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"Danish is never a Requirement for these Jobs": Platform Housecleaning in Denmark through a Migration Lens

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"DANISH IS NEVER
A REQUIREMENT FOR THESE JOBS":
PLATFORM HOUSECLEANING
IN DENMARK THROUGH
A MIGRATION LENS

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Abstract: The worldwide expansion of digital labour platforms has a transformative impact on labour markets, reconfiguring employment relations and labour management both on a local and global scale. Lately, the growing literature on digital labour platforms is increasingly documenting how platform workers around the world are to a great extent migrants. Our article draws on data from empirical research on digital platforms providing housecleaning in Denmark, to emphasise how the intersection of migrant work, digital technologies, labour market regulations and migration law exacerbate inequalities and institutionalise precarious working conditions. We analyse platform housecleaning in Denmark through the lens of the "institutionalisation of precarity" and "Autonomy of Migration" concepts, to highlight that it is a phenomenon simultaneously co-constructed by migrants' agency and structural factors. We conclude that critical studies on platform labour and future research should engage deeper with the intersecting realities (legal, social, gendered etc.) that shape migrant workers' precarious lives, and migrants' own strategies to navigate the shortcomings of exclusive and hostile labour market environments.

Keywords: gig-economy, housecleaning platforms, Denmark, institutionalisation of precarity, autonomy of migration.

INTRODUCTION

Digital labour platforms acting as online intermediaries who match the supply and demand of labour have proliferated all over the world in the past fifteen years, an evolution which

consolidated what has been termed the "gig-economy" (Wood-cock, Graham 2019). The worldwide expansion of these plat-forms has a transformative impact on labour markets, reconfig-uring employment relations and labour management both on a local and global scale (Vallas, Schor 2020). These transfor-mations and the implications deriving from them have triggered an extensive interdisciplinary body of literature on many as-pects of digital labour platforms. Two main themes emerging in this literature are misclassification of labour and the algorithmic management of workers (Lata et al. 2022). What has been less explicitly articulated is that platform workers all over the world are to a great extent migrants (Altenried 2021; van Doorn et al. 2022; van Doorn, Vijay 2021), especially when it comes to what the ILO terms as "location-based platforms" (ILO 2021), which are platforms mediating geographically tethered tasks such as ride hailing, food delivery or housecleaning (e.g., Lam, Triandafyllidou 2021; Newlands 2022; Bor 2021). Investigating housecleaning platforms is highly relevant in Denmark, which prides of being the first country in the world where a collective agreement between a cleaning platform and a labour union (Hilfr.com and 3F respectively) was signed, in 2018 (Ilsøe 2020). Digital labour platforms have been promoted by the Danish state and local stakeholders as offering opportunities to businesses and consumers (Danish Government 2019), despite early research warning on the fact that many workers on these platforms are already excluded from the wide range of benefits offered by the Danish welfare state (Weber 2018). Our article draws on data from research on three housecleaning platforms operating in Denmark, to analyse relations between digital la-bour platforms and migrant labour in the Danish context.

More specifically, the aim of our paper is to investigate how migrant workers on three housecleaning platforms operating in Denmark experience the intersection of labour market regula-tions and migration legislation and how such experiences relate to what we describe as institutionalised precarity (Floros, Jørgensen 2020). Through focusing on migrant workers' expe-riences, we stress out their agency in contending such institu-tionalisation of precarity. In our analysis we identify strategies deployed by migrants to improve their daily working lives,

which are subject to a top-down procedure of precarisation, imposed through practices of housecleaning platforms and specific Danish legislation and labour market regulations. Our theoretical framework draws on the concept of "institutionalisation of migrant precarity" (Floros, Jørgensen 2020) and the Autonomy of Migration (AoM) approach (Metcalfe 2022; Mezzadra 2010). The AoM approach helps us emphasise that the intersection of migrant work, labor market regulations and migration law also is a border struggle; that "borders are everywhere" as Balibar notes (2002). The rationale for combining these two approaches in our paper is a deliberate attempt to avoid the portraying of migrants as mere victims of platform companies. On the one hand, platforms are popular to thousands of migrant – mainly female – workers, who sign up to Danish housecleaning platforms pursuing an easier entry point to the labour market, looking for a temporary employment solution and/or a complementary income. On the other hand, platforms are content with the prolongation of the status quo which keeps most platform companies detached from the Danish industrial relations system – a system established on collective agreements between labour unions and employers' associations, and minimum state intervention – which allows them to circumvent existing labour legislation (Munkholm, Schjøler 2018). Meanwhile, the Danish state introduces some half-measures, which do not drastically address the ills of working in the unregulated environment of the Danish gig-economy. A good example is the restriction of holiday working visas from Argentina and Chile in 2019 and the simultaneous prohibition for such visa-holders to work as self-employed. The state is penalizing specific categories of migrant mobility rather than digital labour platforms which take advantage of this mobility.

The article proceeds as follows: First we provide a brief outline of previous literature and the state of the art on migrants working for location-based platforms in the gig-economy. We continue from this overview to outline our theoretical framework for the article. Our point of departure here includes concepts relating to institutionalisation of precarity which we counter-pose to understandings drawing on AoM. Following that, we present our methodological approach. We then proceed

with our analytical section. First, we describe the Danish con-
text of our analysis and especially the landscape of digital
housecleaning platforms in Denmark and their regulatory
framework. Then, we focus on indicators of precarious working
lives such as job insecurity, income insecurity, and insecurity
caused by the exclusion from welfare benefits and refer to the
role of the manifold intersecting identities of migrants (e.g.,
gender, race, residence permit status) in aggravating such inse-
curities. Next, we elaborate on how these insecurities become
institutionalised by relating the impact of specific structural
components regulating labour market access and conditions to
experiences of interviewed migrant platform housecleaners and
discuss how the AoM perspective can nuance such findings.
The article ends with a conclusive discussion.

MIGRANTS IN THE GIG-ECONOMY

A growing body of literature has engaged with the multidi-
mensional insecurities deriving from location-based platform
work. These include among others income insecurity, insecurity
caused by rating systems, gendered insecurity when working
isolated in private domestic environments, as well as insecurity
caused by the exclusion from welfare benefits and the lack of
future employment perspectives (e.g., Moore 2018; Flanagan
2019; van Doorn 2020; Campbell 2022). The overall uncer-
tainty and instability inherent to location-based platform work
has led scholars to classify it as just a subtype of precarious work
(Montgomery, Baglioni 2021). Despite the relative lack and
complexity of official and corporate data on platform de-
mographics, international research has highlighted how mi-
grants form a significant part of location-based platforms, such
as food delivery, domestic work or ride hailing (ILO 2021).
This prevalence is documented in various contexts around the
globe (Tandon, Rathi 2022; Zhou 2022; Jimenez 2022; van
Doorn 2020; Webster, Zhang 2020). Especially in domestic
work and housecleaning platforms the workforce is not simply
of migrant descent but also highly gendered and racialised, fol-
lowing the historical patterns of informality and low-pay in

domestic work (Flanagan 2019; Tandon, Rathi 2022). Nevertheless, literature on this type of platforms is sparse internationally (e.g., Ticona, Mateescu 2018; van Doorn 2020; Bor 2021), also due to the invisibility of platform housecleaners in the public sphere (Mateescu, Ticona 2021; Ecker et al. 2021).

Despite the elevated share of migrants in location-based platforms' workforce, literature combining these platforms to migration studies had been limited until recently. During the last two years, the interrelation of migration and platform work has become a fast-growing research field, especially through empirical studies discussing e.g., how gig-economy relates to the integration of migrant newcomers in the Canadian labour market (Lam, Triandafyllidou 2021), looking into structural issues of how migrant status and uncertainty are combined with platform work in Australia and China (Holtum et al. 2022; Zhou 2022) or analyzing the rise of Uber in London through the framework of "racial platform capitalism" (Gebrial 2022). Scholars engage with concepts from critical migration studies to analyse these interrelations, highlighting the fact that features of location-based platform work such as algorithmic management or the misclassification of employment relations are not analytically sufficient to address the complex livelihoods of migrant workers in the gig-economy. Articles by Altenried (2021) and van Doorn and Vijay (2021) situate digital labour platforms within the "migration infrastructure", namely the "systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility" (Xiang, Lundquist 2014: 122). This perspective draws attention to the multiple entangled evolutions (e.g., financial, policymaking, technological innovation) relating to the gig-economy, which mediate the trajectories of migrant workers using platform work as a basis for their mobility plans (Altenried 2021). What is of key importance to this literature is striking a balance in analyzing migrant participation in the gig-economy as a phenomenon simultaneously co-constructed by migrants' agency and structural factors. Van Doorn (2023) has recently suggested "liminal precarity" to conceptualise migrants' subjective understandings of the transitory nature of gig-work and their conscious choice to sign up for it, while anticipating another future.

Migration scholars have stressed out how different categories of migrants, such as e.g., migrants initially admitted on study, family or humanitarian reasons, are susceptible to accepting precarious working conditions to fulfill income requirements set by national immigration controls (Könönen 2019). In the case presented in this paper it is not solely immigration controls who prompt migrants' employment on precarious terms, but the need to support oneself until a more favorable residence permit situation is obtained or the individual migration trajectory has been concluded. While waiting to become eligible for the welfare benefits deriving from residency or citizenship status, migrants temporarily engage in precarious working conditions, such as the ones inherent to housecleaning platform work, as we will present in our analysis. Lata et al. (2022) refer to all the factors that constrain the choices of migrants (such as language barriers, different visas and residence permits or welfare exclusions) as structural precarity. In our analysis we take one step further to suggest that this structural precarity is dynamic and shaped concurrently by specific policymaking procedures, housecleaning platform practices and weaknesses of the Danish industrial relations system, thus leading to an institutionalisation of precarity for migrant platform workers. However, one should not normatively consider all workers engaged in platform housecleaning as precarious, as there are several workers who either only need to work few shifts to complement their income or have achieved better employment conditions through building their platform reputation and hence experience less insecurity.

INSTITUTIONALISATION OF PRECARITY AND AUTONOMY OF MIGRATION

In line with research resonating with the intervention of van Doorn, Ferrari and Graham (2022) on the need to foreground migrant labour and its governance in critical platform labour studies, and also heeding the call expressed by various scholars for research to engage more deeply with the material conditions and experiences of migrants working in the gig-

economy (e.g., Lata et al. 2022; Hillmann et al. 2022), our paper contributes to the academic discussion with a Danish case study on migrant workers' experiences of housecleaning platforms and the institutionalisation of precarity that this work entails.

Our first theoretical point of departure for understanding institutionalisation of precarity accounts for both strategies used by employers –in our case online housecleaning platforms- and structural components regulating labour market access and conditions. Drawing on Ollus' work, we argue that demands of cost-effectiveness have led to increased competition, out-sourcing and subcontracting which have led to a turn from permanent positions towards increasingly flexible and temporary jobs (Ollus 2016). This tendency has widened in both consequences and scope with the expansion of digital labour platforms. It is obvious that employers carry their share of the responsibility of this development, however, this tendency also is enmeshed in larger structural policy frameworks. Therefore, the analysis must also account for the competitive economies, conditions and structures that shape employment in this sector.

We agree with Anderson who argues that attention should be paid to how the labour markets and immigration controls illegalise some groups and legalise other groups in particular ways (Anderson 2010). This entails that the situation of low-waged precarious workers must be analysed not only in the context of abusive employers, but also in the context of the labour markets within which they work (Anderson 2010). Analytically this shifts emphasis from workers in housecleaning platforms to migrant workers in housecleaning platforms. We therefore must also account for the intersection between immigration policies and labour market regulations that lead to the institutionalisation of precarity (Floros, Jørgensen 2020). Within this intersection precarity is "normalised" and institutionalised for migrants who arrived under formal (specialised) labour market schemes, came to Denmark to study but simultaneously need to work or are included in existent programs aiming at integrating refugees in the labour market. This means that for certain often very specific occupations, immigration controls may not function as a means of protecting jobs for citizens but effectively create a group of workers that are more desirable as

employees through enforcing atypical employment relations such as fixed term contracts or self-employment and direct dependence on employers for legal status (Anderson 2010: 312-313). There is an interplay of entrant categories, employment relations and construction of institutionalised uncertainty steered by immigration controls to form particular types of labour and relations to the employers and labour market. The legal status of the migrant is produced by immigration control, which at the same time produces different types of (il)legality. In our understanding here institutionalisation of precarity thus shows an active turn of labour market policies towards a broader restructuring of labour characterised by generalised insecurity. In the case of housecleaning platforms, this insecurity is further intensified by the "selective formalisation" of only some aspects of – traditionally informal – domestic labour (van Doorn 2020). Selective formalisation highlights how migrant housecleaners are obliged to assume administrative, fiscal and legal responsibilities (which otherwise would be undertaken by the employer), while simultaneously being excluded from the benefits a formal employment relation would entail (Ticona, Mateescu 2018; van Doorn 2020).

The first part of our theoretical framework thus conceptualises how precarity is institutionalised through both structural (state-based) drivers and the employer side. Our second theoretical point of departure conceptualises how migrant workers also navigate within this framework and try not only to cope with this system but also to alter and challenge it in different ways. Here we draw on the Autonomy of Migration (AoM) approach. Although this framework was developed to theorise borders as places of ongoing conflicts and as a constantly developing site of re-negotiation (Bojadžijev, Karakayali 2010) it also can help us conceptualise and analyse how migrant workers employed on digital labour platforms act. AoM can be best described as an attempt to theorise the role of migrant agency in the constitution of contemporary border regimes. An emphasis is placed on the primacy of movement over control (Karakayali, Tsianos 2010; Mezzadra 2010), as well as the development of socialities and mundane practices independent of sovereign control among people on the move (Fischer, Jørgensen 2022).

Border regimes and border struggles here not only have to do with the external borders (in our case the European and Danish ones) but just as much with regimes set up in the intersection of labour regulations and migration policies. Here it is also important to unpack the notion of both autonomy and (following from this) agency. We follow Metcalfe (2022: 53) who argues that: "autonomy is not the power of complete self-determination or freedom from control but rather represents the inherent uncontrollability of individuals within borders as a result of conflict within oppressive migration controls". The relationship here is complex and autonomy cannot be translated as direct agency, rather "autonomy represents a relational concept between efforts to control and efforts (successful or not) to contest and subvert this control" (Metcalfe 2022: 53). What autonomy means here is the active response to the "logistification" of migration regimes (Altenried et al. 2018) that developed through and due to the "refugee crisis", where labour market needs result in a blurring of distinctions between the categories of "refugee", "asylum seeker" and "economic migrant" (Fischer, Jørgensen 2022). The autonomy of the migrant workers is here located in the refusal of migrants to accept their logistification and access to or exclusion from a particular labour market position.

METHODOLOGY

Our article analyses data from ongoing PhD work which investigates the impact of housecleaning platform work on workers' lives, employment relations and the welfare state in Denmark[1], drawing mainly on interviews with platform housecleaners. Investigating such platforms is a very challenging task, especially when including the workers' experiences, given the invisibility of housecleaners in the public sphere and subsequent issues of access that arise from this (Ticona, Mateescu 2018). Existing ethnographic research with platform housecleaners usually follows a lateral path of recruiting informants through relevant Facebook groups, agencies and platforms like Craigslist and LinkedIn (Van Doorn 2020; Ticona, Mateescu
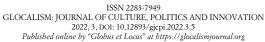
2018). Other approaches include participant observation – working as a cleaner – (e.g., Bor 2021) and hiring informants through platforms to conduct interviews (e.g., Gerold et al. 2022), both aspiring to initiate a snowball effect. The interviewees in our sample were approached in three different ways: First, messages were posted in various local housecleaning-related Facebook groups, looking for cleaners who used both the social media path and platforms to make a living. Second, an interviewed platform manager granted one of the authors access to the platform's Facebook group to approach informants directly, without the platform's mediation. Third, one of the authors signed up as a client to another Danish housecleaning platform and sent individual invitations for interviews to workers' profiles in Copenhagen, clearly stating the purpose of the research and instructing respondents to answer via email and not through the platform, to avoid possible sanctioning. These approaches culminated in twenty-three semi-structured, in-depth interviews with cleaners working for three different platforms. The interviews were done both in person and online – mainly due to Covid-related reasons or due to informants living in other cities – and lasted between approximately 30 to 100 minutes. All interviews were conducted between November 2020 and October 2022, in English. Some parts of the interviews with Latin American cleaners were concluded in Spanish, due to the difficulty for some of the informants to express themselves fluently in English. Twenty-one informants were female and two male, eighteen were migrants (Eastern and Southern Europe, Latin America and Asia) and five Danes, of whom three female were ethnic Danes. Six of them were university students and nine were university degree holders. All interviewees were between 18 and 40 years old. The sample reflects the gendered and racialised distribution of labour market participation in the sector, as well as the strong representation of Latin Americans among platform housecleaners. Participating cleaners were guaranteed both anonymisation and non-disclosure of their opinions to the platforms. All interviews were recorded, translated where needed and then transcribed. The questions for the interviews derived mainly from conducting purely observational digital ethnography (cf. Pink 2016) in the platform's

Facebook group, which was a rich pool of personal experiences, comments and debates, as well as a site for direct and indirect management practices. However, due to ethical research parameters, such as the impossibility of obtaining informed consent from all users of the group, we are not utilizing any quotes or referring to identifiable events within the group (cf. Willis 2019). Nevertheless, the content in the group influenced the interview guides, facilitating the intention "to raise questions about issues that the women themselves consider problematic" (Neufeld et al. 2001: 578).

In addition, the walk-through method, a "step-by-step observation and documentation of an app's screens, features and flows of activity" (Light et al. 2018: 882) was employed. Through this walk-through on the three housecleaning platforms' websites under investigation, it became evident early in the research that female migrant cleaners form most of the workforce[2]. The rest of our data comprise a review of the existing literature, analysis of Danish policy documents, rulings and decisions issued by public agencies and news articles relating to the Danish gig-economy. This desk-based research informed the construction of interview guides with various stakeholders of the Danish gig-economy. The article draws on interviews with two Danish trade union representatives, an MP from the governmental coalition who has engaged in employment-related issues, a public official in a key-position related to policymaking for the platform economy, two academics involved in policymaking, a platform lobbyist, a housecleaning platform manager and a former employee on the customer service of the most popular Danish housecleaning platform. These interviews provided insight to the practices and perceptions of various gig-economy stakeholders, as well as to the ways in which Danish policymaking and the Danish industrial relations system relate to this specific part of the labour market.
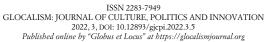
ANALYSIS

Situating housecleaning platform work in the Danish context

Contracting housecleaning through location-based digital platforms in Denmark is a relatively new phenomenon, which started gaining traction after 2016. Working in the gig-economy is not as widespread as in other European countries and existing research estimates its overall share in the labour market to be around 1 per cent (Jesnes, Oppegaard 2021). Previous literature on Danish housecleaning platforms is limited (e.g., Ilsøe 2020; Kusk et al. 2022) and there is a research gap regarding the systematic documentation of the workers' point of view. There are no publicly available data on the demographics of housecleaning platforms. However, data that we present in this paper confirm various sources which have already indicated the overrepresentation of migrants in this part of the labour market (Scheer 2019, Ilsøe, Jesnes 2020). In Denmark, the labour market is primarily regulated by the industrial relations system. This means that wages and working conditions are decided through collective bargaining between trade unions and employers' associations or companies, and there is no state regulation or intervention in setting a minimum wage. Despite the signing of the first collective agreement in the world between a housecleaning platform (Hilfr) and a union (3F), this did not result to more collective agreements nor did it lead any platform housecleaners to become union members (E4 union representative 2022). The agreement was the outcome of a top-down procedure between the platform company and the union, promoted by the Danish government (Ilsøe 2020; E4 union representative 2022). Almost all platform workers in Denmark are classified as solo self-employed and are not collectively organised. Consequently, they lack the safety of minimum wage, pension plans, parental leave, sick-pay and entitlement to paid holiday. Entitlement to such welfare benefits for all workers in Denmark, including the self-employed, is defined in statutory acts. However, the requirements for platform workers are so complex that it is practically impossible for them to meet the eligibility criteria for most benefits (Munkholm 2021). Moreover, self-

employed earning more than 50.000 Danish crowns (about 6.700 euros) annually must create their own company, which amplifies the perplexity of dealing with tax issues and increases their taxation. In the case of student platform housecleaners, there is a stratification according to nationality: Danish students can work part-time for a limited number of hours and money and receive student benefits (SU). EU students are entitled to SU under the same terms as Danes, but the procedure to apply for SU as self-employed platform housecleaners is time-consuming, complex and usually results in rejections. Non-EU students are not eligible for SU, with some minor exceptions (Uddannelses og Forskningsstyrelsen 2022). At the same time, student visas allow only a limited number of working hours, otherwise they are terminated.

Until today, little has been done in terms of policy initiatives to provide concrete solutions to the insecurities caused by this employment status. Two contradictory decisions have been issued by public agencies: In 2020, the Danish Competition and Consumers' Authority decided that the housecleaning platforms Happyhelper and Hilfr, which had set a minimum hourly fee for people working through their apps, were breaching competition law and had to remove it. This decision -although without a binding effect for other agencies- deliberated that platform workers are not employees. On the contrary, in 2022, the Danish Tax Agency decided that Wolt-couriers are wage-earners (employees) within the Danish tax context and should be taxed consequently. In 2021, the Danish Ministry of Employment initiated a process to establish a "presumption of employment" rule, whose main goal is to clarify the employment relations of platform workers (Munkholm et al. 2022). Moreover, as of 2020, holiday working visas for Argentinians and Chileans who figured prominently among platform housecleaners were restricted to 150 annually and such visa-holders were exempted from self-employment. This political decision was straight-forwardly connected to successful recruitment policies of a specific housecleaning platform, which encouraged transnational mobility of young Latin-Americans premised on profitable gig-work (E4 union representative, 2022). The Danish Minister of Immigration and Integration justified this decision

on the fact that young people came to Denmark "to work on part of the labour market where you can discuss how regulated the working conditions are" (Scheer 2019b). Further in our analysis, we will present how migrant platform workers in Denmark experience these agencies' decisions, regulation on holiday-working and student visas, as well as legally imposed welfare exclusions, as an instance of institutionalisation of migrant precarity.

Consolidation of multiple insecurities for platform housecleaners

The above statement by the minister is an explicit acceptance that the Danish government considered working conditions in location-based platforms to be unregulated and dubious, what an interviewed MP referred to as "the wild wild West" (E1 MP 2020). This resonates with existing literature claiming that platform work expands as a deregulated labour market and creates or prolongs multiple insecurities and precarious livelihoods (MacDonald, Giazitzoglou 2019; Montgomery, Baglioni 2021). In our analysis of the platform workers' interviews, we distinguish three indicators of precarious working lives, namely: job insecurity, income insecurity, and insecurity caused by the exclusion from welfare benefits. In the background of our analysis, we also discern how intersecting migrant identities such as gender, race and residence permit status exacerbate such insecurities. We also delve deeper into the experiences of migrant housecleaners to elaborate on how these insecurities become institutionalised through the interplay of domestic platform work with specific Danish labour market, migration, tax and welfare regulations presented in the previous section of this paper. Platform housecleaning features some unique characteristics, distinct from other types of location-based platforms. Van Doorn (2020) stresses out how these platforms engage in "selective formalisation" of labour, where some aspects of the gig are being formalised but other traditional aspects of informality and the consequent uncertainties deriving from performing domestic work remain intact, if not worsened

by the digital mediation of labour. This is depicted in the words of an interviewed migrant female cleaner:

> I didn't make the money that I need in the sense that I had to pay, I started paying VAT […] the only solution would have been to work more hours, but it is very hard and very irregular, […] you have new customers coming and some leaving, it is very hard to make it your main job, I think. No, I didn't get enough, and it was complicated to get more, because I did it for a long period where I had two or three cleanings per day, but that is very hard (C6).

This worker, coming from an EU country, was a relatively successful platform cleaner, who charged a high hourly fee and had a fully booked schedule. Because of the 50.000 Danish crowns threshold she had to establish her sole proprietorship, which led to a formalisation of her solo self-employed status. However, this created extra taxation costs and extra effort to keep up the same pace and quality of work, to prolong her profitable spell. We see here how formalisation did not change the contingency and irregularity of work, since last-minute cancellations from customers and constant uncertainty regarding bookings transformed this formalised aspect into extra pressure. Moreover, the grueling schedule she adopted did not suffice to eliminate her income uncertainty. On the contrary, she soon had to drop most bookings due to injuries caused from overworking, but because of her self-employed status she could not claim a sick leave. Due to the complexity of meeting the eligibility criteria for sick pay (cf. Munkholm 2021), she would need to privately insure herself against occupational injuries in order to receive compensation. Eventually, she had to leave Denmark as she was also not entitled to unemployment benefits.

As Mailand and Larsen (2018) demonstrate, the 2017 reform regarding self-employed workers intended to increase the level of social protection for atypical workers, however inequalities persist and some protections apply only to employees covered by collective agreements, which is not the case for most platform workers. Natalie Munkholm refers to the reform as "experiencing systemic setbacks for platform workers" (2021: 199). The reform was an outcome of the Disruption Council, set up by the government to discuss the best ways in which

Denmark could orient itself towards a future of constant changes and technological advancements. In its final report, the Council elaborates on the labour market issues deriving from the development of digital labour platforms, nevertheless there is no reference to the disproportionate representation of migrants working through these platforms (Danish Government 2019). An interviewed Danish MP admitted that this issue never surfaced, although "everyone knew that there were a lot of migrant workers in the platforms" (E1 MP 2020). The experiences of the interviewed cleaners highlight how these systemic setbacks are aggravated in the case of migrant workers. For instance, most migrant cleaners (be these students, holiday-workers or family members) are newcomers and are not entitled to any type of welfare benefits. For most of them platform housecleaning is their only income and in case they have another job, it is usually part-time and poorly paid and does not provide a social security net for them. Until 2020, the minimum hourly fee for housecleaning through Happyhelper and Hilfr (120 and 130 DKK/hour respectively) was set by the platforms. When this was removed, after the decision issued by the Danish Competition and Consumers' Authority, there was a downward pressure on the fees, created by workers who lowered their fees to contract bookings more easily. This pressure further intensified feelings of income insecurity among platform housecleaners:

I started with 110 (DKK/hour) […] minimum is good [...] if you will go for an agreement that says yes, I will go work for a very low rate then the government can't do anything. […] But it is good to have a lower limit so that we can have safety (C10).

Hence, institutionalisation of migrants' precarity through platform work is premised on how these systemic setbacks consolidate an overall feeling of uncertainty amplified by the structural difficulties that migrant newcomers face when entering the Danish labour market. An interviewed trade-union representative expressed his opinion in similar terms:

Because of other dynamics in society, I think cleaning platforms will be much reliant on foreign labour in Denmark. And those dynamics are also systemic discrimination, discrimination of […] how we have constructed our society, that always will take the weak on the labour market and always give them hard physical labour for a very low wage (E4 union representative 2022).

This quote highlights how the creation of precarious working conditions for migrants is not a novel outcome of location-based platforms but a prolongation of traditional labour market inequalities for workers with a compromised socio-legal status. Nevertheless, digital labour platforms combine contingency of work and income with features of algorithmic management such as ratings for workers, profile prioritisation, algorithmic matchmaking and automated sanctioning procedures. All these features are augmenting the insecurity experienced by platform housecleaners and dictate specific behaviors. The three most common strategies for interviewed workers trying to establish themselves on the platforms are starting at a low price, accepting jobs far from their homes, and striving hard for a 5-star rating. Ratings are a controversial issue among cleaners, who express outrage for some clients that report fake square footage for their homes in order to book cleaners for the minimum time required. Such clients tend to blame cleaners for laziness, complain to platforms' customer services asking for refunds and give bad reviews. The detrimental effect of a bad review (discouragement of prospective clients, low prioritisation of profile in customers' searches) influences work practices. Workers often agree to unpaid overtime or are submissive to improper (sexist or racist) behavior by customers to avoid negative ratings.

I had bookings […] where they asked me to wash the floor on my knees and all kinds of crazy things […]. There can be very strange behaviors but there are some who are really desperate for their ratings and would accept anything (C5).

This finding accentuates the performativity of ratings or what Bucher et al. (2021) have coined as "anticipatory compliance" in the gig-economy. Platform companies' strategies of

managing their cleaners are also reinforcing feelings of insecurity:

I have been canceling a booking and […] then my profile was set to passive and you receive this email which is threatening, it is a bit aggressive email they are sending actually, so "if you keep canceling you will be set to passive first of all and if you keep canceling, then we will block your profile" (C6).

This quote demonstrates how flexibility is not unilaterally decided but is contingent to platforms' policies and subsequent pressure from platforms' customer support services. Jointly with fear of bad ratings, this creates uncertainty and affords better control of the workforce in contrast to the flexibility narrative that platform companies promote. Especially for migrant workers unable to speak Danish, who know that it will be difficult to find a better job soon, these strategies intensify the experiencing of insecurity.

Migrant students and holiday working visa holders: Strategies of adaptation

Many non-EU migrants working through cleaning platforms are also studying and – in contrast with Danish and EU students – are not entitled to student benefits. This amplifies their need for securing enough income to support their studies. Our interviewees reported that applying for student benefits as self-employed students working through platforms is a very hard and time-consuming process for EU students and the application is hardly ever accepted. On the contrary, two interviewed Danish students had no problem in ensuring these benefits and combining them to platform work. These difficulties make migrant students more dependent on platform work. Students who are third-country nationals are subject to restrictions in relation to the number of hours that they are allowed to work and breaching their limit can lead to a revocation of their visa:

we have to calculate our hours, that is one thing, and another thing is the CPR number, so they are taking my CPR number, so if I do something bad, they can go to the government. […] (also) it is very crucial in Denmark to pay my taxes. […] I am an immigrant and it is very, very dangerous for me. […] Here if they catch me, they will just deport me (C10).

This Asian female cleaner working on a student-visa was unequivocal as to how work-related uncertainty permeated her everyday life. She was very happy to work on a "totally clean" platform as she said, however she felt that her employment relation to the platform was threatened by a number of factors: being reported by an abusive client, failing to declare taxes correctly, miscalculating her working hours or simply complaining to customer support for a trivial issue, all seemed possible reasons for her deactivation from the platform or for a possible deportation if Danish authorities were involved. Drawing on the concept of "selective formalisation" (van Doorn 2020) we stress out how this worker's fears are a structural effect of the tensions between formalised and informal aspects of domestic work platforms. Moreover, these fears are plausible, since an interviewee (C23) pointed out that in 2021, there were five deportations of migrants working irregularly through platforms.

Despite such examples of workers' livelihoods, the overall picture of migrants' experiences in Danish housecleaning platforms is far from accurate if only depicted in a victimizing way. Migrant workers adapt to the realities created at the intersection of gig-economy and Danish regulations and forge their own strategies to counter the uncertainties and shortcomings of such employment. These strategies include the creation of social media groups among platform housecleaners, which is a common tactic, especially for housecleaners from the Latin American community. In these groups, migrant workers blacklist customers who offer backbreaking gigs or have displayed abusive behavior, make arrangements for exchanging bookings and share tips on tax and working-visa regulation issues. Applying the lens of the AoM approach foregrounds migrants' agency in its constant challenging of the institutionalisation of migrant precarity in the Danish context. Most workers are

aware of the contingency and insecurities of platform house-cleaning, yet still choose it either as a lifeline until they find another job or as a preferable alternative to low-paid zero-hour contracts in the Danish hospitality sector. A common denominator for all our interviewees is that they are not planning to work through platforms for a long period. A Latin American worker phrased this as "if I were to be working as a cleaner for all these years, I would prefer to get hired by a company, […] it is completely absurd to just go into that without any benefits" (C14). Others use platforms to create a clientele, which they can later invite to leave the platform, in a mutually beneficiary move where the worker evades taxation and the customer avoids paying a high commission to the platform. The 50.000 Danish crowns threshold acts for many cleaners as a benchmark, signifying that the rest of the needed income must be provided either through waged employment or undeclared labour, since baffling tax issues create logistical insecurity that they don't wish to confront. Migrant workers are impelled by the circumstances to adjust their strategies to maximise much-needed income. What we see here is that the ability of housecleaning platforms to control and integrate part of the unemployed or low-skilled migrant workforce into formalised employment, while simultaneously outsourcing livelihood risks to workers, is actually challenged by a set of different workers' strategies. Migrants on these platforms mainly strive for income rather than formalisation of their working conditions.

An interviewed Latin American cleaner narrated how in 2020 she lived in a house shared by forty Latin Americans, owned by the "mafia" (sic). All of them were holiday working visa holders, each paying 3250 Danish crowns for a shared room. Half of them were working through housecleaning platforms and the rest for food-delivery platforms (some worked for both). The people living there:

were very nice, only they were making party every day, […] wanted to meet people and to do new things, to go to parties or to go just to see around, and that was good because they were all the same, like… youths… (C2).

Despite the obvious exploitation of these visa holders by the people renting out the house, we see how the ambient in the house corresponds more to a pattern of organised mobility with certain characteristics, rather than a stereotypic account of forced migration premised on coercive work. According to fieldwork data, regardless of the attempts of the Danish state to control migrant mobility through restricting the number of visas and the employment rights deriving from them, housecleaning platforms are still signing up a lot of Latin American workers who purchase EU passports. At the same time, interviewed housecleaners claimed that several holiday working visa holders use other workers' accounts to contract gigs. Migrants seem to effectively challenge the constraints posed by the Danish state, yet at the same time they provide platform companies with the number of workers needed to cover customers' demand if they wish to remain competitive. This highlights the ability of platform companies to navigate themselves within the regulatory omissions of the Danish state in relation to platform work, while simultaneously complementing the various policies and sociolegal stratification regimes that institutionalise precarious livelihoods for migrant workers (cf. Anderson 2010; Könönen 2019).
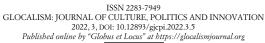
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In our analysis we did not focus on a specific group of migrants but presented the experiences of platform housecleaners with diverse origins, work and residence permits: EU and non-EU migrant students, family members (migrant spouses of Danish citizens or residence permit holders), Latin Americans (both on holiday-working visas and with EU passports) and migrants residing long-term in Denmark on various grounds. Despite the diversity of regulations regarding work and residence permits and student visas for EU and non-EU citizens, all migrants experience these processes of institutionalisation of precarity, albeit to a different extent, depending on their financial needs, intersecting identities and rights deriving from their status. Danish authorities have set up restrictions to control not only

how but also for how long, migrant workers carrying few formal rights can make use of labour market openings, as for instance the working visa holders. In this way, regulations are not only set up to regulate conditions on the labour market but also insert border politics within the labour market. As Balibar famously wrote, the border can no longer, if it ever could, be understood as limited to the frontier of any nation-state, but emerges at different instances, moments and places "wherever selective controls are to be found" (2002: 91). For some of the workers quoted and referred to in this article the experienced precarisation not only relates to contingent work and/or lack of income but also to deportability. These mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are dynamic and often reconfigured, allowing some forms of mobility and limiting others.
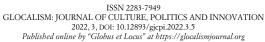
The institutionalised forms of precarity that housecleaning platforms produce at the intersection of migration policies and labour market and tax regulations are not unique to these platforms but the norm in location-based platform work. An example of this "pump and dump" logic, i.e. take in people when needed and discard them when not, was recently seen in France, where the food-delivery platform UberEats welcomed thousands of migrants during the pandemic. Among them were many undocumented migrants, as the company did not do any real check of documents (Oberti 2022). The Collective of Platform Couriers (CLAP) report that more than 2,500 workers have recently had their app deactivated due to a crackdown on "illegal" workers (Meaker 2022). Protesters, joining protests organised by CLAP in Paris, are accusing UberEats of exploiting undocumented workers' precarious status and using them to pump and dump courier numbers as demand increased under the pandemic and since has decreased. CLAP accuses UberEats of making it easy for undocumented workers to apply to work on its platform during the pandemic, when takeaway demand was high (Oberti 2022). In Denmark, the labour union 3F writes that they have no concrete knowledge of major food delivery platforms in Denmark directly partnering with or employing undocumented workers. However, the union also mentions on hearsay and from "words" on the street that some workers borrow other couriers' account to be able to work

(United Food Delivery Workers 2022), a practice also mentioned by our interviewees in housecleaning platforms. This is obviously a risky strategy and again visualizes the intersection of labour regulations and migration policies. Besides having to pay a cut of their salary, undocumented workers also face the risk of deportation if they are arrested by the police. This is the reality both in France and in Denmark and as we argue in the introduction to this article, an example of how the state is penalizing specific categories of migrant mobility rather than the business model which takes advantage of this mobility. Danish housecleaning platforms rely on the plentiful offer of migrant labour to create the network effects (Vallas, Schor 2020) needed to consolidate themselves in the market and attract financing. Recently, Hilfr was bought by a Danish investor and Happyhelper is currently expanding to Germany and Estonia.

From the perspective of AoM, the Danish government's termination of self-employment for working holiday visa holders must be seen as a response to the mobility of young people from Latin America, who were willing to cover vacant job-positions in Denmark. The growth of housecleaning platforms was parallel to the boom of holiday visas and helped to upscale the platforms across the larger cities. If borders are everywhere they can also be challenged from everywhere though. The new restrictions have not stopped workers from these countries from still entering Denmark and using these platforms to sell their labour. As we mention, it is not uncommon for Argentinians and Chileans to hold also Spanish (or Italian) documentation which offers access to the Danish labour market. At the same time, the efforts of the Danish government to control these migration flows coincide with trends towards an abridgement of welfare benefits for migrant groups with other socio-legal statuses than permanent residency. The government reduced the access to educational benefits (the so-called SU) for EU citizens, which has made living in larger and thus more expensive Danish cities an even bigger daily challenge for this group. Refugees, i.e. people who had their claim for asylum accepted by the Danish immigration authorities likewise are subjected to a much lower category of social benefit (approximately 35 per cent) of the benefit Danish citizens and people

with permanent residence are entitled to. An assumption here could be that the Danish government potentially wishes to channel other migrant social categories towards gig-work.

Whatever their socio-legal status, we should be aware not to victimise all such workers but give them voice to share their experiences and strategies. Some use their experiences to actively resist restrictive policies and exploitation of employers (as we saw recently in France) and some accept the conditions as they offer alternatives to already precarious everyday realities. We believe that critical studies on platform labour and future research should engage deeper with these intersecting realities (legal, social, gendered etc.) that shape migrant workers' precarious lives, and migrants' own strategies to navigate the shortcomings of exclusive and hostile labour market environments. Our analysis shows that migrants' subjectivities can hardly be reduced to mere labour-power and therefore regulatory instruments facilitating or impeding entry to the labour market are not in themselves efficient for managing migration (cf. Bojadžijev, Karakayali 2010).

NOTES

[1] Konstantinos Floros conducted his fieldwork between September 2020 and November 2022. The PhD project is expected to be published as a monograph in the winter of 2023/24.

[2] Only platform companies themselves can provide register data which would sufficiently document the demographics of platform housecleaners in Denmark. Even in this case, factors such as workers simultaneously uploading profiles to various platforms, registering on the app but never actually working, account users renting out their profiles to people without working permits etc., are likely to obstruct statistical objectivity. Indicatively, a detailed observation of the 444 workers' Facebook profiles who joined one of the housecleaning platforms under investigation between July 1st and November 30th, 2020, showed that only 27 were registered under an ethnic-Danish name, while 45 per cent were self-reportedly Latin-American (a percent definitely higher since many profiles with Latino names didn't report origin). During this period, holiday working visa holders were legally excluded from platform housecleaning. When one of the authors signed up as a customer on another platform, in February 2022 and received automated emails by the platform suggesting specific cleaners, only nine out of thirty-three suggested profiles could speak Danish. Finally, a walk-through of the third platform in December 2022, showed that 60 out of 72 workers' profiles in Southern Copenhagen self-reportedly belonged to migrants and only 5 to ethnic Danes.

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