced by platform workers in general.

Heiland (2022) discusses fragmentation characterized by the "active undermining and prevention of workers' collectivization" within the realm of platform work. This fragmentation manifests across legal, spatial, organizational, technological, and societal dimensions. He attributes the prominence of workers' protests in sectors like ride-hailing and food delivery to local and temporal connections among workers in these specific platform roles, resulting in relatively low fragmentation in this regard. However, despite numerous protests in these domains, he highlights the absence of large-scale labor movements. The dissolution of a cohesive workspace, diminished interaction among workers due to the reduction of work into

tasks, and the shift from collaboration to competition all reinforce the atomization of workers. He argues that this resultant societal fragmentation, coupled with a high turnover rate in the industry, poses challenges in establishing long-term and unified collective power.

Indeed, numerous factors need consideration in assessing the organizational capacities of platform workers, including the nature and organization of the work, the counterstrategies of companies, the subjectivities of *esnaf-kurye* workers, and the attitudes of existing conventional unions. Although these elements do not necessarily eliminate the possibility of collective action, they present significant challenges for workers in establishing lasting organizations. Below, we will explore the challenges that hinder workers' collective organization, stemming from the organizational methods of platform companies in shaping the work and labor process. We will also examine the control mechanisms employed by these companies, including the use of physical superiors, all within the context of impeding workers' collective efforts. Following that, an examination of the subjectivity of workers, the approaches of existing traditional unions, and the emerging dilemmas and contradictory dynamics will be broached. Building on this analysis, the discussion will center around the question of how, on what foundation, and with what demands *esnaf-kurye* workers can organize, and their relationship with the larger working class.

In the fourth chapter, we highlighted the general strategy of platforms, which involves initially entering the market with low prices to undercut competitors or offering a wide array of discounts and promotions for customers. Simultaneously, platforms set wages high enough to attract a substantial workforce. However, after establishing a stable presence in the market, these platforms consistently reduce workers' units of payment (Shapiro, 2020). In the context of delivery platform work, where wages often decrease and working conditions become more challenging, the employment of numerous workers creates a tense environment among them. This dynamic is not exclusive to delivery work; in low-wage occupations labeled as unqualified, where labor is abundant, this abundance renders workers replaceable for employers and enables companies to sustain lower wages as long as there is no collective resistance from workers.

Furthermore, in platform work, the amalgamation of the piecework payment system with bonus-like incentives transforms wages into a speculative target seemingly dependent solely on individual achievements. This dynamic significantly impacts the relationships among workers,

hindering their ability to collectively interpret the nature of the work and the company with shared meaning, thereby fragmenting their sense of commonality. Moreover, this issue is exacerbated by unequal incentives and discriminatory practices, such as regional payment differentiations. This fractures the foundation upon which workers could form a shared perception, masking the common exploitation experienced by all workers and undermining the shared nature of their lived experiences. We also stated this atmosphere wrongly shifts the target from companies to workers, and when endorsed by racism, to immigrant workers.

Nonetheless, despite the divisive impact of this work regime on workers, we discussed the protests that have arisen against companies. We illustrated that these actions have the potential to be successful in significantly disrupting company operations. We underscored the importance of fostering trust among workers to enable them to stand collectively and assertively against companies. In this context, the primary point to highlight is that excessively long working hours present a substantial obstacle to the establishment of deep, long-term relationships among workers. While this work regime relies on atomizing workers, many *esnaf-kurye* have social circles consisting of colleagues in their profession. However, the demanding working hours and the growing monetization of life hinder their ability to socialize. After work, workers often return home fatigued only to engage in basic needs such as eating, bathing, and changing clothes. The working pace that allows for no social life also impedes organization. In such an environment, workers may even view attending a meeting as a financial burden. When they believe a meeting will not yield results, they may perceive it as a waste of time and, consequently, money.

At this juncture, social media groups serve as a platform for socialization, allowing individuals to connect and share experiences when encountering work-related challenges. We have previously highlighted instances where these groups are employed for mutual assistance. However, the communication within these groups typically falls short of evolving into productive discussions that comprehensively address specific issues. At times, navigating discussions becomes challenging, especially when tension arises between two individuals, hindering collective participation. Additionally, the fluidity of entries into these groups can blur their original purpose, leading to quick shifts to different topics. For instance, in a group established to prepare for action against a company, a worker might inquire about the prospect of joining that company and its financial viability. Although these groups expedite the

dissemination of news for immediate actions, they prove less effective in formulating long-term tactics and strategies. Many workers have also conveyed that they feel exhausted after work and refrain from participating in these groups unless they have a specific requirement, such as buying or selling equipment. Consequently, the demanding working hours pose a substantial obstacle to socializing and organizing, as social media offers limited avenues for socialization. While it allows for the resolution of immediate work-related issues through mutual assistance, it proves less effective in fostering long-term organizational efforts.

Moreover, as it is recognized that company managers can easily infiltrate established groups, workers might hesitate to express issues related to the company, fearing a lack of safety. Another practice reported by workers is that companies identify and fire workers who share negative posts about companies on social media. We previously highlighted a situation in a social media group formed to discuss issues at Yemeksepeti, where the accounts of group members were disabled just an hour after the group's formation. One of the workers whose account was closed later attributed this to the group organizers. Through communication with the company supervisors, the worker stated that he fortunately had his account reinstated. The companies, through these supervisors, also make strategic moves to absorb workers' resistance and internalize potential reactions. This is particularly noticeable in the case of Getir and its main contractor, Vigo. For instance, during the protest against Vigo's regional pricing policy, a worker prominently involved in the protest was offered a regional management position afterward. In Vigo, regional managers dictate workers' schedules and handle work-related issues. Thus, the company employs a clientelist approach to mitigate workers' reactions by placing influential workers with social connections in lower managerial positions. For example, I discovered that a field operator at Vigo also serves as the president of a delivery workers association in the same region. By favoring workers in their proximity and managing them in some way, attempts are made to dampen potential objections from workers. Similarly, the accounts of workers whose accounts are closed can be reinstated within the framework of these relationships, where problems are often addressed by instilling a sense of gratitude among workers and engaging in a "brotherly" dialogue.

Although platform workers face specific challenges due to the nature of their work, when examining the barriers to organizing workers, the scenario doesn't differ significantly from many other sectors. Key issues include extended working hours, dependence on received

earnings, and the associated fear of termination. Additionally, noteworthy are the managerial dynamics that compel workers to be compliant at the workplace, as illustrated in the Vigo example. When considering factors like the piece-rate payment system, a characteristic feature of this work model, or the allocation of all work-related costs onto the worker, these aspects can be seen as extensions of employment practices based on performance pay systems or those that disregard the worker's reproduction. More broadly, this reflects the trend of precarization. Extreme forms, as seen in platform work, are likely to emerge unless a comprehensive resistance against precarization is mounted.

However, traditional unionism in Turkey is predominantly focused on negotiating collective bargaining agreements that only cover union members. There is a notable absence of active efforts in organizing precarious workers, such as subcontracted workers, domestic workers, or seasonal workers (Odman, 2020). In the private sector, the rate of collective bargaining is remarkably low, standing at 5% in 2021 (Birelma, 2022). This signifies a significant disconnect between unions and sizable portions of the workforce. Consequently, while unions represent the interests of their members, they unintentionally reinforce the marginalization of precarious workers (Crouch, 2019). Simultaneously, this narrow focus erodes their credibility within broader segments of the workforce (Urhan, 2005).

Adaman and colleagues (2009) underscore a vicious cycle in this context. Taking into account the challenges faced by all workers, beyond their specific membership, could enhance the stature of labor organizations in society. However, constrained by the environment in which labor unions operate, they are compelled to adopt a short-term strategy aimed at preserving their shrinking membership base. This strategy, in turn, hampers the potential for improving the standing of labor organizations in society, including the ability to gain broader popular support for their advocacy. Consequently, by overlooking the issues affecting the broader workforce, unions undermine their own legitimacy and, subsequently, their capacity to mobilize public opinion against restrictive legislation—partially explaining their short-sightedness.

Regarding the *esnaf-kurye* system, unions in the transport sector express the opinion that the system should be abolished (Delivery Worker Rights Association, 2023). In his analysis, Kıdak (2021) from the TÜMTİS union asserts that the *esnaf-kurye* status creates an "illusion in workers' class perceptions" and points to the "level of alienation" as the main barrier to their

collective actions. Stressing the significance of "class consciousness," Kırdağ suggests that the struggle of *esnaf-kurye* workers should prioritize the demand to attain employee status.

Certainly, this system presents numerous challenges for workers, as outlined in this dissertation. However, the suggestion for the abolition of the system or the unions assigning to *esnaf-kurye* workers to demand employee status does not resonate in workers' protests. Several key points need emphasis here. Initially, we underscored the inherent subordination relationship between platform companies and workers, framing it as an employer-worker dynamic. Yet, we also acknowledged that within capitalism, the definition of workers extends beyond merely wage laborers. Moreover, while asserting that individuals working on platforms are workers is one aspect, it is another matter to insist that they must first articulate a demand for employee status.

Barratt and colleagues (2020), in their research on the app-based food delivery sector in Australia, portray a situation where, in response to legal cases led by unions for the employee classification of platform workers, the workers - predominantly comprised of migrants with temporary residency status - display what they term an "entrepreneurial agency." They argue that the platform discourages collective agency, instead promoting individual expressions of 'entrepreneurial' agency. Accordingly, workers mainly adopt low-level resilience strategies to boost individual earning capacity, aligning with and reinforcing platform business models. Many workers express a lack of long-term commitment to food delivery, hindering the development of ongoing collective structures. In contrast, Australian unions have primarily focused on supporting individual legal cases rather than fostering collective mobilization and organization. While not conclusive, this interplay of institutional and horizontal factors is suggested to account for the limited collective agency in the Australian app-based food delivery sector. Considering that the majority of these workers are migrants with no long-term commitment to their jobs, and existing unions are not actively involved in their organization, workers' reluctance to participate in long-term collective organization is evident. However, given these limitations, it is questionable whether this phenomenon can be accurately characterized as 'entrepreneurial agency.'

Dubal (2017), in this regard, underscores the possibility that platform workers may prefer classification as self-employed or independent contractors rather than employees. In her ethnographic study on San Francisco taxi workers, Dubal identifies significant differences

between the perspectives of white, non-immigrant drivers and those of racial-minority and immigrant drivers regarding independent contractor status. White and non-immigrant workers view being an independent contractor as a "loss," attributing all negative aspects of their job to not being an employee. In contrast, racial-minority and immigrant workers prefer independent contractor status because it provides them with "structural control," "physical freedom," and the "promise of social mobility." While white and non-immigrant workers see this perception of independent contractor status as an "illusion," Dubal argues that for racial-minority and immigrant workers, it is not an "illusion." They appreciate the qualification as independent contractors, believing that employee status would exacerbate existing problems of corruption, racism, and social prejudice against taxi drivers. She then argues because of the very reason of white, non-immigrant workers' "fixation" on "return" to employee status and because they label racial-minority and immigrant workers as "unorganizable" due to their illusions, the possibility of collective action among taxi workers has vanished.

In interviews conducted for this research, many workers expressed the necessity of abolishing the *esnaf-kurye* system. While some suggested not entirely eliminating it, they emphasized the need for regulation in favor of workers. It is noteworthy that some association officials, often described as right-wing, despite not actively working on this issue, also advocate its abolition.

On the other hand, workers' protests are driven by more immediate, urgent, and tangible issues they face in their lives. Whether rallying for pay increases or demonstrating against the recent upsurge in delivery worker fatalities, workers swiftly mobilize. However, their optimism about abolishing *esnaf-kurye* system is limited. They either perceive a deficiency in organizational power capable of achieving this goal or deem it unworthy of time investment due to perceived lack of tangible results. In light of the direct correlation between time loss and income loss, their material conditions do not favor prolonged struggles. Azmanova (2022) underscores the politically disempowering impact of precarity in this context, asserting that it channels all endeavors toward seeking and securing income sources, leaving neither time nor energy for broader struggles. Additionally, considering the overarching weaknesses of labor organizations in resisting precarization, workers' confidence in their collective power to compel platform companies to step back diminishes. The suggestion to rely on perceived collective power, already viewed as lacking, does not seem realistic or empowering to them.

Ford and Honan (2019), in their study on app-based transport workers in Indonesia, explore the challenges associated with integrating driver communities into larger-scale organizations. They argue that mutual aid-based organizing, characterized by horizontal networks and strong social commitment, effectively reaches workers, enhances mobilization capacity, and fosters high member participation. While these initiatives provide practical support and solidarity, they primarily focus on short-term solutions and daily community needs, thus proving insufficient in addressing the legal uncertainties surrounding drivers' worker status. To bring about structural change in the industry, the authors propose a combination of everyday forms of collectivism and traditional union strategies, including large-scale collective action, negotiation, and legal challenges. These attempts, however, face obstacles due to anti-union tactics by companies, internal divisions within the movement, and unions' reluctance to adapt their structures to accommodate mutual aid principles. The study also identifies internal difficulties stemming from differences in values and organizational logics between grassroots mutual aid-based communities and more structured organizations engaging with employers and the state. The union tends to prioritize formal industrial relations processes rather than the lived experiences of drivers. The authors assert that addressing these challenges requires a greater degree of articulation between grassroots communities and more institutionalized organizational forms. The key question posed is how to overcome obstacles and achieve an articulation among these organizations.

In the Turkish context, as we noted, traditional unions have refrained from organizing or making any efforts related to these workers, aside from stating for the abolition of the *esnaf-kurye* system. The lawsuit seeking to recognize *esnaf-kurye* workers as employees was initiated by TEHİS, an independent small union, using an *esnaf-kurye* as a representative. Instead of advocating for an outright ban of the *esnaf-kurye* system, the union opted for a more nuanced approach, advocating for the acknowledgment of labor rights for *esnaf-kurye* workers arising from employment. However, the attendance was limited to 15-20 individuals, and not all of them were *esnaf-kurye* workers. The legal process did not attract the participation of a broader group of workers. The initial hearing, originally scheduled for October 6, 2022, was postponed to April 11, 2023, citing the judge's health problems. Subsequently, another postponement took place, attributed to the judge reportedly having a report on the rescheduled date. This sequence of delays gives the impression that the judicial authority may be intending to gloss over the issue at hand.

In their investigation into delivery platform work in Argentina, Arias and colleagues (2021) examine the effectiveness of unions as the primary organizational structure for workers in response to the emerging challenges posed by platform capitalism. They assert that a union's adaptability, flexibility, and willingness to overhaul concepts and strategies are crucial for expanding its influence and incorporating workers with new identities, such as platform workers. Despite the limitations of the bargaining tradition, especially when confronting multinational platform companies, the authors argue that unions rooted in this tradition are better positioned to intervene and achieve demands under a government with a worker-friendly stance. While immediate success in demands against platform companies was limited, the unions' partial achievements played a vital role in advancing their long-term goals. The authors stress the importance of workers self-identifying as workers, challenging the discourse of entrepreneurialism, and highlighting the precarization of platform work in the public agenda to gradually secure their demands. During the pro-business Macri government from 2015 to 2019, companies operated without regulatory constraints. However, the transition to a more worker-friendly government has provided an opportunity to enact legislation for platform work, ensuring labor rights for delivery workers, with the new government actively undertaking a project to draft such laws. In this context, it is asserted that the emphasis of political unionism, directing its demands toward the state, appears to have regained strength.

However, in the November 2023 elections in Argentina, the far-right candidate Milei, who declared his intention not to implement any regulations regarding platforms, emerged victorious. A considerable number of platform delivery workers supported him during his campaign (Herrera & Iglesia, 2023). In this regard, labor lawyer Ottaviano suggests that platform workers, who already do not have any labor rights, might perceive the notion of regulation as losing their only right, the opportunity of work, in a context of rapidly increasing inflation and worsening working conditions in the formal sector (Iglesia, 2023). Similarly, in the post-apartheid South African context, we highlighted before that Barchiesi (2011: 248) contended that the backing for right-wing politics among precarious workers stems from the government's policy exclusively centered on employment, neglecting the deteriorating material conditions of work, in a setting where such work does not symbolize a dignified existence for either the employed or the unemployed.

These examples underscore the significance of considering the broader state of the labor market and the socio-economic conditions of the country when examining the factors that drive workers to participate in platform work. In the context of this research, we emphasized that platform workers are drawn to this type of work as a response to the challenges they faced in their previous experiences, including long working hours, low wages, intense hierarchical relationships in the workplace, and the physical presence of the employer. In an environment where these conditions persist and the cost of living continues to increase, encouraging workers to transition to wage labor or demanding to be classified as wage workers may not be a particularly attractive proposition.

Another underlying issue lies in the perspective that interprets the inclination of workers to become *esnaf-kurye* as a desire for entrepreneurship or the aspiration to become a boss. This viewpoint dismisses the possibility of effectively organizing these workers in the present by neglecting their subjectivity. As a result, a binary conception arises within a normative wage-centered framework, classifying these workers strictly as either wage earners or potential small capitalist business owners. This viewpoint tends to regard self-employed workers as potential small business owners unless they explicitly adopt the identity or demands of wage workers.

The argument presented here does not deny that some of these workers may indeed aspire to become their own bosses. Instead, it challenges the perspective that universally views them as inherently geared towards becoming small business owners. By treating the category of self-employed as a monolithic entity without distinguishing for instance those who self-appropriate as self-employed and those who do not, this perspective overlooks the distinct needs shaped by these separate class processes. Furthermore, by linking security and legal protection exclusively with waged employment, this perspective complicates the consideration of secure work outside the conventional employee-employer relationship (Hotch, 2000). It becomes essential to recognize the diversity within the self-employed category and understand the unique challenges and aspirations of individuals who may not conform to the conventional narratives of entrepreneurship.

The desire for freedom in the inclination to work as an *esnaf-kurye* can be interpreted from a more autonomist perspective, suggesting that workers deliberately avoid the conventional capitalist work structure characterized by an unequal employee-employer relationship.

Assigning this inclination solely to the supposed lack of class consciousness in these workers and excluding them may inadvertently create an environment where right-wing ideologies could potentially exert influence over them. Failing to acknowledge the material conditions and nuanced motivations behind these choices can oversimplify the narrative, potentially making workers vulnerable to ideologies that exploit their dissatisfaction with the existing system. This understanding creates an opportunity for constructive dialogues addressing their concerns without unintentionally pushing them towards ideologies that may not serve their long-term interests. In this context, the active involvement of unions in the fight against precarization, beyond exclusively safeguarding their members' interests, becomes crucial. By addressing the root causes and working to alter the conditions leading workers to opt for jobs like platform work, these efforts can produce more meaningful outcomes, contributing to the collective empowerment of the working classes.

6.5. Final Reflections: Reimagining Organizational Perspectives to Empower the Precarious

In the recent few years, we have witnessed an increased number of delivery worker organizations. However, the majority of these associations do not align with a militant labor movement and often maintain relationships with existing companies. Despite their efforts, independent unions, committees, and solidarity networks face challenges in building strong organizational capacities. Conventional unions have not taken the lead in organizing *esnaf-kurye* workers, while the chamber of self-employed craftsmen actively strives to consolidate and govern the *esnaf-kurye* system. Workers with a specific ideological commitment may gather around these organizations based on their views, although their numbers are very few. Consequently, these organizational structures fail to attract widespread participation from *esnaf-kurye* workers, who grapple with issues like prolonged working hours and persistent concerns about subsistence.

The demanding work hours present obstacles to socialization and organizational efforts, leading workers to rely on social media groups for immediate problem-solving. However, these groups prove less effective in formulating long-term strategies. The piecework payment system, combined with bonus-like incentives, turns wages into individualized targets, hindering a collective interpretation of work conditions. The existence of unequal incentives and

discriminatory practices further fractures shared perceptions, diverting attention from the exploitation common for all workers.

Despite facing numerous challenges, workers have initiated various protests, often centered around demands for increased pay. The urgency of immediate concerns, coupled with perceived organizational limitations, dampens optimism about achieving comprehensive change. Material conditions, such as time and income constraints, further impede workers' willingness to engage in prolonged struggles. The impact of precarity is palpable as it redirects efforts toward securing immediate income sources, leaving minimal room for broader, sustained struggles. In fact, *esnaf-kurye* workers do not differ much from other workers in this respect. This raises the critical question of the self-reproduction of social movements—not just how individuals reproduce themselves, but how movements establish and sustain collectivities.

There is an essential need for an organizational perspective that considers both the material conditions of workers—where work consumes a significant amount of their time and dominates their lives within the increasing realm of monetization—and their expectations from work, as manifested in their inclination towards becoming *esnaf-kurye*. Addressing the root of the issues is imperative, considering why do workers engage in this job, and more fundamentally, why do they work. Critical issues such as stringent subordination relations and increasing exploitation at work, the working regime that leaves no time for living, let alone organizing, the absence of collective mechanisms for workers to rely on, and the challenges posed by movements' limited social reproduction capacity are indeed pivotal considerations not only for *esnaf-kurye* organizations but also for building a resilient and powerful labor movement to counter the growing domination of capital.

In this regard, Azmanova (2022) argues that precarity arises from a misalignment between responsibility and power, with governments exercising power without corresponding responsibility, while workers bear responsibility without commensurate power. As precarity represents a politically induced disempowerment, perceived as an inability to cope, its core essence is rooted in powerlessness. Therefore, the antithesis of precarity is not security but rather empowerment, essential for both individuals and societies.

However, traditional unionism in Turkey, concentrating on bargaining agreements for members, further marginalizes precarious workers and exacerbates the broader disconnect between unions and the workforce. This underscores the urgent need for a more inclusive approach that empowers all workers, especially those facing precarious conditions, to foster collective action and instigate meaningful change. This perspective would pave the way for a broader struggle based on the alliance of different sections of class and the realization of their collective power. In this regard, unions' commitment to fighting against precarization with workers would not only encompass and address broad segments of the class but also revitalize the unions as an essential social force.



7. Conclusion

The platform economy almost unfolds as a manifestation of the theoretical abstraction of the 'labor market,' where the concept takes on its literal meaning, materializing neoclassical economic presumptions and their idealized notions. Serving as the embodiment of the 'labor market,' it functions as a marketplace where labor, akin to other commodities in different markets, is bought and sold. With reliance on ratings and dynamic pricing, the platform economy reinforces the notion that labor is comparable to any other tradable commodity, quantifying it and subjecting its value to the volatile forces of supply and demand, governed by market rules.

The platform economy not only reshapes the nature and organization of work but also concurrently consolidates the very meaning of being a worker, as understood from the perspective of capital, reformulating it in the interests of capital. Under this arrangement, platform workers are compelled to shoulder the responsibility for all costs and risks related to the execution of their work and the reproduction of their labor. They lack traditional labor rights and protections. Acknowledging that these rights were gained through historical struggles waged by the working class - a tangible expression of their collective strength - their eradications in the realm of the platform economy signifies a significant shift in power relations between capital and labor. This shift, occurring within the declining power of labor forces, is also an ongoing process deliberately intended to further weaken labor, reflecting a strategic move by platform companies to enhance their control over labor. Therefore, it indicates a reconfiguration tilted in favor of capital within the power dynamics of capital and labor. In essence, a platform worker embodies the ideal worker desired by capitalists, for whom they do not have to assume any responsibility. Indeed, labor in the platform economy is (re)situated as a bare commodity—a form to which capitalism has historically tend to diminish labor.

Moreover, this unfolds within the high-tech and digitized realm of the platform economy, where the labor performed by platform workers is subjected to an array of expanding disciplinary tools and control mechanisms. Financialized companies, enabling consumers to enjoy the seamless conveniences of technology with a simple click to place orders, engage workers through on-demand, piece-rate contracts, ultimately leaving them in a precarious state. Presenting

themselves as technology firms and positioning themselves as mere "mediators," these platform companies strategically refrain from acknowledging their status as employers. This deliberate stance allows them to sidestep legal accountabilities associated with employer status and labor rights, enabling them to evade responsibility even in instances of worker accidents or fatalities. Thus, this sector signifies a reconfiguration, entwining cutting-edge technology with enduring labor extraction strategies deeply rooted in the historical context of capitalism, orchestrated by platform companies to serve their interests. It also reveals an uneven distribution of technology, with varying access, utilization, and experiences among different participants.

Platform companies disguise their role as the central coordinators of service production, creating a scenario where workers and customers engage in direct interaction. Customers perceive it as a 'personal service', and are prompted to rate this service – essentially, the workers' labor. These ratings impact workers' earnings and their continued ability to work. For companies, this translates into enhanced control over labor by integrating ratings into their management mechanism, reducing workers' services to numerical entities. The significance of this dynamic is amplified when considering the nature of platform work, which typically involves fulfilling various essential needs such as food delivery, grocery shopping, transportation, domestic, and care work. However, the inherent ambiguity of service work, oscillating between addressing essential needs and catering to personal desires, complicates the distinction between the two. In the context of the platform service arrangement, this distinction becomes less significant, as platforms frame the work in a precarizing and devaluing manner, restrict workers' agency and control, organize the service within a personalized setting and effectively transform personal desires into market demands. Hence, the platform economy is closely related to the inseparable organization and valuation of social reproduction relations.

Consequently, the platform economy molds the very fabric and structure of work, redefining its essence and organization, and altering the dynamics of power between capital and labor. The dynamic not only shapes how laboring bodies perceive, experience, and enact their work and lives but also simultaneously transforms the broader organization of (re)production relations.

In pursuit of understanding these critical aspects and their interrelations, this dissertation explored the experiences of platform delivery workers in Istanbul, known as *esnaf-kurye*, engaged with the three major companies—Getir, Trendyol, and Yemeksepeti—operating

within the food and grocery delivery platform sector. Dedicated to examining the localized, lived, and contested dimensions of the delivery platform economy within the Turkish context, it delved into how these workers experience, make sense of, and enact their *esnaf-kurye* position, how they relate to other workers and the company, how they reproduce themselves, and critically question the interconnectedness of their experiences with broader social (re)production relations. The study tried to unravel the desires, perceptions, contradictions, and understandings of workers in their complexity, closely scrutinizing the contextual and nuanced meanings they attach to work, autonomy, control, and organization. Additionally, the study addressed how workers' objective work conditions, alongside the broader socio-economic landscape, and their perceptions of self and community, shape their experiences at work, interactions with other workers, articulation of demands, and collective capacities within the realm of platform work. The research further explored the protective mechanisms relied upon for the reproduction of work, workers, and workers' organizations, while also investigating the challenges that limit their reproductions.

Accordingly, to properly situate platform work and understand the dynamics it engenders in the Global South, in the second chapter, this thesis first grounded precarity and technological change as dynamic processes inherent to capitalism, historically embedded differently across countries. It argued the working class could be simplistically equated with waged laborer, as capitalism has historically and globally encompassed diverse employment modalities such as non-wage labor, piecework, subcontracted self-employment, temporary work, and home-based work. Hence, it critiqued the framework that construed precarity from a narrow viewpoint merely as a deviation from one model of work relations, specifically Standard Employment Relations, rooted in a particular historically and socially contextualized experience significant substantially in advanced capitalist countries. It objected to the identification of precarity within the framework of the declining position of labor in the post-Fordist context, arguing that this perspective consequently confines precarity to a labor market characteristic.

Rejecting a techno-determinist view, the second section of the chapter critically addressed the thesis on automation-led 'end of work' and suggested technological change as a social process shaped by multifaceted forces such as economic, social, and gendered relations. The rise of platform work exemplifies that the contemporary landscape is witnessing the emergence of complex arrangements of work. Therefore, it stressed the need to examine how technology is

actively transforming labor processes, altering the nature and organization of work, and reshaping the division of labor within the framework of global capitalism, and called for redirecting attention to workers' experiences.

The last section of the chapter contemplated how to conceptualize platform work in the Global South within the context of precarity, urging caution against oversimplifying it as a mere facet of the labor market. Building on the analysis in the first section, it suggested that considering precarity as an analytical tool, which allows the tracing of the structural origins of workers' subordination manifesting differently across contexts and historicizing the contradictions within contemporary capitalism, enables a profound understanding of the complex social relations (re)produced by the platform economy in the Global South. In this regard, the section underscored the necessity of a critical perspective that takes into account the exploitative practices of companies, the commodification of labor and (re)production relations, and recognizes worker agency within a dynamic analysis capable of capturing workers' subjectivities.

The third chapter began by examining perspectives on the purported distinctiveness of platform companies, questioning ideas that aim to separate the platform economy from conventional capitalist labor relations. Contrary to assertions likening the dominance of these platform companies to a form of feudalism, emphasizing capital accumulation through rent, it contended that these companies are fundamentally capitalist. The chapter substantiated this argument by highlighting the substantial investments made by these companies, the nature of their revenues, the indispensable role of states in the platform economy, and the significance of legal regulations. Subsequently, the chapter addressed the misclassification of platform workers as independent contractors, examining lawsuits filed by workers and trade unions against platform companies, particularly in the Global North, regarding the employment status of platform workers. Recognizing variances in platformization across national contexts, the chapter asserted that the transformation of work and labor relations within platforms is intricately linked to economic, social, and political power dynamics. These dynamics are influenced by factors such as government policies, public institutions, the strength of labor organizations, and the legal framework. It highlighted, in this regard, the limitations of solely relying on the misclassification framework to challenge the corporate power of platforms. Stepping into the field of research, the final section examined the recent surge of e-commerce and digital

platforms in Turkey introducing key platform companies in the country. It provided a descriptive analysis of the food and grocery delivery sector, emphasizing the rapid platformization of the Turkish economy.

The fourth chapter presented the research findings on labor relations and workers' experiences within the food and grocery delivery platform in Istanbul, seeking to understand how workers experience, make sense of, and pursue their *esnaf-kurye* position in the platform economy and how it related to the meanings they attribute to work and being a worker. The chapter delved into several aspects of work, addressing a pivotal concern, work-related diseases, accidents, and fatalities. It scrutinized the social, organizational, and political implications of the piece-rate payment system and how workers perceive incentives such as bonuses and promotions provided by companies, investigating their effects on workers' interpretations of themselves, their work, and other workers. The chapter also examined how workers' interactions and relationships with customers impact their self-identity, integrity, and judgment regarding the worth of their jobs. Additionally, it questioned how workers' masculinity was both (re)produced and (re)formed within this work context.

Highlighting two key findings, the research rejected framing the workers' inclination to become *esnaf-kurye* as merely an illusion imposed by platforms or 'false consciousness.' Instead, it considered this orientation by examining their prior work experiences within the broader socio-economic context of the country. The study posited that workers' previous unfavorable work experiences, characterized by strict hierarchies, subordinate relationships in factories, workshops, or service sectors, constant managerial presence, exposure to commands, shouting, or workplace harassment, alongside a lack of better options in the labor market, drove individuals to become *esnaf-kurye*. The potential for relative autonomy and the physical absence of managers or bosses emerged as decisive factors leading workers to this profession. Additionally, extended working hours in their previous jobs, delayed salary payments, non-receipt of overtime wages, and the absence of social insurance enhanced workers' inclination.

Secondly, the study stressed on the aspects of platform work extending beyond algorithms, delving into traditional labor management and control mechanisms, including arbitrary wage cuts, performance and bonus systems, and piece-rate payment. These factors compel workers to endure extensive hours, exert more effort, and take additional risks, thereby negating the

promised flexibility at work in practice. Within the Turkish context, the significant role of various managers at different levels in labor management was underscored, operating within a hierarchical structure across all three companies. These managerial figures, with titles such as consultant, supervisor, field manager, chief, or regional manager, play a crucial role, particularly during instances of worker unrest and protests, serving to pacify reactions and control demonstrations. Additionally, at Getir, supervisors wield authority over daily or weekly work schedules, mandating workers to labor for 12 hours a day. Consequently, the study argued that the historical complexity of labor control strategies rejects a linear progression, and the platform work model does not eliminate organization-based control typically observed in physical workspaces. It is, therefore, more accurate to examine the widening repertoire of control mechanisms employed by platforms, rather than narrowly associating the platform economy with concepts such as 'algorithmic control.' This approach considers the social embeddedness of platforms, recognizing variations across countries within larger systemic dynamics.

The fifth chapter scrutinized platform work through the lens of social reproduction, exploring how this male-dominated reproductive service sector ensures its own reproduction in precarious conditions. It argued that workers' reliance on the family, particularly on women's unpaid reproductive labor within the household, enables them to sustain extended working hours despite declining earnings and worsening working conditions. It contended that this gendered division of labor serves as the social precondition for platforms to offer only a partial solution to the problem of social reproduction through the market. The chapter examined the significant absence of women from the paid workforce in the households of delivery workers, contextualizing it within the inadequacies of elderly and childcare services and their gendered nature in Turkey. Turning to the labor that reproduces workers enabled an understanding of the links between the market of social reproduction and the households of reproductive workers. This, in turn, facilitated the analysis of both the social and gendered conditions of the market of social reproduction, which delivery workers serve in the platform economy, and the social and gendered relations it affects. Thus, the chapter posited that this gendered configuration not only serves for the functioning of platforms, but, conversely, reinforces the family unit through unequal gendered relations. This dual dynamic implies a social configuration characterized by simultaneous marketization and familiarism, grounded in the privatization of social reproduction - a dynamic aligned with the recent social policies of the Turkish government.

The chapter demonstrated that the households of delivery workers embody this dual dynamic. In the commodified care environment, women often refrain from engaging in paid employment as they take care of children and the elderly as well as other reproductive task at home, while men undertake paid reproductive work by delivering meals and groceries to other individual households. Amid the increasing marketization of social services and the dominance of financial considerations, the chapter pointed out that these households encounter challenges in reproducing themselves both socially and physically. It further explored how the increasing commodification of life affects workers' perceptions, social relationships, lives overall. Considering the lack of protective mechanisms provided by platforms, including the obligation for these workers to cover their own health and social security premiums, it delved into the challenges faced by delivery platform workers. It demonstrated that these workers often find themselves compelled to incur debts, relinquish basic health security, and forfeit their social insurance rights - essentially trading their future for daily survival - within the examination of the broader context of the recent transformation of the health system in Turkey.

The final chapter explored workers' cooperative mechanism, organizational forms, collective actions, and modes of resistance. To achieve this, it first scrutinized various existing forms of delivery workers' organizations, including associations, unions, committees, and the recently established chamber of tradesmen. The chapter also addressed the utilization of digital media, discussing their operations and functions in the context of workers' organization. Essentially, the chapter navigated the landscape of collective organization, outlining its potential and constraints. It focused on three major actions within the platform delivery sector: the strike of Trendyol Express *esnaf-kurye* workers, who perform deliveries using their cars, in January 2022; the struggle of Yemeksepeti delivery workers (platform workers in employee status) during February-March 2022; and the protest of Trendyol Go *esnaf-kurye* workers in January 2023. All three initiatives were worker-initiated, predominantly fueled by demands for increased pay, and rapidly mobilized through social media channels. It discussed the limitations, contradictory dynamics, and challenges within these actions, exploring the potential for a sustained collective capacity among *esnaf-kurye* workers.

The chapter underscored that demanding work hours present obstacles to socialization and organizational efforts, leading workers to resort social media groups for immediate problem-

solving. However, these groups prove less effective in formulating long-term strategies, despite their significant role in fueling protests. While major protests were sparked by immediate concerns, such as the demand for increased pay, the chapter noted that their impact on strengthening collectivity was limited. It argued that the palpable impact of precarity redirects efforts toward securing immediate income sources, leaving minimal room for broader, sustained struggles. Within the chapter, it was identified that among the primary obstacles to the organization of *esnaf-kurye* workers, the extended working hours, dependence on earned income, and the resulting fear of contract termination stand out, challenges common across various sectors. Additionally, the chapter highlighted the counterstrategies employed by companies, involving various manipulations and the use of supervisors to intimidate workers. It pointed out that traditional unionism in Turkey primarily focuses on negotiating collective bargaining agreements limited to union members, neglecting broader sections of the working class, such as informal workers, subcontracted workers, and domestic workers, including *esnaf-kurye* workers. The fragmented and weak structure of existing organizations in the sector was also emphasized, illustrating its impact on workers' engagement in building a united struggle and eroding their confidence in their collective power to compel platform companies to backtrack.

Consequently, the chapter emphasized the crucial necessity for an organizational perspective that takes into account both the material conditions of workers and their expectations from work, as reflected in their inclination towards becoming *esnaf-kurye*. This perspective was argued to entail addressing critical issues such as stringent subordination relations, lack of autonomy at work, a demanding working regime that allows no time for living, let alone organizing, the absence of collective mechanisms for workers to depend on, and the challenges arising from movements' limited self-reproductive capacity, which complicates the organization of workers. These considerations were argued to be pivotal not solely for *esnaf-kurye* organizations but also for the development of a resilient and powerful labor movement positioned to counter the escalating trend of precarization.

This thesis began with two poignant vignettes featuring platform delivery workers. The first narrated the tragic death of a worker in Italy, whose employment was terminated just one day after his passing by the company through an automated deactivation message, revealing the company's apparent indifference to his death. The second unfolded in Turkey, where, following

the death of a worker, the company not only failed to offer support to the grieving family but also initiated investigations against workers. The company deemed the collective commemoration and display of solidarity for the deceased worker as provocative. In the pages that followed, this thesis delved into the experiences of these workers, underscoring the profound degradation of their labor and, moreover, their lives. Concurrently, the thesis advocated for a perspective that acknowledged and embraced our social dependencies, centering on the regeneration of both individuals and life. It laid bare the complex dynamics between the organization and valuation of (re)reproduction relations - or, put another way, between precarization of labor and the collective empowerment of labor - in capitalist society. The aim of this thesis can, in a way, be formulated as probing this vast terrain from the workers' perspectives within the frame of platform delivery work.

This thesis addressed precarity as a phenomenon that manifests in different ways across time and geography within the context of social power relations, firmly situating it within the framework of the capitalist mode of production. Precarity was considered an inherent dimension of the process of the commodification of labor. As a result, the thesis opposed the perspective that marginalized certain workers under labels such as the 'precariat,' positioning them in opposition to the proletariat and treating them as a distinct entity. It argued that precarity involves depriving individuals of the ability to exist and control their lives beyond the confines of capitalist relations, signifying their deprivation of the means to reproduce themselves and, consequently, their obligation to sell their labor to survive. Therefore, thesis posited that precarization and devaluation of labor are fundamentally linked to how and on what basis work is organized in capitalism. It argued that the essential foundation of labor control remains the subordinate position of workers, while labor management under capitalism has employed diverse mechanisms, including those facilitated by technology.

Within this framework, the thesis addressed platform work as a contemporary manifestation of the capitalist labor process, representing the latest capital move towards commodifying and precarizing labor. It argued that the operation of platform work is not an inevitable outcome of technological progress but rather is rooted in capitalism's traditional labor extraction strategies. The thesis proposed an understanding of technological change as a multifaceted social process shaped by economic, cultural, and gendered relations, which, in turn, reshapes these relations. The argument centered on the idea that the incorporation of technology into specific sectors,

tasks, and labor processes should be examined within these dynamic social contexts. Moreover, it emphasized the importance of investigating how technology transforms labor processes, alters the nature and organization of work, and reshapes the global division of labor. The thesis underscored that the platform economy exemplifies the unequal distribution of technological progress, wherein workers are assigned to traditional service works on-demand on a piece-rate basis. At this juncture, a critical aspect of low-wage service jobs, often classified as unskilled occupations, was mentioned. These roles inherently present challenges to automation, as tasks like cooking, cleaning, and caregiving require physical effort and a blend of emotional, relational, and social intelligence, taking into account the wishes and needs of the service recipient, and necessitating the ability to take initiative. However, the inability to replace these characteristics with technological tools does not elevate these jobs from their low-paid status. Notably, despite the irreplaceable nature of these tasks, the fact that they are predominantly performed by women at home without pay and the availability of 'cheap labor' perpetuates the low-paid and undervalued status of these jobs. Even though these jobs demand various qualifications, they continue to be perceived as unskilled works. In the realm of platform work, delivery platform workers similarly engage in tasks that cannot be easily replicated by automation. However, this uniqueness does not translate into increased value or recognition. Their labor is viewed as replaceable within the existence of a large surplus population. This once again demonstrates that the valuation of labor in capitalism is shaped within the existing unequal economic, social, and gendered relations.

The thesis found that work within Turkish delivery platforms is generally characterized by extensive working hours with a high risk of accidents and deaths, low earnings, limited autonomy, arbitrary dismissals, and a lack of protection, leading to workers' reliance on their families. Additionally, it stated that companies maintain an organization-busting position, with several control mechanisms in place, including traditional labor control methods such as the use of physical managers. Consequently, delivery platform work represents a landscape where technological determinism falls short, labor control relations persist, and where the valuation of (reproductive) labor remains a critical issue. In this regard, this research identified shared commonalities with the challenges faced by many other workers in Turkey, as this situation is not unique to platform workers. It was determined that among the main obstacles to their organization, factors such as long working hours, immediate dependence on income earned in an environment of intensifying monetization, and therefore the fear of being fired, do not differ

much from other broad segments of workers.

However, the objective here was not to dissolve the distinct aspects of platform work. This finding rather reflects the research's approach. While recognizing the distinct issues within platform work, this study refrained from formulating assertive concepts that might overestimate specific aspects, claiming novelty and originality. It avoided leaning towards conceptualizations that might oversimplify complex processes or subject workers to abstract categorizations. Hence, the study critically scrutinized existing concepts in the literature. In this context, the research adopted an approach rooted in the experiences, narratives, perceptions, views, interrelations, and actions of workers. It allowed an examination of the interplay between platform work and the broader economic, social, and political landscape, encompassing the labor market, labor organizations, state social service policies, households, and gendered relations. Consequently, it is not surprising that this perspective, which essentially regards *esnaf-kurye* workers as individuals compelled to sell their labor in order to survive and seeks to understand them within the dynamic framework of these relations, has ultimately identified shared commonalities with other workers.

As a dialectical result of being dependent on income to survive, the protests in which *esnaf-kurye* workers organized in the largest numbers were those demanding a pay increase. This thesis discussed the constraints faced in these actions, the general limitations for *esnaf-kurye* workers to organize, and the difficulties in creating longer-term, permanent organizations. In this context, the neglect by conventional unions to organize *esnaf-kurye* workers, as they overlook wider segments of the working class, was critiqued.

Such an organizational perspective carries serious repercussions. By confining themselves to representing the interests of their members, which constitute a limited number of employee-status workers, unions marginalize a broader segment of the class. This action intensifies divisions within the working class and exacerbates the already existing disconnect between unions and workers. Consequently, unions become less likely to convince workers that they are committed to advocating for the common interests of the entire class. Workers tend to perceive labor organizations as similar to other interest groups, leading to increased distancing from them. The practice of yellow unionism further reinforces this perception. In the absence of robust collective labor organization, workers tend to rely more on traditional collectivities such

as family, thereby perpetuating the family as an unequal gendered realm.

This thesis argued that the perspective interpreting *esnaf-kurye* workers as lacking class consciousness or desiring to be bosses - shared by conventional unionism as well - is essentially rooted in the insufficient problematization of capitalist work as a subordinate, control relationship between worker and employer. Consequently, it falls short in capturing the potential pursuits of autonomy among the workers. This neglect fosters an environment in which right-wing ideologies can readily influence workers, rendering them susceptible to these ideologies that exploit their dissatisfaction with the existing system. It's important to clarify that our assertion was not that *esnaf-kurye* workers inherently hold anti-capitalist or autonomist views. Instead, the study aimed to draw attention to the fact that the perspective viewing them as potential bosses dismisses the very possibility of the existence of such views within workers, thereby undermines the potential for channeling workers' dissatisfaction toward an anti-capitalist orientation.

This study recounted the experiences of delivery workers who persist in working even under adverse weather conditions out of the necessity to earn a living. It emphasized that the opportunity to earn an income exceeding the minimum wage, even at the cost of extended working hours, was a significant factor influencing their decision to become *esnaf-kurye*. In a highly monetized environment, *esnaf-kurye* workers often sacrifice their time, and consequently, their lives for the prospect of a meaningful income. In these circumstances, even regulations by authorities, such as the prohibition of motorcycle delivery due to safety concerns, can be perceived as constraints by these workers. For those who even risk their lives to sustain themselves, security might paradoxically translate into restriction. On a broader scale, the proposal of regulations, especially considering the already low wages and difficult conditions in formal sectors, might not strongly attract these workers. It could be perceived by them as limiting their ability to make a living. Aware of the dilemma faced by workers, companies exploit their predicament in the name of freedom. In response, labor organizations must consider these material conditions and formulate strategies that can address the challenges workers face, taking into account the significant trade-offs workers are forced to make.

This thesis noticed the existence of groups that operate as informal platforms on social media, facilitating piece-rate deliveries for workers, with the founders earning commissions from these

transactions. Notably, some group founders had a background as former delivery worker. As market relations expand within capitalism, various side markets or small informal markets are formed. This gives rise to new workers and small-scale entrepreneurs within these nascent markets. In an environment, where money reigns as the dominant medium of exchange, a monetary perspective on life and relationships becomes increasingly prevalent. This often implies a compelled adaptation, as seen in the necessity for individuals to engage in paid employment. Instead of seeking potential small business owners within the nature of workers and regarding them as future bosses, it is crucial to interpret this trend as a process instigated by the very capitalist dynamics. The focus should be on opposing the root causes of these dynamics. This perspective, primarily focused on outcomes, also tends to misunderstand precarity, almost treating precarious workers as the source of precarity itself. Instead of confronting the forces subjecting individuals to precarious conditions, it tends to marginalize the workers. Therefore, the goal should be to counteract the prevailing capitalist forces, which, through its social organization, not only compel but also exacerbate the prevalence of monetary visions.

Consequently, significant portions of the working class encounter difficulties in organizing, and unionism, primarily focused on its own base, is gradually losing influence. The perspective that prioritizes wage labor and limits its efforts to securing wage increases for this specific labor force proves inadequate. This approach tends to forget that the fact that the wage labor model itself was forged through the hard-fought rights gained by workers' struggles in specific socio-historical contexts. What is crucial today is not merely an attempt to preserve certain acquired statuses but to re-establish the collective power that once succeeded in obtaining them. Rather than defending statuses that are increasingly detached from the reality of large segments of the working class, the emphasis should be on advocating for the tangible workers who face precarity every day and raising the genuine demands distilled from their experiences.

This thesis, therefore, asserted that the remedy for precarity is empowerment, not security. Against the increasing precarization and devaluation of labor by capital, resistance can only be achieved through the active struggle of workers who are directly subjected to these processes. As these workers organize, asserting the value of their labor and empowering themselves, the strength of this organization will be crucial to oppose the precarization of labor, resisting capitalism's latest move to expand its power relations in its favor. Hence, it means defending

labor as a whole against capital—a collective response to the increasing commodification of labor, going beyond the conventional interests of specific groups of workers.

Moreover, expanding the focus beyond wage workers, predominantly comprised of industrial male workers, allows for an emphasis on the significance of reproductive labor, foundational for the reproduction of our lives. Empowerment of these workers entails contemplating the organization and valuation of reproductive labor. A perspective centered on the reproduction of life carries potentials for a broader social transformation, beyond partial corrections in the wage relationship, which is nothing but the means of the subordination of the working class. Allowing individuals to regain control over their lives, experience genuine free time, pursue self-realization, and foster care for one another and the world, it paves the way for a new society built on values fundamentally different from those prevailing today.

The study primarily identified several existing problems and, consequently, concentrated more on the challenges faced by workers, yet it did not adequately delve into the favorable aspects of work. Among the positive features mentioned, two notable ones were identified, but they came with inherent dilemmas. Workers often expressed an appreciation for the social nature of the job, yet paradoxically, the demanding long hours left them with minimal time for a social life. Similarly, they valued the comfort of working in an open space and the freedom associated with using a motorcycle. However, this freedom was accompanied by the constant fear of accidents and death, exacerbated by the pressure to work at high speeds. These experiences highlight the notion that work takes over lives, despite its primary purpose being to sustain life. The examination of workers' networks of cooperation, solidarity, and coping mechanisms, in this regard, deserves closer attention for a more nuanced understanding.

This study limited its scope to platform workers in Istanbul, examining platform work from the workers' perspective. Research conducted in other cities and smaller urban areas may reveal different dynamics. Exploring the structure, operations, and market strategies of platform companies will shed light on the dynamics of the platform industry. Additionally, investigations on platforms from the customers' perspective will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the platformization phenomenon in the Turkish social context. The managers, who are noted to play important roles in business management in this study, need to be examined more closely. Last but not least, it seems crucial to investigate the delivery platform

economy based on personal services from an ecological perspective, considering the effects of the platform's operations, logistics, and overall business model on the reproduction of the earth.



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