Imperfect presents, uncertain futures

Platform housecleaners in the Danish gig economy

PhD Thesis

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Summary

Digital labor platforms have proliferated worldwide over the last fifteen years, creating what is widely known as the gig economy. The growth of this gig economy has sparked international debates at social, regulatory, and academic level in relation to (mis)classification of employment relations and algorithmic management of workers. Especially regarding location-based platforms, emerging literature demonstrates and describes the prevalence of migrants in their labor force and the implications stemming from this fact. The Danish gig economy is a remarkable case within this global setting, due to several particularities of the Danish social, political and economic environment. These include the traditional regulation of the labor market through collective agreements between the social partners, and the existence of a universal welfare state, coupled with restrictive migration policies. This thesis is a case study that engages with the phenomenon of housecleaning platform labor in Denmark, analyzing it as an outcome simultaneously shaped by three different factors: a) workers' livelihood strategies, b) platforms' affordances and performative aspects, and c) policymaking and regulations on labor market, welfare and migration issues.

Research on domestic work and housecleaning platforms has been explored less intensively compared with other platforms. The invisibility of platform housecleaners in the public sphere creates practical and methodological obstacles to conducting fieldwork. The relative absence of platform housecleaners' experiences and practices in international literature is therefore a subject I address while bringing cleaners' voices to the forefront of debates on platform work in Denmark. This thesis adds new insight to the literature by drawing on twenty-three interviews with – predominantly female and migrant – platform housecleaners, nine interviews with stakeholders, digital ethnography in housecleaners' social media, policy document analysis and other forms of desk-based research.

The analysis of my findings commences with demonstrating the migrant identity of cleaners, which I subsequently argue is the most defining trait of platform housecleaning in Denmark. I contend that platform housecleaning is a precarious form of work that unfolds on the basis of a double –

often unfulfilled – promise. Platform companies promise unhindered flexibility to cleaners, and platform workers promise themselves that this work will be only temporary. By delving deeper into workers' practices, I describe the ways in which they resist exploitation by platform companies and customers, and reveal how they navigate restrictive regulatory frameworks, welfare exclusions and minor algorithmic management by platforms. Finally, I examine the role of the Danish state and its institutions over time in promoting platform housecleaning. Despite providing a lifeline for migrants in urgent need of income, platform housecleaning in Denmark exacerbates labor market inequalities and augments insecurities for its workforce. Thus, platform housecleaners experience imperfect presents and uncertain futures.

Resumé

Digitale arbejdsplatforme har i de sidste femten år spredt sig over hele verden, og skabt det der almindeligt kendt som gig-økonomien. Gig-økonomiens vækst udløste internationale debatter på sociale, juridiske og akademiske niveauer i forhold til (fejl)klassificeringen af ansættelsesforhold og algoritmisk ledelse af arbejdere. Især med hensyn til lokationsbaserede platforme demonstrerer og beskriver ny litteratur tilstedeværelsen af migranter i deres arbejdsstyrke, og de implikationer der stammer heraf. Den danske gig-økonomi er et bemærkelsesværdigt tilfælde inden for denne globale kontekst på grund af flere særlige forhold ved det danske sociale, politiske og økonomiske miljø.

Disse forhold omfatter den traditionelle regulering af arbejdsmarkedet gennem kollektive overenskomster mellem arbejdsmarkedets parter og eksistensen af en universel velfærdsmodel kombineret med restriktiv migrationspolitik. Denne afhandling er et case-studie, der beskæftiger sig med 'arbejdskraft til rengøringsplatforme i Danmark'-fænomenet, og analyserer det som et resultat, der samtidig er formet af tre forskellige faktorer: a) arbejdstagernes levebrødsstrategier, b) platformes affordances og performative aspekter, og c) politikudformning og regler om arbejdsmarkeds-, velfærds- og migrationsspørgsmål.

Forskningen i husarbejde og rengøringsplatforme har været underudviklet i forhold til andre platforme, delvist på grund af usynligheden af platformsrengøringspersonale i den offentlige sfære, hvilket skaber praktiske og metodiske forhindringer i udførelsen af feltarbejde. Denne afhandling behandler således det relative fravær af platformsrengøringspersonales erfaring og praksis i international litteratur, og bringer rengøringspersonalets stemmer forrest i debatterne om platformsarbejde i Danmark. Denne dissertation trækker på treogtyve interviews med – overvejende kvindelige og migrant – platformsrengøringspersonale, ni interviews med interessenter, digital etnografi i rengøringspersonalets sociale medier, dokumentanalyse af juridiske og politiske dokumenter og andre former for skrivebordsbaseret forskning. Analysen af

mine resultater starter med at demonstrere rengøringspersonalets migrantidentitet, som jeg så argumenterer for at være det mest definerende træk ved platformsrengøring i Danmark.

I denne afhandling hævder jeg, at rengøring af platforme er en usikker arbejdsform, som udfolder sig på baggrund af et dobbelt – ofte uopfyldt – løfte. Platformvirksomheder lover uhindret fleksibilitet til rengøringspersonalet, og platformarbejdere lover sig selv, at dette arbejde kun vil være et midlertidigt engagement. Ved at dykke dybere ned i arbejdernes praksis, ser jeg i afhandlingen de måder, hvorpå arbejderne modstår deres udnyttelse af platformsvirksomheder og kunder, og hvordan de navigerer i restriktive reguleringsrammer, velfærdsekskluderinger og deres mindre algoritmiske ledelse fra platformene. Afslutningsvis undersøger jeg den danske stats og dens institutioners rolle over tid i at fremme platformsrengøring. På trods af at platformsrengøring udgør en livline for migranter med et akut behov for indkomst, forværrer det, i Danmark, ulighederne på arbejdsmarkedet og øger usikkerheden for dets arbejdsstyrke. Således oplever platformsrengøringsarbejdere en ufuldkommen nutid og en usikker fremtid.

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List of Abbreviations

AoM – Autonomy of Migration

BBR – Danish Building and Housing Registry

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

CPR (number) – Det Centrale Personregister (Civil Registration Number)

CVR (number) – Det Centrale Virksomhedsregister (Central Business Register)

DCCA – Danish Competition and Consumers Authority

DKK – Danish kroner (currency code)

EU – European Union

GAAP – Generally Accepted Account Principles

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation

ILO – International Labour Organization

ITU – IT University

MP – Member of Parliament

SKAT – Danish Customs and Tax Administration (Skatteforvaltningen)

SMS – Short Message Service

STS – Science and Technology Studies

SU – Statens Uddannelsesstøtte (Danish state's Educational Grant)

USA – United States of America

VAT – Value Added Tax

3F – Fagligt Fælles Forbund (Trade Union Confederation)

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and theoretical framework

"Saanvi" had only been in Denmark for a year when I met her in 2022. She came from a South-Asian country to Denmark to study, knowing that parallel to attending her courses she had to work to sustain herself. Her student visa allowed her to work for twenty hours per week during academic semesters and had no limits for the summer holiday period. During the first weeks of her stay, she applied to work in several hotels and restaurants in the big Danish city where she lives, and she soon ended up with a low-paid job in a restaurant. Saanvi had no issues with that; she believed that low pay was fair given her inexperience and lack of specific skills. However, she soon found out that the on-call, zero-hour contract she signed was interfering with scheduling her studies. A friend already working through a housecleaning platform convinced Saanvi to sign up, arguing that she could work flexibly, choosing her own schedule. But first, her friend had to teach her how to use a vacuum cleaner. Saanvi started working for DKK 110/hour, a very low price for Danish labor market standards. She continued to look for another job, but only managed to find a part-time cleaning job at a bar, where the payment was the same. There, she got some training, which helped her gain some cleaning experience. As she contracted more bookings through the platform, she decided to continue with platform work. Having a flexible schedule that accommodated her studies made more sense. She now works only through this platform.

Saanvi is experiencing overlapping insecurities when working through the platform: She is afraid of any wrongdoings that could compromise her visa, such as working above the twenty-hour student visa limit or failing to declare taxes correctly. She is uncertain about whether she will contract enough work to sustain herself, but still needs time for her classes so that she does not fail in her studies. She recurringly works for rude and demeaning customers but is afraid to drop these bookings, for fear of

having her profile deactivated on the platform or getting bad ratings, which could compromise her platform reputation, a reputation gained by offering a very cheap price for her services.

> Here if they catch me (working undeclared) they will just deport me and it is very dangerous and […] (the platform) is totally clean, I don't have this kind of problem. […] 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. […] I wouldn't start with SKAT[1], first of all, I will contact my friends, and ask them how to pay because it is very crucial in Denmark to pay my taxes and another thing is that I am an immigrant, and it is very very dangerous for me. If I go here and there, I am dead (E10 female migrant)[2]

Although the way Saanvi expresses her fears is relatively exaggerated in relation to other cleaners' experiences, she resembles some of the prevalent identities among these platform workforces. She is female, migrant, young and a student. Despite her fears, she is not quitting platform work.

From 2020 to 2022, I conducted research on housecleaning platforms and interviewed many workers who had started working through platforms as early as in 2017. Much like Saanvi, when housecleaners in Denmark narrate their experiences of working through platforms, they usually express contrasting sentiments. On the one hand, they are satisfied with the relative easiness of booking some cleaning sessions and having the opportunity for flexible scheduling. On the other hand, they are concerned with the arbitrary behavior of platform companies, the customers' often exaggerated claims, and the shortcomings of self-employed work, such as welfare benefit exclusions and complicated self-reporting of taxes. Despite this ambivalence, platforms are popular, especially among non-Danish-speaking workers in urgent need of a source of income. This ambivalence is also manifest in the literature on the relatively new phenomenon of platform work. As I demonstrate in

[1] SKAT is the Danish Tax Agency. Here Saanvi refers to her difficulties in reporting her tax in the Danish online self-service system.

[2] Throughout the thesis, when I am quoting anonymized platform housecleaners I refer to them with the code of their interview. When using larger quotes, I indicate their gender and whether they are migrant, Danes or non-ethnic Danes. When quoting them in-text, I only use the interview code. When quoting my expert informants, which I have also anonymized for reasons explained in my methodological chapter, I indicate interview code and their capacity (when in-text only the code) and use gender-neutral pronouns to protect their anonymity. In the text, I use gender-neutral pronouns, except for when referring to self-identified female/male housecleaners.

the next sections of this chapter, precarity and flexibility are highlighted to different extents in the existing literature, according to the type of platformized work and the local and temporal context where it is performed.

1.1 Background, scope, and research questions

The rise of the digital economy has led to the worldwide proliferation of digital platforms, which offer a variety of services. Platform companies have become an inextricable part of modern societies, leading scholars to term the world in which we live a 'platform society' (van Dijk et al. 2018) and the economic model deriving from this proliferation 'platform economy' (Kenney & Zysmann 2016), or in more critical terms 'platform capitalism' (Srnicek 2017). Digital labor platforms are a prominent part of the platform economy. By transforming labor markets from "markets for jobs to markets for tasks" (Drahokoupil & Vandaele 2021: p. 1) these platforms have contributed to large-scale transformations of work organization and employment relations, establishing what is widely referred to as the 'gig economy' (Woodcock & Graham 2019). Digital labor platforms span many employment sectors, adopting wildly different business models. They have therefore been classified by various scholars as different taxonomies, such as e.g., platforms offering online remote tasks in contrast to location-based platforms, according to their distinct features[3] (e.g., Vallas & Schor 2020; Woodcock & Graham 2019; Zukerfeld 2022).

[3] A variety of terms and concepts in existing literature describe all components of platform labor. Below, I offer a brief explanation of my choices regarding terminology: In my thesis, I use 'platform work', 'platform labor' and 'gig work' interchangeably to depict the process of contracting and executing labor tasks through digital labor platforms. This is not because I am unaware of the theoretical implications deriving from choosing between 'work' or 'labor' but precisely for that reason. Work is a general concept, relatively free from direct theoretical connotations, whereas labor as a concept usually indicates an association with Marxist-related theoretical traditions. Even though I do not subscribe to Marxist political ideologies, I find several theoretical tools introduced by Marxist and post-Marxist scholars highly relevant and use them in my thesis. Christian Fuchs and Sebastian Sevignani engage with Marx's writings on the concept of labor and depict it as a "necessarily alienated form of work, in which humans do not control and own the means and results of production" and a "historic form of the organization of work in class societies" (Fuchs & Sevignani 2013: p. 240). Indeed, platform housecleaning is an alienated form of work and part of the organization of work in modern class societies. Nevertheless, due to nuances in my research that challenge strict definitions, and due to not adopting a Marxist theoretical framework, I use work and labor interchangeably. The providers of housecleaning services mediated by platforms are referred to as platform housecleaners, workers, gig workers and cleaners and not entrepreneurs, freelancers or helpers. Platform companies offering housecleaning in Denmark fall under the category of location-based platforms (ILO 2021). The ecosystem of platform work – Danish or international – are referred to as a 'gig economy' or 'platform economy' and not

'Location-based platforms' is a term used by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to describe digital labor platforms that mediate geographically tethered tasks, i.e., tasks ordered and carried out in specific locations (Rani et al. 2021). The most popular location-based platforms are ride-hailing and food-delivery platforms, as well as platforms facilitating domestic services such as housecleaning. In recent years, there has been incremental growth of international research on location-based platforms. This growth corresponds mainly to food delivery and taxi services (e.g., Chen 2018; Goods et al. 2019; Seetharaman et al. 2021) but research on domestic services platforms is also increasing recently (e.g., Ticona & Mateescu 2018; van Doorn 2020; Tandon & Rathi 2022), alongside the proliferation of these platforms on a global scale.

The Danish gig economy is a remarkable case within this global setting, due to several particularities of the Danish social, political, and economic environment. Denmark has a robust and universal welfare state, relatively low unemployment rates, and a labor market regulated by an industrial relations system based on collective bargaining between unions and employer organizations. Compared to other European countries, Denmark has largely tackled undeclared labor and has managed to minimize irregular migration flows (Williams 2020). This is very important in terms of location-based platforms, since international literature has highlighted that location-based platform work all over the world is primarily migrant labor, and that participation of migrants in these labor markets is disproportionately larger than in other labor market segments (e.g., van Doorn et al. 2023). In 2017, the Danish government introduced a strategy for growth through the sharing economy that openly promoted digital labor platforms (Regeringen 2017), while public funds supported the creation of labor platform start-ups (Arbejderen 2017). The first ever collective agreement in the world between a housecleaning platform (the platform company Hilfr) and a union (3F, the biggest blue-collar Danish union) was signed in 2018, in Copenhagen (Jessen 2018).

The aforementioned features, combined with Denmark being a global frontrunner in many aspects of public and private sector digitalization processes, created widespread optimism regarding the

'sharing economy' or 'collaborative economy'. These choices are justified extensively and situated within existing literature in this thesis.

establishment of a regulated gig economy, which would promote growth for the Danish economy. Despite early research findings indicating that platform labor had not expanded as much as expected in Denmark and that it is covers only around 1-2% of the labor force (Kristiansen et al. 2022), a growing concern was expressed by politicians, journalists, scholars, labor unions and employers' organizations as to how and if the gig economy – or at least some of its aspects – should be regulated (e.g., Klarskov 2015; Rasmussen & Madsen 2017; Weber 2018; Jessen 2018). However, both in the public and academic debate, there is an unequal distribution of participants, as the perspectives of platform workers are rarely heard in these debates. Specifically, regarding platform housecleaners in Denmark, interviews appear only sporadically in scholarly and journalistic work (e.g., Ilsøe & Madsen 2018; Scheer 2019a), which has not yet allowed more systematic documentation of the employees' experiences of platform work and its implications for their livelihoods. This thesis aims to tackle that problem by providing thick descriptions and analyzing these experiences.

It is therefore a case study of housecleaning platform labor in Denmark. More specifically, it investigates housecleaners' everyday practices and experiences in working via three specific digital labor platforms operating in Denmark, by using three approaches to understanding them. My analytical strategy is to engage with the phenomenon of housecleaning platform labor as an outcome simultaneously shaped by three different factors: a) workers' livelihood strategies, b) platforms' affordances and performative aspects, and c) policymaking and regulations on labor market, welfare and migration issues. The investigation combines a bottom-up approach – seeing from below as Donna Haraway phrases it (1988: p. 584) – with a top-down approach – seeing like a state, to borrow the title from James Scott's seminal book (1998) – to explore the various constellations that shaped housecleaning platform work in Denmark from its rise in 2016 until the end of 2022, when I concluded my fieldwork. Incorporating the workers' experiences in a wider sociopolitical narrative enhances the understanding of the subjects involved in platform housecleaning in Denmark and offers a composite, dynamic approach to the historical reasons for its development. More precisely, this thesis is structured according to the following five research questions:

- **How has platform housecleaning evolved in Denmark?**

- **What are the subject positions of platform housecleaners and how do they influence platform work?**
- **What are the workers' practices and experiences of platform housecleaning?**
- **How do affordances of housecleaning platforms, such as algorithmic management and rating systems, mediate the production and governance of labor relations for platform housecleaners in Denmark?**
- **What is the role of the Danish state and its agencies in producing/impeding flexibility and potentially precarious employment relations for platform housecleaners?**

1.2 Positioning of the thesis

This thesis contributes to scholarly discussions on the digitalization and platformization of labor and more precisely to the emerging interdisciplinary field studying Platform Labor (Grohmann & Qiu 2020; van Doorn & Shapiro 2023). Platform Labor Studies focus not only on how work is organized, managed, and experienced when mediated by a platform company, but also on the working and living conditions of platform workers, (mis)classification of their employment relation, governance of platform work, and worker resistance. My research engages with several of these aspects:

1.2.1 Platform labor as migrant labor

First, my findings contribute to the rapidly evolving body of literature that places migrants and migrant labor at the epicenter of debates on the gig economy and its governance (e.g., van Doorn et al. 2023; Altenried 2021; Lam & Triandafyllidou 2021; Holtum et al. 2022; Zhou 2022; van Doorn & Vijay 2021; Tandon & Rathi 2022; Newlands 2022; Abkhezr & McMahon 2022). This contribution is twofold. On the one hand, despite the lack of credible and comprehensive demographical data on the composition of the Danish gig economy to date, my study extensively documents, through digital ethnography, interviews and web scraping of housecleaning platforms, the fact that migrant – predominantly female – workers comprise the vast majority of housecleaning platforms' labor force[4]. Previous literature on location-based platform work in Denmark has referred to the

[4] Data on migrant labor from my PhD project have also been used – predating the publication of this thesis for coauthoring an article published earlier (Floros & Jørgensen, 2023).

overrepresentation of migrants in the overall Danish gig economy and housecleaning platforms more specifically, but without offering more detailed data (Jesnes & Oppegaard 2021; Ilsøe 2020). On the other hand, this thesis argues that the predominance of migrants among platform housecleaners is a point of departure for understanding how policymaking and regulation (or lack thereof) of the gig economy take place in Denmark. The governance of the Danish gig economy is presented as a manifestation of governmental precarization (Lorey 2015). This theoretical concept depicts precarization in neoliberalism as increasingly normalized at a structural level so that it becomes an important instrument of governing through insecurity (Lorey 2011; 2015; 2017). This thesis combines governmental precarization with the Autonomy of Migration (AoM) approach (Bojadžijev & Karakayali 2007), which recognizes the constitutional role of migrant agency in the shaping of (inter)national border regimes and labor policies. As a novel lens through which to analyze the Danish gig economy, it accounts for the central role of migrants' choices and trajectories in shaping the Danish gig economy while also offering an explanatory framework for the contradictory policymaking and regulation of gig work in Denmark, which I propose is hostile towards migrant platform workers.

1.2.2 Studies of algorithmic management

A second area in which this thesis contributes to the literature involves the algorithmic management of labor (e.g., Jarrahi et al. 2021; Bucher et al. 2021; Wood et al. 2019; Wood 2021) and more specifically the strand within this literature that investigates algorithmic management of location-based platform work (e.g., Lee et al. 2015; Rosenblat & Stark 2016; Griesbach et al. 2019; Newlands 2021). In the analysis, I depart from Min Kyung Lee and colleagues' definition of algorithmic management described as the "software algorithms assuming managerial functions and surrounding institutional devices that support algorithms in practice" (Lee et al. 2015: p. 1603). These managerial functions are not simply confined to decisional, informational or evaluation procedures on behalf of housecleaning platforms. They also attempt to heavily influence workers' choices regarding their digitally mediated participation in the labor market. The centrality of such algorithms in our everyday lives and their effect on multiple social and political phenomena should be stressed, according to Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholars, to "unpack the institutional choices that lie behind

these cold mechanisms" (Gillespie 2014: p. 169). Lee et al.'s emphasis on the "institutional devices that support algorithms in practice" (2015: p. 1603) echoes Gillespie's call to combine the micro-sociological level of worker-platform-customer algorithmic interactions with the macro-sociological level of (inter)national institutions' policies and regulations, which enable algorithmic control. This thesis empirically demonstrates the existence of performative effects of platforms' algorithmic management of housecleaners' behavior. However, its novel contribution lies in that it places more emphasis on the importance of institutional devices underpinning and supporting algorithms in practice. These institutions and their devices span a wide range of areas, from platform companies' customer support departments to state agencies and national policies. Therefore, in the case of Danish housecleaning platforms, this thesis argues for the occurrence of 'minor algorithmic management', where the algorithmic configuration of the apps influences, to a lesser extent than human and/or institutional decisions, the way platform housecleaners work, behave and live. Here, this study contributes from a location-based platform perspective to the literature on the often-overlooked roles of humans within technological systems, labor platforms, and algorithmic management (e.g., Irani 2015b; Gray & Suri 2019; Kusk et al. 2022).

1.2.3 Platform Labor Studies

Third, this thesis engages with various other concepts discussed in the broad literature on Platform Labor. Indicatively, it employs concepts such as liminal precarity (van Doorn 2023), and anticipatory compliance (Bucher et al. 2021) to critically examine platform housecleaning in a Danish context. Simultaneously, it seeks to elaborate and deepen these theoretical concepts by applying them in an empirical case (cf. Burawoy 1998). By combining these concepts in the analysis of fieldwork data, this thesis also exposes aspects of resistance in the everyday practices of platform housecleaners in Denmark. Resistance in this case differs widely from more pronounced, organized, and explicit forms of resistance demonstrated in other types of location-based platform work such as food delivery (e.g., Vandaele 2022; Marrone & Finotto 2019). Platform housecleaners in Denmark adopt what James Scott in his seminal book *Weapons of the Weak* refers to as more "Brechtian or Schweikian" forms of everyday commonplace resistance (Scott 1985: xvi). Resistance here does not refer to collective

organizing or direct confrontation with platform managers and/or public institutions. On the contrary, this resistance is evident in housecleaners' self-organized networks of solidarity, where they share knowledge and tips for the improving individual working conditions and share individual strategies of self-help against restrictions deriving from the regulation of platform work in Denmark. By analyzing these forms of everyday resistance, this thesis contributes to the literature that documents the individual and collective resourcefulness of platform workers (Veen et al. 2020; Iazzolino & Varesio 2023). At the same time, it subscribes to the efforts of analyzing platform work with a view towards optimal future avenues of workers' organization and resistance (Benvegnù et al. 2021; Purcell & Brook 2022; Iazzolino & Varesio 2023).

1.2.4 (In)visibility of platform housecleaners

Finally, and most importantly, this thesis brings to the forefront the voices of – predominantly migrant – platform housecleaners working in Denmark. The invisibility of platform housecleaners in the public sphere creates practical and methodological obstacles in conducting fieldwork. International research based on interviews with domestic gig workers has – until the time of writing of this thesis – been relatively underdeveloped in relation to interview-based research in other sectors of platform work, such as ride hailing and food delivery (e.g., Ticona & Mateescu 2018; van Doorn 2020; Hunt & Samman 2020; Tandon & Rathi 2022). Therefore, empirical accounts documenting the experiences, practices, and perceptions of workers are scientifically valuable at international level to expand current conceptualizations and theory on platform-mediated domestic work. At national level, this PhD project and thesis (see also Kusk et al. 2022; Floros & Jørgensen 2023) address the gap of including the housecleaners' points of view in platform-related research. To date, Danish research on digital housecleaning platforms has included only a few interviews with workers (e.g., Ilsøe & Madsen 2018; Ilsøe 2020; Cabi 2021). Nevertheless, national policy documents, corporate stakeholders and reports issued by governmental institutions invoke the claim that platform work – including housecleaning platforms – can act as a stepping stone for groups of vulnerable workers to (re)enter the labor market (e.g., Danish Government 2019; Cabi 2021; Ilsøe & Madsen 2018). This thesis provides a nuanced critique of this assumption based on ethnographical data and therefore

contributes to the stepping stone hypothesis debate, both at academic and societal levels. Academically, it furthers the interdisciplinary discussion on the role of temporal jobs on workers' future labor market outcomes (e.g., Scherer 2004; Hveem 2013; Filomena & Picchio 2021), which has also been discussed specifically for location-based platform work (van Doorn 2020; Newlands 2022). At societal level, the conclusions of this thesis argue against the prevailing narrative among numerous Danish policymakers who claim that labor platforms act as stepping stones to the labor market.

1.3 Introduction of theoretical concepts

This case study draws on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework from Labor Sociology, Platform Labor Studies, Migration Studies, STS and Labor Geography. Combining theories and concepts across disciplines is essential for my research when describing, analyzing and synthesizing the interplay of various micro and macro-sociological factors that affect interactions between platform housecleaners, platform companies, algorithms, Danish state agencies and the Danish industrial relations system.

1.3.1 Between flexibility and precarity

A cornerstone for the inception of this project has been the contradiction between flexibility and precarity, which has fueled the debate on digital labor platforms and the future of work more broadly. Flexibility is evidently a very wide-ranging concept, leading scholars to characterize it as "an all-encompassing meta-narrative" (Kluzik 2022: p. 14). Its use is more than often oversimplified and has come to be considered a metaphor for unregulated neoliberal markets when referred to as labor market flexibility (Rodgers 2007). Flexibility, in all its facets, is an indispensable component of post-Fordist societies. Preceding the extensive digitalization of work and the creation of digital labor platforms, the British sociologist and state theorist Bob Jessop claimed that flexibility is "shaped and enhanced by a new techno-economic paradigm that institutionalizes the search for permanent innovation" (Jessop 1994: p. 37). Digital labor platforms are part of this techno-economic paradigm, and flexibility is the promise on which their strategy for attracting workers is premised (Galiere 2020). However, as many empirical studies have demonstrated, flexibility in platform work does not warrant workers' unilateral decision-making on when, how long and for how much money they will work

(Rosenblat & Stark 2016; Griesbach et al. 2019; Galiere 2020). Therefore, in this thesis, flexibility is broadly depicted as a promise from platform companies to workers. The promise is that workers will avoid subordination to a contractual form of dependent employment and enjoy the positive effects of such a choice (cf. Morales & Stecher 2023).

Flexibility is a buzzword concept used when discussing the gig economy, both in academic and public discourse. Digital labor platforms promise flexibility to workers (Ravenelle 2020; Cano et al. 2021) and platform workers emphasize the importance of flexibility to them (Wood et al. 2019). Governments around the world – also in Denmark – stress the pivotal role of labor platforms in "covering a growing demand for flexible services" (Danish Government 2019: p. 43). International institutions, such as the European Union and consultancy firms, have also promoted platform work by underlining the beneficial role of flexibility, which sounds appealing to unemployed people who cannot have or do not want full-time jobs (e.g., Manyika et al. 2015; Single Market Forum 2018; European Commission 2021). Previous literature on labor platforms highlights the centrality of the concept of flexibility in the discourse surrounding platform work, acknowledging the multiple facets offered by flexibility[5], depending on the actor invoking it and the incentives for pursuing it (Schor et al., 2020; Katsnelson & Oberholzer-Gee 2021). However, when workers are forced to take up flexible employment out of necessity, platform work assumes precarious features, and workers are susceptive to detrimental effects on their livelihoods (van Doorn 2023). Anwar and Graham suggest that when assessing job quality in gig work, we should not differentiate freedom and flexibility from vulnerability and precarity (Anwar & Graham 2021: p.238). This tension between flexibility and precarity figures prominently in many accounts of platform work, whether from scholars, news media outlets or (inter)national institutions (e.g., Risak 2017; MacDonald & Giazitzoglou 2019; Pollet 2021; Danish Government 2019; European Commission 2021).

[5] The use of the word flexibility also has interesting etymological connotations. Flexible originates from Latin 'flecto', meaning to bend or curve. Thus, flexibility is the anatomical ability to bend and stretch without breaking. This implies that the flexible material that is elastically deformed will return to its original state once the applied pressure or stress has been removed. Being flexible is considered a positive attribute, as long as the 'material' – in this case platform workers – is not deformed or broken after the stress has been removed.

Precarity is a conceptual frame describing the rise of employment uncertainty and income instability coupled with exploitation and the flexibilization of labor markets in contemporary neoliberal economies (Waite et al. 2015). The term was first used by French sociologists in the '70s to depict a more general state of insecurity and proximity to poverty (Barbier 2004) and by Italian workerist movements to explain new modes of governance in capitalist regimes (Nigro 2018). Precarity as a concept was later refined by Butler (2004) as precariousness to portray ontological vulnerability and insecurity. However, precarity has prevailed in literature as a labor-related concept, widely used by labor sociologists and labor geographers to refer to the rise of flexible, sub-contracted, temporary, contingent, and part-time work in a market economy (Kalleberg 2009) and how it is locally experienced or contested (Paret & Gleeson 2016). Precarity has been used as a theoretical lens to highlight deteriorating and insecure employment conditions, mainly for – but not confined to – those working in the lower levels of the labor market (Waite 2009). At the same time, precarity has been a politically laden term, used widely by workerist movements and political groups, and identified as a potential point of convergence for union struggles and radical collective activism (Foti 2005).

Engaging with the concept of precarity in the case of platform housecleaners in Denmark is useful for my thesis in three different ways: First, it provides me with a critical tool for analyzing the workers' self-perception of flexibility in relation to multidimensional insecurities when working through a platform, such as income insecurity, contingency of gigs, gender-related insecurity when working isolated in private domestic environments, welfare benefit exclusion, etc. Second, drawing from Bourdieu's (1998) conceptualization of precarity as a product of political will rather than economic fatalism, I investigate the proliferation of housecleaning platforms in Denmark as a result of active policymaking and not just as an innovative business model trend. Third, the political implications associated with the concept of precarity inform my analysis on how workers in these platforms perceive their ability to collectively influence their employment conditions and explore whether there is some sort of resistance strategy. That said, precarity is not used in this thesis to underline the vulnerability of platform housecleaners and portray them as victims. On the contrary, my use of precarity – and relevant concepts I use such as 'governmental precarization', 'institutionalization of migrant precarity', and 'liminal precarity' – subscribes to a strand of thought that refutes traditional

socialist and communist depictions of the working class as victimized passive subjects, as an exploited labor force subordinated to the force of capitalism (cf. Cobarrubias et al. 2011; Nigro 2018). This strand of thought (e.g., Neilson & Rossiter 2008; Waite 2009; Lorey 2015; Paret 2016; Alberti 2018; van Doorn 2023) foregrounds the individual and collective agency of precarious workers, which is largely underestimated in many analyses on precarious work(ers). Although these scholars come from diverse disciplines and political backgrounds, they all share a common aspiration, which, in the words of Noopur Raval, is to "retool precarity [...] as a non-fatalistic analytic" (Raval 2020, quoted in van Doorn 2023: p. 162). In the next section, I present my use of concepts from the wider theoretical framework of precarity as non-fatalistic tools for analyzing the precarious work of platform housecleaners in Denmark.

1.3.2 Governmental precarization, institutionalization of migrant precarity, and liminal precarity

Platform labor studies have abundantly documented and analyzed the working conditions of platform workers. However, the role of states in shaping the employment conditions of platform work (Collier et al. 2017; Inversi et al. 2022; Floros & Jørgensen 2023) has been less clearly investigated in this literature. In Denmark, employment conditions and wages are decided by an industrial relations system of collective bargaining between employer and employee organizations. This seems to leave little space for the state to engage in regulating the Danish gig economy, since it is only called upon by the social partners if they fail to reach common agreement. Yet, during my fieldwork it became evident that the state (elected government or state agencies) played a significant role in shaping the gig economy environment[6]. My analysis on the governance of the Danish platform housecleaning sector draws on Isabelle Lorey's theoretical approach to 'governmental precarization' (Lorey 2011; 2015; 2017). Lorey describes precarization in neoliberalism as increasingly normalized at structural level so that it becomes an important instrument of governing through insecurity. This concept aims to describe specific modes of governing in capitalist industrial societies that are based on creating

[6] Beyond portraying states and international institutions as lagging behind technological innovation and therefore unable to regulate it promptly (cf. Aloisi & De Stefano 2020), here I am also inspired by Foucauldian analyses on liberal states and neoliberalism. According to these analyses, the self-regulation of neoliberal economies, such as the platform economy, is impossible without the institutional, legal and policymaking initiatives (or targeted omissions) of a supra-state that make it work (Goldschmidt & Rauchenschwandtner 2007; Lazzarato 2009).

contingency in the living conditions of subjects. Consequently, contingency produces new practices for self-government of the subjects. In that sense, governmental precarization can be described as assigning the regulation of one's precariousness to oneself.

According to Lorey, governmental precarization is historically based on governing through the process of 'othering', where states create identities of dangerous others within or outside their constituency and offer security and protection against these others (simultaneously generating precarity for these others) as the means for state legitimization (cf. Panourgiá 2009). In neoliberalism, an inward turn for governmental precarization is witnessed, as othering parts of society and outsourcing precarity to the global South is not sufficient to sustain the political-economic structures of advanced economies. Therefore, Lorey claims that capitalist states are continuously normalizing the individualized precarization of their subjects through insecurity, by destabilizing employment relations and living conditions. Over time, welfare provisions have been deployed to maintain this balance. The post-war evolution of Western welfare states aimed to provide certain levels of security (lengthen the threshold of precarity) for their citizens (cf. Offe, 1984/2019). Nevertheless, in recent history, this direction has been reversed and even Denmark – with its comparatively high level of welfare provisions – has also restricted welfare benefits. However, the goal is not the unlimited precarization of all subjects, but the achievement of an 'acceptable equilibrium' between different normalities of poverty, precarity and wealth (Lazzarato 2009: p. 128). This equilibrium is intended to encourage subjects to strive on their own resources to remain just above the level of absolute poverty, which would require the state to take some action. Lorey, in line with non-fatalistic analytics of precarity, claims that self-government features sparked by the process of governmental precarization can lead to emancipatory projects of self-organization. This requires subjects to understand and embrace their precariousness and use it as an affirmative basis for collective emancipatory politics (Lorey 2015: p. 91). In my thesis, I use governmental precarization as a tool for analyzing both the governance of platform housecleaning in Denmark and the individual and (or) collective self-organized practices of cleaners to improve their working and living conditions.

Given that my fieldwork denotes that platform housecleaners in Denmark are mainly migrants, in my analysis I am also employing 'institutionalization of migrant precarity' (Floros & Jørgensen 2020). This concept describes the interplay of labor market regulations and national migration policies in promoting the availability of migrant labor on unequal terms for specific segments or local settings in national labor markets. Institutionalization of migrant precarity originates from the same line of thought and non-fatalistic analytic as governmental precarization. It illustrates the current tendency of what Lazzarato (2009) terms as an 'acceptable equilibrium' moving towards a degradation of employment conditions and further devaluation of migrant labor. Rather than portraying migrants as victims, institutionalization of migrant precarity is a dynamic concept depicting labor as 'becoming migrant'. This term suggests that flexibility and informality are primarily imposed on migrant workers and are spreading to the rest of the workforce (see also Casas-Cortes 2014; Schierup & Jørgensen 2017). In this thesis, the institutionalization of migrant precarity applied accounts for the multiple mechanisms that normalize precarious employment for the predominantly migrant labor force of housecleaning platforms in Denmark. Institutionalization is not only achieved actively through labor and migration policies imposed from above. It is also established through wider cultural and social trends, where the demand for seamless, app-based service solutions has become part of everyday life (Elliott 2019). Literature on location-based platform work highlights the existing pattern of time-poor households taking advantage of money-poor migrant workers, who seldom have other recourses than working through platforms (Huws 2019). This thesis argues that institutionalization of migrant precarity in Denmark also builds on Danish consumers embracing the gig economy (and its precarious employment conditions). Contrary to corporate narratives claiming that housecleaning platforms are eager to foster formalization and fairer conditions in the housecleaning labor market (E1; hilfr.dk n/d), empirical findings from my fieldwork point in the opposite direction. As I demonstrate in my analysis, migrant platform housecleaners in Denmark must navigate through uncertain trajectories of precarious employment(s), where positive labor market outcomes are more often hindered than facilitated through platform work.

Discussing such trajectories of precarious employment for migrants, Scott and colleagues introduce the concept of 'ambiguous liminality' (Scott et al. 2022). Combining Anthropology with Migration

Studies and Labor Geography, this concept underlines how the achievement of more typical employment conditions for newcoming migrants is uncertain and depends on multiple factors. Liminality originates from Anthropology and denotes the in-between stage in rituals of passage, which comes after separation from the before and incorporation into the after (van Gennep 1960, in Scott et al. 2022: p: 4). In Scott and colleagues' words, liminality highlights migrants' agency but simultaneously works in favor of capital, by "masking the negatives associated with precarious work" (Scott et al.: p. 1). Their conceptualization breaks away from the more positive and creative depiction of liminality introduced by Turner (Thomassen 2015) and approaches liminality as a source of insecurity (cf. Horvath & Szakolczai 2018). In the case of platform labor, this can facilitate abusive employment conditions for migrant gig workers. In the same vein of foregrounding migrants' agency while adopting a non-fatalistic analytic, van Doorn (2023) recently suggested 'liminal precarity' to conceptualize migrants' subjective understandings of the transitory nature of gig work and their conscious choice to sign up for it, while anticipating another future. Liminality here also serves as an analytical tool that takes into account the various intersectional identities and past experiences of migrants. The different ways in which migrant housecleaners in Denmark experience and make sense of platform work also depends on these factors. The analysis in this thesis draws on these concepts to illustrate the in-between state in which migrant housecleaners find themselves as well as the uncertain futures this situation entails. Migrant housecleaners adapt to the realities created at the intersection of platform housecleaning and Danish welfare, migration and labor regulations and forge their individual or collective strategies to counter the uncertainties and shortcomings of location-based platform work.

1.3.3 Everyday forms of resistance align with the Autonomy of Migration approach

Adopting a non-fatalistic analytic approach to precarity in this PhD project paves the way for a thorough investigation and account of the collective and individual resistance strategies of precariously employed housecleaners in Denmark. Existing literature on workers' resistance in the gig economy focuses disproportionately on food-delivery and ride-hailing platforms (e.g., Cant 2019; Marrone & Finotto 2019; Schreyer 2021; Riesgo Gomez 2023). This is not surprising, since food

delivery and passenger transport platform workers have been at the global forefront of organizing platform labor struggles. The visibility of these riders in public space, and their ability to interact while performing their work is one of the main factors enabling these struggles. Conversely, platform housecleaners figure at the lower end of typologies on structural workplace bargaining power (e.g., Vandaele 2021). Attempts at organization are hindered by the fact that housecleaning is performed in private homes, behind closed doors, and workers usually never get to physically meet people working on the same platform. Despite such obstacles, there are examples of platform housecleaners' organization efforts, such as the Helpling Workers Assembly in Berlin (Bloque Latinoamericano Berlin 2021). However, such examples of publicly visible organization are merely exceptions.

In order to better describe resistance practices of platform housecleaners in Denmark, I follow the reasoning of James Scott in his work 'Weapons of the Weak', which describes everyday forms of peasant resistance (Scott 1985). Scott draws attention to everyday forms of resistance that fall short of being characterized as "collective outright defiance" (ibid: p. 29). According to Scott, everyday resistance is not aimed at bringing about institutional change but is associated with more informal and covert behaviors, in the quest for immediate gains. One of the concerns Scott describes in his book involves challenging Marxist interpretations claiming that peasants' quiescence vis-à-vis their exploiters relates to peasants' false consciousness. Rather than taking for granted a fatalistic acceptance of the existing social order on behalf of the peasantry, Scott points his readers towards everyday practices of peasant resistance. Such practices include concealment of thoughts and feelings, false compliance, defamation, and feigned ignorance.

In my analysis, I demonstrate how platform housecleaners in Denmark resort to such everyday practices of resistance. Moreover, such practices are not solely individual. They also assume more collective forms, like social media groups fostering solidarity among workers. Applying Scott's framework on everyday resistance is consistent with a non-fatalistic analysis of precarity. Instead of simply focusing on the shortcomings stemming from the inability of platform housecleaners to participate in traditional Danish labor unions, my analysis: a) highlights the emancipatory potentials of alternative ways of collective organizing, whether through social media groups or ethnic/migrant

groups, and b) stresses workers' agency in platform work, eschewing the portraying of (migrant) housecleaners as unresourceful victims of the gig economy.

Here, my theoretical framework is also enriched by the Autonomy of Migration (AoM) approach. The AoM approach was originally used in Border Studies and Migration Studies to conceptualize the constitutional role of migrant agency in the shaping of (inter)national border regimes, labor, and migration policies (Bojadžijev & Karakayali 2007; Casas-Cortés et al. 2015; De Genova 2017). AoM emphasizes how migrant mobility and migrant practices predate the enforcement of oppressive migration controls. This emphasis draws on theorists from the Italian workerist and post-workerist tradition (*operaismo*), who reversed the duality between labor and capital to claim that transformations of capitalism take place in response to demands and social dynamics of the workers' movements (Nigro 2018; Casas-Cortés et al. 2015). Applying the lens of AoM to platform housecleaning in Denmark is analytically productive in three ways: First, rather than treating the introduction of digital labor platforms in Denmark as a result of technological innovation, AoM addresses their establishment in the Danish labor market as a means for evading the industrial relations system of collective bargaining, and minimizing labor costs. Second, AoM opens up for theorizing housecleaning platforms as sites of contestation and conflict between migrants, state policies and platform management. This produces a different reading of recent policymaking initiatives on the Danish gig economy, as I reveal in the following chapters of my thesis. Third, AoM's focus on foregrounding migrants' subjective diversities informs my analysis of platform housecleaners' accounts of resistance as a constant dialogue between everyday practices and subjective understandings of the platform economy and the Danish labor market. This dialogue highlights migrant practices as a result of individual and collective livelihood strategies, rather than as passive acceptance of new trends in capitalism based on migrant workers' dire living conditions and false consciousness (cf. Scott 1985; van Doorn 2023; Orth 2023).

1.3.4 Algorithmic management meets minor theory

Of course, analyzing everyday forms of resistance begs the question of what exactly do platform housecleaners resist precisely? When resistance in location-based platforms takes more collective and

organized forms – such as food delivery workers' labor unions – protests or demands can be expressed in various directions, e.g., platform managers, platform companies, local politicians or international institutions. However, in my case study, platform housecleaners in Denmark are not directly defying managers and platforms, nor are they articulating claims to the Danish government or the EU. Housecleaners' everyday resistance practices are a means of coping and navigating towards benefiting themselves from – collective or individual – management by the platforms. In my analysis, I use the concept of algorithmic management to investigate how working conditions of platform housecleaners in Denmark are produced, mediated, governed, and contested.

Algorithmic management is a broad concept that was adopted quickly in both academic (e.g., Wood et al. 2019; Walker et al. 2021) and institutional discourse (e.g., European Commission 2021; Munkholm et al. 2022). Originally conceived by Lee, Kusbit, Metsky and Dabbish in the Human Computer Interaction discipline, algorithmic management is defined as the "software algorithms assuming managerial functions and surrounding institutional devices that support algorithms in practice" (Lee et al. 2015: p. 1603). Other scholars have provided similar definitions of algorithmic management. Indicatively, shortly after the concept was coined, Rosenblat and Stark argued that it should be extended to include the automated ways in which it imposed corporate policies on (Uber) workers' behavior (Rosenblat & Stark 2016: p. 3759). Duggan and colleagues conceptualize algorithmic management as the limiting of human involvement in management, through delegation of responsibility for making and executing decisions to self-learning algorithms (Duggan et al. 2020: p. 119). Möhlmann and Zalmanson adopt an Information Systems approach and attribute five characteristics to algorithmic management. According to their definition, algorithmic management comprises tracking workers' behavior, evaluating workers' performance, automated decision-making procedures, interaction with a "system" rather than humans, and low levels of transparency (Möhlmann & Zalmanson 2017: pp. 4–5).

These conceptual variations build on empirical insights, adding nuance to the understanding of algorithmic management. Nevertheless, in my analysis, I depart from the original definition proposed by Lee and colleagues, as they emphasize the importance of algorithmic management being

supported by institutional devices. Assuming a broad definition of the words 'institutional' and 'devices', I understand 'institutional' to include both corporate and public institutions. Likewise, inspired by STS, I do not consider 'devices' to be simply technical artefacts, but also reports and policy documents, as well as human/non-human assemblages, such as customer support services and public agencies. That said, I argue that the production and deployment of algorithmic software and the legal framework underpinning its use to control labor is equally important in defining algorithmic management.

Existing literature on algorithmic management/control in digital labor platforms focuses mainly on food delivery and ride-hailing platforms (Lee et al. 2015; Rosenblat & Stark 2016; Griesbach et al. 2019; Ivanova et al. 2018; Veen et al. 2020; Walker et al. 2021; Kusk & Bossen 2022), and on crowd working (online remote work) platforms (Wood et al. 2019; Jarrahi et al. 2020; Möhlmann et al. 2021; Jarrahi et al. 2021). Despite the variety of conclusions reached in these texts, there is widespread agreement on the existence of extensive information asymmetry between the platforms and the workers. Most scholars agree that this information asymmetry, which is evident in the way platform apps are configured, allows gig platforms to exert broad control on the way workers are directed, evaluated, and disciplined (Kellog et al. 2020; Wood 2021; Sandbukt 2021). On the one hand, some researchers who, in their case studies, discern such totalizing algorithmic control that leads them to coin terms such as 'algorithmic despotism', stress the extent and stringency of such control (Griesbach et al. 2019; Veen et al. 2020). On the other hand, some specific case studies indicate that workers are subject to 'lenient algorithmic management', where the workers' choices regarding the way they perform the work are less constrained (Kusk & Bossen 2022). Regardless of the different conclusions, this literature also converges on context – meaning the type of work, the configuration of the specific platform, and the location where the work is performed – as being crucial in defining the ways in which algorithmic management takes place in each case.

Given that domestic work platforms do not involve complex algorithms for price surging or optimal distribution of tasks in real time, references to algorithmic management in the platform housecleaning literature are limited. Julia Ticona, Alexandra Mateescu, and Alex Rosenblat have

provided a thorough juxtaposition of algorithmic management in domestic work and ride-hailing platforms in the USA (Ticona et al. 2018). According to them, rankings, ratings, and penalizing workers through account deactivation are some of the common algorithmic management tools used for all types of digital labor platforms. Ticona and colleagues emphasize that in spite of the 'marketplace' business model of domestic work being less reliant on complex algorithmic software, researchers should not disregard the role of algorithmic management on the way work is organized and experienced (ibid.). In Europe, algorithmic management has been investigated in the case of the German housecleaning platform Helpling (Gerold et al. 2022). In this study, researchers demonstrate how the digital infrastructure of the Helpling platform acts as a site of assessment, evaluation, ranking, and comparison of the platform workers, thereby shaping user interaction.

Closely related to the concept of algorithmic management, and the ways in which it shapes user behavior, lies the argument that platform workers adopting and engaging in 'anticipatory compliance practices' (Bucher et al. 2021). The empirical foundation of this concept comes from investigating online crowd-working platforms. Anticipatory compliance refers to workers' efforts to predict the prioritizations of algorithmic management, and their subsequent striving to align their behavior accordingly, in order to ensure a good reputation and visibility, and secure long-term access to the platform. Anticipatory compliance practices are driven by the information asymmetries endemic in the complex and black-boxed nature of algorithmic management and can take direct or indirect forms (ibid.: p. 52–53). Anticipatory compliance practices have not been widely investigated in the context of location-based platform work (e.g., Viera 2023) and – until the time of writing of this thesis – not at all in a housecleaning platform context. Here again, despite the less complex algorithmic decision-making taking place on Danish housecleaning platforms, I draw on the analytical value of the concept to describe findings from my interviews with cleaners. Moreover, the concept places special emphasis on workers' social agency, and is therefore consistent with the theoretical framework of this thesis as a whole.

In my analysis of platform housecleaning in Denmark, I draw inspiration from feminist geographer Cindi Katz's writings on minor theory. Katz introduces minor theory as a way of doing theory

differently, of interpolating established, 'major' productions of knowledge with 'minor' stories vibrating within their realm (Katz 1996; Katz 2017). The aim of minor theory is to open up new understandings of and connections to established concepts in order to explain how the social relations co-constructing these concepts work (Katz 2017). In the case of housecleaning platforms in Denmark, literally and theoretically attributing the adjective 'minor' to algorithmic management is meant to further nuance Lee et al.'s definition of the concept and describe how the entanglement of human and algorithmic factors co-producing the management of platform housecleaning is enacted. Rather than simply describing how the labor process is organized and affected by the algorithmic configuration of the apps, minor algorithmic management foregrounds the subtleties of the interwoven human and nonhuman management practices existing in platform housecleaning in Denmark. By selecting the conceptual elements of algorithmic management that are most useful for analyzing platform housecleaning and combining them with empirical insight on how work on these platforms is actually managed and distributed, 'minor algorithmic management' transforms the concept of algorithmic management for housecleaning platforms in Denmark.

In accordance with the reasoning behind adopting non-fatalistic analytics of precarity, employing minor theory unsettles "received narratives and material social practices of power" (Katz 2017: p. 597). By adopting a minor approach to platform housecleaning in Denmark, I aim to explore how intersecting categories such as class, gender, race, and citizenship status interact with the major narrative of algorithmic management as the present – and imminent future – of work (Benlian et al. 2022). Minor theory intends to critically rework concepts and develop emancipatory and socially transformative theory in new registers. Reworking the concept of algorithmic management in housecleaning platforms to absolve the omnipotent technocentric character it has been attributed by literature on platform work, adds a layer of nuance both to the understanding of management practices and to the practices and agency of platform housecleaners. Thus, my goal in combining minor theory and algorithmic management is not to strictly theorize on what 'minor algorithmic management' means for digital housecleaning platforms, but also to challenge what algorithmic management might imply or obscure when used in policy and academic papers on domestic platform work. Accepting that housecleaning platforms rely solely on algorithmic management supports, by

proxy, the narrative used by such companies to present themselves as tech firms rather than as entities more similar to temporary staffing agencies, which refuse to offer employee rights and benefits to workers (cf. Harnett 2021).

1.3.5 Sociotechnical imaginaries of the Danish gig economy

Finally, in this thesis, I apply one more concept that is useful for analyzing the role of various stakeholders, amongst them the Danish government, state agencies, and industrial relations system, in forming the sociolegal and sociotechnical environment of the Danish gig economy. This is the concept of sociotechnical imaginaries, originating from STS, which discusses how the imagining of technological futures assumes a constructive role for contemporary societies. The early formulation of the concept referred to nation states as the initial propagators of sociotechnical imaginaries and aimed at transnational comparisons (Jasanoff & Kim 2009). As the concept gained a lot of academic attention for its analytical potential to help scholars understand how sociotechnical shifts unfold, its two authors further developed it and broadened its scope. In 2015, Sheila Jasanoff defined sociotechnical imaginaries as "collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology" (Jasanoff 2015: p. 6). In its new form, the concept is adjusted to accommodate the lead of smaller-scale, regional or local actors in articulating and propagating sociotechnical imaginaries. Corporate actors, civil society organizations or even individuals can serve as starting points for such an imaginary. However, not every thought, ephemeral plan or envisioned future can rise to the status of a sociotechnical imaginary. For this to happen, it must be communally adopted, through the building of social and political coalitions (Mager & Katzenbach 2021; Jasanoff 2015).

The popularity of sociotechnical imaginaries in recent literature on constructing technological presents and imagining technological futures (e.g., Sadowski & Bendor 2019; Schiølin 2020; Bach 2020; Bareis & Katzenbach 2022) stems also from the concept's capacity to cut through the binary of agency and structure (Jasanoff 2015). Envisioned technological futures informed by stakeholders' subjective understandings (agency) are combined in the analysis with legal frameworks, political

cultures and infrastructural materialities (structure). Highlighting both agency and structure is consistent with other concepts I include in the theoretical framework of this thesis, such as the concepts informing my non-fatalistic analytic of precarity, the AoM approach and minor theory. The sociotechnical imaginaries' interplay of structure and agency is employed in my analysis to provide answers to the research question on how the Danish state, its agencies and the industrial relations system promote or impede flexibility and potentially precarious employment relations for platform housecleaners, within a specific spatial context. The rise of the Danish sharing economy[7] was fueled by an institutionally led imagining of a technological future (Schiølin 2020). Both labor and capital platforms solidified their proliferation and operation within a socio-political context characterized mainly by a techno-euphoric climate of innovation (cf. Mager 2012).

Nevertheless, I do not restrict my analysis to describing a linear evolution of a single desired sharing economy future, but instead draw inspiration from the reading of sociotechnical imaginaries as "multiple, contested and commodified" (Mager & Katzenbach 2021). Multiple factors signify that single and solid sociotechnical imaginaries rarely remain stable through time. Rather than being monolithic, sociotechnical imaginaries tend to be dynamic and multi-faceted. Likewise, these imaginaries are often in contestation with other imaginaries, and the outcome is not always the prevalence of one but the parallel existence of many. Finally, as tech companies have grown tremendously recently, imagined futures are all the more corporately motivated and pushing against the primacy of states in producing sociotechnical imaginaries. Not surprisingly, the 'sharing economy' is one example Mager and Katzenbach give to explain how sociotechnical imaginaries are being commodified (ibid.: p. 227). In line with the above theoretical approach, in my thesis I explore and analyze the multiple facets of the Danish sociotechnical imaginary of the sharing economy, which originated in the second half of the past decade. Moreover, I scrutinize the construction of this imaginary as part of a wider set of multiple sociotechnical imaginaries of the digitalization of everyday life in Denmark. This multiplicity comprises an array of sociotechnical imaginaries such as the creation

[7] In contrast to the rest of my thesis, here I use the term 'sharing economy' (Deleøkonomi in Danish) as this was the blanket term originally employed in Danish public policy to describe the operation of both labor (e.g., housecleaning) and capital (e.g., Airbnb) platforms.

of the Danish digital citizen (Schou & Hjelholt 2018), the corporatized imaginaries of digital and data-related technologies (Hockenhull & Cohn 2021), the digitalization of the public sector (cf. Winthereik 2024) etc., which share a common point of convergence in producing a narrative of desired digital seamlessness in the everyday life of Danish citizens (cf. Plesner et al. 2021).

1.4 How does platform housecleaning work?

Before moving on to the overview of the chapters of this thesis, I will provide here a quick summary of how housecleaning work is contracted and performed, when mediated by a platform in Denmark. Each platform company has its own unique model, however some of the features are common. The following description is based on the walk-through technique (Light et al. 2018), where I have documented step-by-step both the procedure a worker follows to sign up to the app/platform and the steps required by a customer looking to contract a housecleaner. Some extra details on specific platforms are informed by the workers', platform manager's and platform customer support worker's interviews, and my digital ethnography in the Facebook group.

When signing up as a cleaner, all platforms require data, such as name, email address, and locations where the cleaner is available to work, as well as setting up a profile with a short description and a photo (not mandatory for all platforms). Depending on the platform and the stage of the booking process, more information is required, e.g., CPR number, which is Denmark's unique ID for people legally residing in the country, bank account number for transactions, and in some cases uploading documentation copies or attesting that the cleaner has a clean criminal record. All platforms require that the cleaner confirms reading Terms and Conditions, which are lengthy legal documents describing the contractual terms. The cleaner is also urged to provide a schedule indicating their availability. Once signing up is completed, the cleaner's profile is included in a list that the potential customers can browse. The prioritization of which profiles appear higher in the list depends on each platform's algorithmic configuration. Most platform companies charge the customer a commission for bookings contracted through the platform, which ranges between ten and thirty-five percent of the agreed fee between cleaners and customers. In some cases, the platforms using the commission model also deduct a smaller amount from the cleaners. Other platforms charge a fixed membership

amount for providing access to the full services offered by the platform, to both workers and consumers, and are not charging any commission.

Contrary to cleaners' obligation to upload their details and profiles in advance, customers are not required to provide all their data in advance. In most platforms they are free to browse profiles and prices after simply entering their postal code and house size. In this way, the platform allows the customers to check the availability of cleaners in their area. The rest of the details, such as bank account number, ID documentation, address etc., must be filled in when the customers proceed with a booking. Customers are not always asked to upload photos, even less profile descriptions, and definitely not criminal records. Some platforms ask customers to create a task including basic information such as date, location, apartment size, and offered fee. This is usually the case for platforms which do not specialize in housecleaning but include it among other services. Platforms offering solely housecleaning allow signed-up customers to approach their chosen cleaners through the interface and discuss details related to the cleanings. Good communication is paramount when concluding a booking or before initiating the cleaning, since the customers' expectations of what is to be done must align with the possibility of this being done within the cleaning hours on offer. Unless otherwise agreed, customers must provide their own cleaning means (tools and chemicals). When the cleaning is concluded, customers may rate the cleaner for the provided service. Many platforms offer this opportunity to cleaners as well; however, this is seldom done in practice. One of the biggest Danish platforms also offers customers the option to let the platform choose a cleaner for them, within the price range decided by the customer.

Bookings can be one-off cleanings or recurring every week or every two weeks. Once the booking is completed, each platform has different policies regarding cancellation by the customer and subsequent compensation for the worker. Commuting between gigs is not calculated in the working time or the expenses. In many cases, the customers are not at home when the cleaning is done and there are various arrangements for providing cleaners with keys. All platforms have a customer service department which handles claims and disputes both by cleaners and customers. Accidental

damages of property and physical injuries are in most cases covered by special insurance schemes which apply per gig and are deducted from the cleaner's fee.

All self-employed workers in Denmark -including housecleaners- who earn more than DKK 50.000 per year, are required to establish their own company and possess a Central Business Register (CVR) number. Above this threshold, self-service tax declaration becomes more complex, since the self-employed housecleaners have to charge, report and pay VAT for their transactions. In Denmark, the state subsidizes citizens for housecleaning expenses in the form of tax deductions. This means that each customer is entitled to a 26% discount on the price of the booking, which they get as tax returns after the annual tax declaration, with an upper limit of DKK 6.600 in deductions for 2023 (SKAT 2023).

1.5 Thesis structure outline

In this introductory chapter, I have situated my case study both within the context of the Danish society and the international literature on housecleaning and location-based platforms. After presenting my research questions, I developed the theoretical framework that guides my analysis and refers to relevant literature defining, applying or advancing the concepts comprising the framework. In the chapters that follow, I first provide an extensive review of the methodological and epistemological choices that shaped my research (chapter 2). Then, I compose a brief historiography of the evolution of housecleaning platforms – and digital labor platforms more broadly – in a Danish context and situate this historiography within the international literature on domestic work platforms (chapter 3). In the chapters that follow, I apply the main theoretical concepts presented in this introductory chapter to answer the rest of the research questions I posed. My empirical-analytical chapters commence with bottom-up accounts stemming from platform housecleaners' interviews and conclude with the role of the state. I chose this order because I prioritize platform workers' experiences and understandings of the phenomenon over the institutional narratives. I will elaborate upon this further in the methodological chapter. More specifically, first I draw on my research findings on the subject positions of platform housecleaners and combine them with the concepts of institutionalization of migrant precarity and the Autonomy of Migration approach to explain how platform work in Denmark is determined by migration and attempts to regulate it (chapter 4). I then

discuss platform housecleaners' practices and experiences (chapter 5), focusing my analysis on the nexus between flexibility and precarity. In my analysis, I follow a non-fatalistic approach informed by concepts such as governmental precarization and liminal precarity while drawing on rich insights from Platform Labor Studies. In the next chapter, I scrutinize platform housecleaners' experiences through the lens of everyday resistance practices, liminal precarity, and ambiguous liminality. By placing workers' agency at the forefront of my analysis, I problematize the concept of resistance in my case study (chapter 6). Next, I investigate how the configuration of the housecleaning apps mediate the production and governance of labor relations for platform housecleaners in Denmark. The concepts of anticipatory compliance and algorithmic management are central to my analysis. By foregrounding the institutional support to the operation of algorithms and highlighting the interplay of human and algorithmic modes of management, I coin 'minor algorithmic management' as a concept better suited to describing Danish housecleaning platforms' management (chapter 7). The subsequent chapter investigates the main assumption underpinning the positive depiction of digital labor platforms in Danish political and corporate discourse. The assumption is that platform work acts as a steppingstone, facilitating the entrance of vulnerable labor groups into the labor market (chapter 8). Finally, the last chapter in my analysis (chapter 9) engages with Danish policymaking and state agencies' decisions. Applying the lens of governmental precarization to my material, I showcase the role of institutional stakeholders in promoting precarious employment relations for platform housecleaners in Denmark. In this chapter, I also approach Danish policy documents and decisions from an Autonomy of Migration perspective, to stress the constitutional role of migrant platform workers' mobilities in the shaping of the restrictive policies to control their labor market participation. This thesis concludes with some general remarks on platform housecleaning in Denmark, and with indicating possible avenues for future research (chapter 10).

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents my epistemological choices and the methods I used to conduct fieldwork on housecleaning platform work in the context of Denmark. It concludes by detailing and explaining how I dealt with the ethical considerations related to my research. My interest in labor-related topics predated the initiation of this PhD project. Having worked for almost two decades in precarious jobs in Greece, mostly as a waiter and as a courier, I have experienced the shortcomings, benefits, and pitfalls that flexible work entails, especially in the context of a labor market with high unemployment rates. Therefore, I was motivated to investigate if and how digital mediation of flexible, low-skilled work through an app affected – for better or worse – the work-life experiences of its users/workers, especially in the context of Denmark. Denmark, according to Greve and his colleagues (2021) is one of the richest and happiest countries in the world, if, of course, we define 'happiness' in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and robust welfare policies. When I started formulating my project proposal in 2019, digital labor platforms were proliferating globally and speculations – by labor sociologists such as Guy Standing – anticipated that, by 2025, labor transactions contracted through platforms would account for 1/3 of all global labor transactions (Woodcock 2020). Exaggerated though these prognoses might sound, as we are closing in on this date, working through digital platforms is a globally widespread and consolidated form of work that figures prominently in debates on digitalization of work and the future of work more broadly (e.g., Berg et al. 2018; Alsos & Dølvik 2021).

Argumentation within these debates frequently draws on quantitative approaches. Specific features of platform-mediated work as well as the size of the gig economy *per se* are hard to analyze and define, also due to the difficulty of acquiring credible and commensurable data. Quantitative data on

platform labor come from large international online surveys – some with self-selected respondents (e.g., Urzì Brancati et al. 2020) and others based on standard probability sampling techniques (e.g., Piasna et al. 2022) or data from national Labor Force Surveys (e.g., Ilsøe & Larsen 2021). Sometimes there are sporadic cases of platforms offering data access to specific scholars and consultancy firms (e.g., Copenhagen Economics 2021). However, corporate data and data from state agencies can be highly curated before being handed over to researchers, especially as the stakes are so high regarding knowledge production on such controversial issues[8]. Moreover, quantitative accounts of platform workers' schedules, duration of employment or platform demographics might fail to account for several aspects of platform workers' work-life realities. In my study, I critically address how housecleaning platforms operate in Denmark and the implications this has on the lives of its – primarily migrant – workforce. My conscious choice was to approach the phenomenon with qualitative methods and to use the housecleaners' accounts and experiences of platform work as a basis for my analysis (cf. Galis & Hansson 2012). Adopting this bottom-up approach helps nuance platform housecleaning in Denmark beyond quantitative accounts, which lack descriptive thickness. However partial such accounts may be, they provide rich insight into the working lives of housecleaners, and they uncover topics well-hidden underneath corporate narratives and public discourse, the focus of which is not decided by the workers (cf. Haraway 1988).

Foregrounding workers' experiences and situated knowledges (ibid.), when investigating labor-related controversies, is central to workplace ethnographies and research methods such as the workers' inquiry (cf. Badger & Woodcock 2019; Woodcock 2014). My appreciation of these approaches also stems from my long engagement in a grass-roots union organization of precariously employed

[8] In 2020, several scholars investigating digital labor platforms signed an open-letter call for establishing ethical principles in gig-economy-related research. The letter responded to a report published by Cornell University and funded by ridehailing platforms Uber and Lyft and it drew on corporate data facilitated by the platforms. However, the platforms refused to share this data with other researchers and independent economists hired by local government, which at the time wanted to regulate platform-mediated ridehailing (Gigeconomyresearchunited 2020). In a European context, Copenhagen Economics was commissioned by delivery platforms to conduct a courier survey, which concluded that platform couriers prefer self-employed, flexible work and if the policy for employment classification changed – as discussed at EU level at the time of the survey – the effects would be disastrous for workers, customers, restaurants and platform companies (Copenhagen Economics 2021). However, when asked to present the specific methodological parameters of the survey, both by labor union representatives and me, the Copenhagen Economics researchers refused.

workers in the hospitality sector. Due to this engagement, I have listened to literally hundreds of workers narrate the complex realities of their employment in relation to labor controversies. This has strengthened my approbation and commitment to foregrounding workers' perspectives when providing nuanced accounts on topics related to labor. In the 1960s, Romano Alquati, a militant researcher of Italian operaismo, pioneered a method of workers' inquiry and coined the term 'coresearch'. Coresearch aimed at foregrounding workers' agency and emancipatory potential, rather than relegating workers as simple objects of research (Armano & Murgia 2019). Alquati claimed that grass-roots labor organizing has always been a form of coresearch (Roggero 2010), which also explains my inclination to adopt a bottom-up approach. Nevertheless, in my research, I do not constrain myself to workers' situated knowledges but combine them with policy document analysis, expert interviews and digital ethnography. A nuanced case study on housecleaning platform work in Denmark must also include the financial, political, technological and social environment in which platform housecleaning grows. As Robert Fairbanks notes, we need to unveil the multiscalar frameworks within which "regulatory experimentation unfolds" to "gain insight into how policy imperatives shape [...] institutions, as well as how human agency reshapes these imperatives at the experiential level" (Fairbanks 2012: p. 560). In this thesis, I combine multiscalar approaches in order to reproduce the chains of interdependency that link the subjective understandings and practices of platform housecleaners, the sociotechnical affordances of platforms and their managerial practices, and the governance of the digital labor platform market in Denmark (cf. DuBois 2009).

2.2 Epistemological choices

In her introduction to *Beyond the Algorithm*, Deepa Das Acevedo (2021) argues for the value of qualitative research when investigating the gig economy. According to Acevedo, achieving granularity and exploring how people make sense of the world around them is imperative knowledge for gig-economy stakeholders and cannot be achieved through data sets and mass surveys (ibid.: p. 4). Given my specific motivation for investigating the digital mediation of flexible, low-skilled work, my project kicked off with the explicit intention to delve deeper into platform housecleaning in Denmark by attempting to 'see from below' and bring 'subjugated knowledges' to the fore (Haraway 1988: p. 584).

The concept of subjugated knowledges originates from Foucault, who used it mainly to make a political claim about the exclusion of lay knowledges of the oppressed from policymaking due to their lack of scientificity (Rudolph 2017). Foucault was mainly interested in the emancipatory and political capabilities of subjugated knowledges, rather than their contribution to achieving scientific validity; namely his argument in favor of subjugated knowledges was power-related and not epistemological (Bacchi & Goodwin 2016). On the contrary, when coining the term 'situated knowledges', Donna Haraway asserts that knowledges of the oppressed are preferred positions in relation to knowledge production; namely she is arguing epistemologically that subjugated knowledges are valuable due to the situatedness (positioning) of the subjects producing them (Haraway 1988). However, Haraway does not make a relativist claim that all situated knowledges are equally valid per definition. She insists that seeing from below requires a rigid skillset, responsibility and critical inquiry (ibid.: p. 584). In this thesis, I make a situated epistemological choice to align my research with platform housecleaners' subjugated knowledges and to base my analysis primarily on their experiences.

Foregrounding situated knowledges is premised on qualitative and ethnographic methods. Blomberg and Karasti claim that the basic principles of ethnography are "studying phenomena in their natural settings, taking a holistic view, providing a descriptive understanding, and taking a members' perspective" (2013: p. 374). They go on to explain that by 'natural settings' they mean the larger context in which the phenomenon under study occurs. The particularities of the case I am investigating do not allow for participant observation in natural settings such as the private houses of customers, since my presence would contaminate the fieldwork and produce a variety of risks for my informants. Therefore, the natural settings are reproduced in the narratives of workers when describing their isolated workplaces. These are complemented with the workers' presence in the platforms' interfaces, their participation in workers' social media groups, and their experiences while navigating the legal and regulatory framework of Danish society and the local labor market. Hence, when designing my project, I made specific epistemological choices based on my own experience and positionality, as well as on the practical constraints of investigating platform housecleaning.

Various disciplines and scholars, especially within the social sciences, have long challenged positivistic accounts of objective scientific knowledge and have stressed the omnipresence of different kinds of biases in academic research. Pam Scott, Evelleen Richards and Brian Martin maintain that "the methodological claim of neutral social analysis is a myth that can be no more sustained in actual practice than can the scientist's belief in a universal and efficacious scientific method" (1990: p. 491). They argue that clearly stating one's subject position and political role elevates the researcher from the role of a pseudo-objective detached observer to that of a critically involved citizen (ibid.). Engagement rather than detachment can also be methodologically productive. This became apparent during my own fieldwork, since many of my research subjects among platform workers and labor union representatives showed great enthusiasm regarding participating in the project, once they understood that my interest in the case was politically motivated and I was not merely trying to extract value for future publications and/or career visibility. On the contrary, when interviewing other stakeholders, despite clearly stating the purpose of my research, I did not refer to my political motivation and background, to avoid possible access limitations. By political motivation, I mean that I am interested in researching housecleaning platforms through the workers' experiences and perceptions articulated from below. I did not commence this project with a political agenda that I want to uncritically justify. This is also evident since I am not testing my case against some grand theoretical hypothesis but am assuming a more explorative approach. After all, platform housecleaners are not a homogeneous political or social movement in Denmark but individual workers trying to earn a living through flexible and insecure employment advertised as a new, competitive, and innovative model that is supported by policies worldwide. Producing partial and critical knowledge along with the workers is a choice that enables potentially sustaining reciprocal and solidary networks – called "solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology" (Haraway 1988: p. 584).

Following the reasoning of Haraway (1988) and Galis and Hansson (2012), in my project I undertook a partial methodological perspective. Partial perspectives acknowledge the inability to produce universalized objectivity. Haraway refers to this as the god-trick or vision of everything from nowhere, inherent in positivist male-dominated science (Haraway 1988). Haraway argues that the gaze from

nowhere signifies the “unmarked positions of Man and White” (ibid.: p. 581). Despite being male and white, I abstain from claims of universalized objectivity in my thesis. Haraway’s aforementioned argument explicitly justifies the need to heed partial, situated knowledges in the case of a highly gendered and racialized labor market, such as platform housecleaning in Denmark. My reason for assuming a partial perspective is both epistemological and practical. Epistemological, since I take a critical stance against supporters of “neutral” and “objective” scientific orthodoxy, especially within the social sciences (cf. Scott et al. 1990; Woodhouse 2005; May 1994). Practical, since mapping, investigating and theorizing on the totality of the platform housecleaning sector in Denmark to represent a “reality” is an impossible task for a 3-year PhD project. Hence, I decided to focus mainly on platform workers’ experiences, practices and overall agency to provide an account of how platform housecleaning in Denmark can be viewed ‘from below’. This account can be juxtaposed with other studies investigating platform housecleaners’ experiences within the flexibility/precarity nexus and how these intersect with local policies and factors augmenting vulnerability (e.g., Altenried 2021; van Doorn 2023). This approach displays specific limitations in analyzing other aspects of platform housecleaning in Denmark, such as the political economy of this sector and its relation to venture capital, workers’ career path statistics, etc. Moreover, my privileged position as a white, male, European researcher with a steady employment contract introduces further limitations – and therefore partiality – to my perception of the fieldwork, regardless of the reflexive stance I am evoking. Despite my good intentions, I am unlikely to fully grasp the nature and implications of uncertainties deriving from being female, and/or having compromised sociolegal status, and/or experiencing racial prejudice etc., due to my positionality.

Nevertheless, even if multiple researchers and resources were summoned, and access to all sorts of fieldwork data was unrestricted, the fluctuating volume and identities of platform workers, the temporalities of their participation, the shifting local and international regulations on gig work etc. would altogether provide just a glimpse of a “multiple, slippery and fuzzy reality” (Law 2007: p. 603).

This thesis therefore provides a time- and context-specific account of a dynamic phenomenon that, during the project’s duration, underwent shifts in labor force composition and national and European

policymaking, and was even adapted to suit the specificities of the COVID-19 pandemic. Different realities are contingent upon different research questions, different motivations and different methodologies. Blomberg and Karasti point out how the research field site is not simply out there, waiting to be discovered, but is actually constructed by the choices of the researchers and their interactions with the people and the artifacts that comprise it (Blomberg & Karasti 2013: p. 389). However, I am not making a relativist claim here. These choices are not "innocent" nor apolitical for any researcher. On the contrary, I am arguing for my situated epistemological commitment to research alongside platform housecleaners, aiming to disseminate knowledge to them and their communities first and foremost, while giving counter-hegemonic possibilities to the stakeholders with whom they share common interests (cf. Burawoy 2004; Galis 2022). My attempts may have fallen somewhat short of my original intentions, however, my initial conclusions, insight from the research, drafts and final forms of my papers were shared broadly with my interviewees, who were also invited to a follow-up meeting to discuss them. Throughout my project, I maintained both formal and informal communication with labor union representatives engaged with the Danish gig economy. Finally, I organized a roundtable discussion with platform workers, labor union representatives and scholars to support bridge building among individual workers of different sectors and union members, while raising awareness of the "underprivileged work-life realities of the people providing services through platforms" (Floros 2023).

The design of my case study on platform housecleaning in Denmark was inspired by the extended case method (Burawoy 1998). This method advocates reflexive science, namely engaging with – rather than being detached from – the subject under investigation and embedding research in its particular sociopolitical context, taking into account power relations and local and international processes. The method is intended to "extract the general from the unique, to move from the 'micro' to the 'macro', and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory" (ibid.: p. 5). Engaging with platform housecleaners in my project means trying to analyze perceptions, articulated from below, of both the nature of flexible employment relations and the role of policymaking and technologies in consolidating these relations, thus connecting micro-sociological approaches to existing theoretical concepts and wider theoretical frameworks. Despite

this influence, my project does not fully adhere to the methodological and analytical protocol proposed by Burawoy. That is because my case study does not aspire to contribute to a specific grand theoretical narrative. Instead, I am inclined towards a more open, interdisciplinary study that can produce knowledge "potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination" (Haraway 1988: p. 585). Still, I do build on preexisting theoretical concepts and use these to frame my case, rather than adopting an inductive Grounded Theory approach, which eschews engaging with macro-sociological concepts because these are not explicitly apparent or articulated in the life-worlds and narratives of the research subjects (Tavory & Timmermans 2009).

Case studies as a methodology, and engaged scholarship as a practice have both been criticized for lack of scientific validity and presence of bias (e.g., Norris 1997; Rooney 2005). Bent Flyvberg rejects such allegations and insists that the rigor of this methodological choice is equal to that of more structured frameworks of quantitative methods (2006: p. 19). Being able to close in on the lived realities of the subjects in a case study is indispensable for drawing valid conclusions (ibid.). Validity here refers more to the qualitative researcher upholding a consistent methodological and analytical approach, rather than to reviewers' criteria of post-hoc evaluation. According to Morse et al. (2002) achieving reliability and validity requires rigorous verification strategies on behalf of the researcher: "Qualitative research is iterative rather than linear, so that a good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis" (ibid.: p. 17). Thus, verification strategies for investigating the Danish gig economy with qualitative methods require an engaged proximity to the lived realities of platform workers. Nevertheless, decisions regarding the classification of platform housecleaners in Denmark as self-employed by the Danish Competition and Consumer Authority (Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020a; Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020b) and assessment of the positive effects of platform work for vulnerable groups (re)entering the labor market by a consultancy company (Cabi 2021) have been premised upon research that failed to engage more broadly – if at all – with the lived realities of housecleaners. Policymaking and decisions deriving from such research have crucial impacts both on the way the platform labor market is regulated and on the livelihoods of platform workers. I claim that this research, despite its allegedly

"neutral" and "detached" character, is clearly partisan in its epistemological choices and analyses, without being reflective about its limitations. On the contrary, precisely because of my admitted partial perspective and political motivation, and my intention to turn these into a strength rather than a liability for my project, I have structured my case study following Burawoy's three principles of explaining empirical phenomena with reflexive science (Burawoy 1998) and Badger and Woodcock's methodological guidelines on how to conduct ethnographic research in hard-to-reach workplaces (Badger and Woodcock 2019).

According to Burawoy, being reflective demands a dialectic approach on three levels: First, between the researcher and the subjects, second embedding the first dialogue into supra-local and macro-social accounts of power relations, and third expanding the "dialogue of theory with itself" (Burawoy 1998: p. 5). As I present in more detail in the next section, I maintained an ongoing dialogue with many of my interviewees, my analysis exceeds the micro-social level rather than considering it a self-contained level of analysis, and I am thinking with several theoretical concepts reconstructively rather than stricto sensu applying theories in my case. Moreover, I also showcase how I followed Badger and Woodcock's methodological guidelines, which include: a) making research accessible to as many participants as possible, b) allowing for the emergence of pluralistic accounts, c) staying long enough in the field to develop relationships of trust, and d) managing to follow the shifting operational and management practices of the platform companies to observe patterns and rationales of such changes (Badger & Woodcock 2019). In the next section of this chapter, I present in detail my fieldwork and methods, which are based on the epistemological choices discussed in this section.

2.3 Fieldwork and methods

Researchers investigating the fast-growing field of location-based platform work with qualitative methods have followed diverse methodological approaches. One of the main issues of concern in these studies is access to fieldwork data. In this section, I describe the evolution of my methodological choices and how they were fine-tuned to live up to the challenges of my project process. These were complemented with more methodological approaches as the fieldwork was unfolding, presenting more data-gathering opportunities.

2.3.1 Desk-based research and initial stages of fieldwork

My initial goal was to map and understand, with nuances, the bigger picture of platform housecleaning in Denmark. I therefore began by seeking policy documents, news articles, public agencies' decisions and relevant material, to piece together a recent historiography of the Danish gig economy more broadly and digital housecleaning platforms more specifically. In parallel, I reviewed literature on housecleaning and other location-based platforms both in Denmark and internationally. I aimed to identify key stakeholders for inclusion in expert interviews (Flick 2018) that would provide insight on topics relevant to the sector. I also intended to collect information from these interviews that could then be juxtaposed – or complemented – with the experiences and perceptions of platform housecleaners. My biggest concern initially was determining how I would be able to access the workers themselves. Having decided early on that I did not want to hire housecleaners online, I was hoping to establish an entry point to my fieldwork through interviewing managers working for housecleaning platforms. Naturally, I was suspicious of what kind of contacts a manager would provide and how representative of the workforce these might be. However, I hoped that, given an entry point, I would be able to snowball my way into the field. Alternatively, I considered working as a platform housecleaner myself to gain access to workers' social media groups and recruit informants from there.

After completing a month of desk-based research, I selected six housecleaning platforms, which seemed to be the most popular in Denmark in terms of online visibility and number of housecleaner profiles. I contacted all six platform companies by email or phone and received a positive reply for an interview from one, a negative reply from a second – stating that they did not have the resources to accommodate a researcher at that point – and no reply from the other four platforms, despite numerous contact attempts. In two of the cases, I managed to reach the platforms' customer support by phone and they instructed me to apply for an interview via email. When I explained to them that I had already sent an email, they insisted that I try again and said they would notify a manager. However, I never received replies to my emails. At the same time, I decided to commence my efforts for conducting interviews with members of the Danish Disruption Council.

The Danish Disruption Council was established in 2017 by the government to discuss and analyze how the country could navigate into the digital future in the best possible way. In February 2019, the Council published its final report where the gig economy figured as one of the three main challenges of the future labor market. In the report, the Council proposed initiatives for partnership between public job centers, temporary work agencies and platform companies "that have entered into a collective agreement or offer conditions resembling those of a collective agreement", "to ensure more flexible labour market access for the most disadvantaged of the unemployed" (Danish Government 2019: p. 46). Given that only one collective agreement was signed at the time between a platform company and a labor union, i.e., the housecleaning platform Hilfr and the labor union 3F (Ilsøe 2020), I concluded that this was an optimal entry point for the expert interviews in my fieldwork. Despite contacting four of the Council's members – some also with personal references facilitated by fellow researchers – I received only one reply. Fortunately, it was affirmative. Later in my research, I experienced the same kind of reluctance towards being interviewed on the gig economy from various politicians and public-sector officials. The reasons for this reluctance vary. Regarding the Disruption Council, the many defamatory comments on its effectiveness could explain this reluctance. Public sector officials refused to be interviewed on the grounds that they did not have a mandate to express any opinion other than the publicly available output of their agencies. Online meeting fatigue due to the pandemic, intense workloads or unwillingness to engage with heavily debated topics on platform labor may have led some of the stakeholders I approached to ignore my emails. To compensate for this reluctance, I approached academics involved in policymaking and lobbyists for digital labor platforms, so that they could offer their own alternative perspectives of engaging with policymakers and public agencies.

Throughout my fieldwork, I continued to gather all sorts of relevant, publicly available material on the Danish gig economy, which I use in the analysis of my case study. This material comprises: A) Various articles from Danish and international media. B) Policy documents such as the Danish Disruption Council's follow-up report (Danish Government 2019), the "Denmark can do more 1" policy proposal (Regeringen 2021), and the thirteen recommendations on a framework for the sharing economy, published by the Council for the Sharing Economy (Rådet for Deleøkonomi 2021). C) Decisions issued

by the Danish Competition and Consumer Authority (Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020a; Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020b) and the Danish Tax Agency (SKAT 2022) relating to the gig economy. D) Reports commissioned by the Danish government, the Council for the Sharing Economy or employers' associations (e.g., Munkholm et al. 2022; Cabi 2021; Copenhagen Economics 2022). E) Directives and other policy documents from the EU on platform work (e.g., European Commission 2021).

In my PhD project, I use these documents both as sources that document specific political processes and I critically analyze them as texts, whose arguments, narratives and discourse aim at constructing social realities (cf. Karppinen & Moe 2012; Fairclough 2013). These two different approaches allow me to both triangulate events and assumptions deriving from my interviews with official documentation, while delving deeper into the values and political rationalities that transform the events I am analyzing into political language (Karppinen & Moe 2012: p. 188).

2.3.2 Expert interviews

Even though my case study is premised to a large extent on interviews with platform housecleaners, I discuss my methodological choices according to the chronological order in which they were employed in my fieldwork. As I presented in the previous subsection, the first person who agreed to be interviewed was a manager of one of the most popular Danish housecleaning platform companies. Interviewing this manager generated valuable insight not only regarding the business model applied but also concerning the bigger picture of the Danish platform economy. The composition of the interview guide was based on desk-based research and the questions were mainly explorative and open-ended, in order to help me enhance the thematic structure of my future field work (Flick 2018: p. 166). This interview proved crucial for my future fieldwork, since the manager provided me with access to the platform's closed Facebook group, so that I could recruit informants from among the platform's housecleaners. The manager claimed that the platform had an open policy in helping researchers and that they always provided them with access to the group, where they could present their research and ask people to participate in surveys or interviews. The Facebook group was a rich pool of data, not only on the composition of the labor force, but also in terms of the topics of interest

that the housecleaners discussed amongst themselves and with the management. I refer to this in more detail in the next subsection.

The rest of the stakeholders and experts I interviewed were identified through desk-based research and were invited by email to participate, except for the former platform employee, whose contact details were passed on to me by a colleague. Apart from the two initial interviews with the platform manager and a politician, which were largely exploratory, the rest were arranged after a large part of my fieldwork was conducted and housecleaners had been interviewed. The reason was that I wanted to include the content emerging from the platform workers' interviews in the guides for the experts' interviews. In all the interviews that I conducted, I notified the participants of the topic and research questions of my project and either asked them to sign an informed consent form or explicitly asked for their consent to use the material, while recording our conversation. All participants were guaranteed anonymization and protection of their data according to GDPR provisions. Here, I must note that most of the stakeholders and experts I interviewed had no problem with me quoting them in my research output with their names, as long as I provided them with the quotes I would use prior to publication. However, I do not quote them by name for two reasons. On the one hand, I wish to protect expert informants that entrusted me with sensitive information but did not wish to be quoted by name. Due to the value of such information for my project, I decided that it would be fairer to everyone if I anonymized all expert participants. On the other hand, several of my expert interlocutors were presented with my project aim and research questions but were not aware of my political engagement with the topic (cf. Badger & Woodcock 2019). Therefore, they were more prone to express themselves more freely, without the reservations they might have had if they had known my political identity. Nevertheless, when analyzing data from these interviews, I did justice to all participants by grounding interpretations in the interview data, avoiding using quotes outside the context of the interviewee's personal views and being careful not to include judgements on a personal level (Flick 2018: p. 41). Another aspect of my work is that I totally respected the information I received off the record. It is obviously against ethical research conduct to publish anything against an interviewee's will. However, being reflective, I must acknowledge that I use this information as "deep background", meaning that I use it to better understand what is going on; to contextualize my

analysis, but I do not refer to this material *per se* and do not attribute it to my informants (Peterson 2001).

List of expert interviews		
Code and citation form	Interviewee's position	Date and place
E1 Platform manager	Manager of Danish housecleaning platform	Copenhagen, October 8th, 2020
E2 Danish MP	Politician, member of the Danish Parliament	Online, November 4th, 2020
E3 Union representative	Labor union representative	Copenhagen, January 21st, 2022 & June 13th, 2022
E4 Customer support	Former customer support employee for housecleaning platform	Copenhagen, February 11th, 2022
E5 Union representative	Labor union representative	Copenhagen, February 24th, 2022
E6 Public official	Official from public agency involved in platform work policymaking	Copenhagen, March 3rd, 2022
E7 Platform lobbyist	Lobbyist working for platform company	Copenhagen, March 10th, 2022
E8 Academic	Academic involved in policymaking	Aarhus, June 2nd, 2022
E9 Academic	Academic involved in policymaking	Online, June 27th, 2022

Table 2.1: List of expert interviews

2.3.3 Digital Ethnography

My access to the platforsm's Facebook group in mid-October 2020 proved to be essential for the future unfolding of my project. The group had multiple characteristics that were beneficial for my research. It was not simply a large pool from where I could contact interviewees but also a vibrant forum containing workers' personal experiences and concerns, as well as communication between management, customer service and housecleaners on many topics of interest. It also provided an insightful mapping of the platform's labor force, not a statistically valid one, evidently, as it contained Facebook profiles rather than official data on people's identities. My immediate concern was how I could make use of this rich pool of data by adhering to ethical research parameters. Even though I

identified myself as a researcher on the first day of my presence in the group and I explained the topic of my PhD project, this did not in any way mean that the other participants in the group either consented to my presence or to me quoting the material in the group. Moreover, the group had more than 1,500 members at the time and new housecleaners were joining every day. Obviously, all these workers would not scroll back in the group and were unaware of my presence. Therefore, respecting the impossibility of obtaining informed consent, I decided that I would not use quotes or refer to specific identifiable events that I had become aware of only through the Facebook group (cf. Willis 2019).

The method I used for collecting this data could be termed as a 'fly on the Facebook wall' approach, designating a way of conducting non-participant digital ethnography in a social-media group (cf. Pink et al. 2015; Thompson et al. 2021). Despite the methodological challenges arising from conducting research in such groups, their ethnographic use provides insights into how platform housecleaners "interpret, resist and embrace the dominant representations to which they are subjected" (Dalgas 2016: p. 175). It was therefore crucial for me to incorporate them in my study. Hence, I used these insights to structure the guides for my open-ended interviews with the housecleaners and as a means of sensing and interpreting which topics seem important or worthy of (social media) discussion to the workers themselves. This provided me with the opportunity to commence a virtual 'shared conversation' (Haraway 1988) with my subjects, before conducting my first interviews. Given the fact that scraping the Facebook group for data and storing these on my laptop could potentially jeopardize the anonymity of the participants and would be against ethical conduct and GDPR regulations, I opted for keeping a personal digital log, where I entered names of topics, anonymized quotes and my written observations on the chats unfolding in the group.

During my non-participant observation of the Facebook group, I tried to think with four out of the five basic principles of digital ethnography as presented by Pink et al. (2015). These principles include multiplicity, non-digital-centric-ness, openness, and reflexivity. The principle of unorthodox, which means adopting more explorative, experimental and collaborative ways of doing digital ethnography, could not be applied in my case, as it would demand a rigid reorientation of my resources, and

subsequently of the whole project. The first of the other four principles, multiplicity, indicates the multiple ways in which the media under scrutiny is being used and how these uses are interdependent with the infrastructures of everyday life. In my analysis, I treat the group as a multiple site, where management practices, digitally mediated interpersonal relations, concerns about practicalities and an overall need for communication coexist. Regarding non-digital-centric-ness, I think beyond the ways the media *per se* is used to highlight the institutional procedures that have come to be substituted by this use. The principle of openness refers to collaborative processes of producing knowledge through digital ethnography. Due to the non-participant character of my observation, I only had the opportunity to discuss crucial issues emerging from my digital ethnography with my interviewees, thus combining my different methodological approaches into one open-ended process. Finally, I treated all content in the Facebook group equitably, trying not to highlight only parts that were theoretically more relevant to my research focus, thus adhering to the reflexivity principle of doing justice to my data source.

2.3.4 Interviews with platform housecleaners

Arranging interviews with platform workers can be a cumbersome task. Depending on the type of service performed, workers can be highly visible in the social sphere, as in the case of food delivery couriers cruising the streets of major cities dressed in distinctive uniforms, or invisible, such as platform housecleaners working behind closed doors in private homes, as in my case (cf. Ticona & Mateescu 2018, Gruszka & Böhm 2022). Conversely, workers' online profiles pose different challenges in relation to the information and entry points they can offer researchers. Regarding online visibility, the algorithmically managed fleet of couriers is largely anonymous, while platform housecleaners and other task-providers' profiles are openly available when scrolling down the interface of most housecleaning or other location-based platforms. However, physical access and communication with these workers through the platforms' interface is premised on performing a financial transaction with them, i.e., hiring them (e.g., Gerold et al. 2022). This complex and challenging situation has led gig-work researchers to explore various methodological approaches, according to the type of platform they are looking into and their own epistemological choices. As I described above, I was lucky to be

granted access to a platform's closed Facebook group. In late October 2020, I posted an open message in the Facebook group. In the post, I identified myself and presented my research project, pointing out that I was interested in interviewing platform housecleaners on topics including employment relations, job flexibility, income, rating systems, tax and welfare issues and technologically mediated working practices. I instructed the group's participants to contact me through a private message on the Facebook platform or alternatively email me. That was to prevent the platform's management from knowing who participated in the research.

During the first couple of weeks, I received only one reply and booked an interview with this worker. Through her personal contacts with other platform housecleaners, my first interviewee helped me arrange my next two interviews with contacts that were built exclusively within the Facebook group through personal messages, as these housecleaners had never physically met. Together, these three interviews were the only ones I conducted before the lockdown measures were imposed in Denmark, due to COVID-19, in December 2020. The snowball effect I had hoped for did not materialize, since my interviewees were unable to provide me with more contacts. After I reposted the open message to the group and received no replies, I decided to send personal messages to the most active participants in the group chat. In the private messages, which were not visible to the platform's management, I added that I was interested in "making the voice and the interests of platform cleaners heard in the public and academic dialogue" and that I do not work for the platform, nor will I share information with them. Given the prevalence of Latino names among workers' profiles, when sending a message to profiles which I considered to belong to native Spanish speakers, I added a couple of lines in Spanish saying that the interview could also be conducted in Spanish. This strategy helped me recruit five more informants after sending twenty private messages. In the autumn of 2021, I decided to start sending the same private message to thirty workers per week, according to the chronological order in which they had become members of the Facebook group, regardless of other characteristics. The only addition I made to the message was that I was also interested in cases of failure to establish oneself on the platform. This was because I wanted to explore reasons why this allegedly easy entrance to the labor market does not work for everybody. A few hundred messages culminated in eight more interviews. The response rate was rather low, and the majority of the

profiles never even read my messages. About twenty people responded negatively, stating mainly that platform housecleaning never really worked for them. Another seven workers agreed to be interviewed but either cancelled in the days prior to our arranged meetings or never showed up online.

In the winter of 2022, I decided to employ two more strategies to recruit informants. The first strategy was inspired by existing research, where platform careworkers were contacted through relevant Facebook groups and platforms like Craigslist and LinkedIn (Van Doorn 2020; Ticona & Mateescu 2018). I posted messages in three local Danish Facebook groups where housecleaning gigs were directly negotiated between customers and cleaners and in two Facebook groups set up by expats living in Denmark. The content of the messages was almost identical to what I had posted in the platform's Facebook group. This strategy produced another three interviews. My second strategy was to sign up as a customer on one of the three most popular platforms offering house cleaning in Denmark. My initial reason for signing up was to conduct a walkthrough of the platform's interface (Light et al. 2018), a method I describe in the next subsection. Among the three most popular housecleaning platforms, this was the only one where I had failed to contact workers. The operating model of the platform was such that for a modest fee I could send messages directly to the cleaners, without needing to book a cleaning session through the platform. In my message, I apologized for using this covert way to approach them, introduced myself and the project, provided my contact details in a way that they would not be filtered out by the platform's algorithmic tools, and clearly instructed the cleaners not to contact me through the platform's interface. I managed to send more than 120 messages in two days before my account was blocked by the platform. In the meantime, two workers had already contacted me, and we arranged an interview. Until the completion of my fieldwork, I also conducted two interviews with platform housecleaners who were introduced to me by a student and a research assistant from my university.

The overall outcome of my efforts yielded 23 in-depth interviews with cleaners who contracted work through four different platforms. The four biggest cities in Denmark were represented in the sample, as I interviewed workers from Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense, and Aalborg. Reasons of distance to

these cities, COVID-19 related reasons or simply because this reflected the workers' preferences, led to 17 interviews being conducted online and six in person. All interviews lasted between approximately 30 to 100 minutes and were carried out mainly in English, except for some small parts of interviews with Spanish speaking interlocutors, where Spanish was also used. My sample reflected the overall gendered and racialized demographics of platform housecleaning in Denmark, as most of the workers are female and migrants (Floros & Jørgensen 2023). The interviews were all recorded, translated into English where needed, transcribed, and anonymized. While the interviews were being recorded, I was also keeping notes of my interlocutors' behaviors, long pauses, laughs and everything else that I deemed important to note. In all these interviews, I had prepared an interview guide beforehand with various questions. Almost all questions were open-ended and allowed for a descriptive answer. As I pointed out in the previous subsection, I used the material from my digital ethnography to compose the guide with many questions stemming from the topics of interest that were discussed in the Facebook group. This was part of my intention "to raise questions about issues that the women themselves consider problematic" (Neufeld et al. 2001: 578). Of course, there were also other questions regarding e.g., how my interlocutors considered the digital mediation of their work and how they perceived the overall political economy of gig work in Denmark, namely questions pointing towards the concepts I had initially chosen as a theoretical framework for my project. Nevertheless, I formulated the questions in a way that would encourage my interviewees to choose their own terms when responding (Qu & Dumay 2011). During the interviews, I adopted a more flexible approach rather than strictly following the interview guide. In line with Kvale (1996) on qualitative interview research, I consider interviewing to be more of a craft that demands swift decisions be taken on the ground, rather than a procedure dictated by strict rules and frameworks.

Gender and number	Migrants	Ethnic Danes	Non-ethnic Danes	Latin-American	EU-migrants	Asian	University students	Academic degree holders	Working exclusively through platforms (not including students)	Less than 2 years in DK when started working
Female 21	17	3	1	6	8	3	6	7	10 out of 15 non-students	13 out of 17 migrants
Male 2	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	2	1 out of 2	-

Table 2.2: Characteristics of interviewed housecleaners

2.3.5 Walkthroughs

During the COVID-19 lockdown of the winter of 2020-21, I became worried that the pandemic would compromise my fieldwork plans. I therefore began looking for other methodological approaches to collecting data on housecleaning platforms. The most prominent solution to what I considered at the time to be a deadlock was to apply the walkthrough method, which Light et al. (2018: p. 882) define as a "step-by-step observation and documentation of an app's screens, features and flows of activity". With the proliferation of various apps and platforms in all aspects of everyday life, the walkthrough method has lately been employed by many researchers in media studies and STS, as well as in interdisciplinary studies (e.g., Duguay et al. 2022; Bucher et al. 2021). The goal of the method is to establish the platform's "environment of expected use by identifying and describing its vision, operating model and modes of governance" (ibid: p. 881). The role of the researcher is to mimic the everyday user and meticulously document the steps taken towards accomplishing the expected use. Therefore, the research practice consists not only of screenshots but also of a log or notes on the screenshots, where observations are made. Dieter et al. (2019) warn against reducing this method to screenshots followed by a semiotic analysis. According to them, apps are operational media that are built with behavior-nudging in mind rather than meanings (ibid: p. 5). Through the mundane practice of the everyday use of the platform's interface the researcher can draw conclusions about both the values and political rationales inscribed in the artifact (cf. Akrich 1992), and also about how the design and content of the interface performs certain behaviors.

From November 2021 to March 2022, I completed a step-by-step documentation of the processes required to sign up both as a housecleaner and as a customer to the three most popular platforms offering housecleaning in Denmark. In two of the platforms, I walked through as far as I could without providing my personal data to sign up as a worker or client. In both platforms, when acting as a client, I had the opportunity to contact workers for a booking without first providing my details. For ethical reasons that I explain later, I never proceeded to do that. On the third platform, I went as far as signing up as a client[9] and as a worker, since the way the transaction took place on this platform did not raise the same ethical concerns. Employing the walkthrough method on three platforms did not involve trying to discern differences and commonalities between the platforms but was mainly to grasp how they frame the whole procedure for clients and what they are led to believe in terms of availability, flexibility and command over the labor force. Moreover, I wanted to mimic a first-hand experience of the ways in which the worker is framed, nudged, empowered or intimidated, when signing up for such a platform. My documentation resulted in 125 pages of documents filled with screenshots and subsequent notes. The data from the walkthroughs mainly inform my analysis in the chapter on algorithmic management.

2.3.6 Other material

From the onset of this project, my aspiration was to firstly and foremostly to disseminate knowledge back to the community of platform housecleaners and workers more generally. In the epistemological context of my shared conversations approach, I was aiming to organize a focus group with some of my interviewees, where we would be able to collectively discuss my initial research findings before I initiated my writing process. Along the same lines, I also intended to host a workshop where platform housecleaners, labor union representatives and other platform workers could spend a day not only discussing my research findings, but also sharing experiences from their respective sectors and exploring ways of collectively organizing within the gig economy. In September 2022, I organized the focus group at the IT University of Copenhagen. Out of the 23 workers that I interviewed, three

[9] Here I would like to thank Simy Kaur Gahoonia from my PhD cohort at ITU, who offered to provide her data for signing up as a customer. As I live in Malmö, I had no other way of providing a legitimate Copenhagen address. When signing up as a worker, I used my own personal data.

agreed to participate in person and another four online. However, last-minute cancellations reduced the number to two in-person participants. Regardless, the two participating house cleaners provided their feedback on my initial findings during a two-hour discussion, which I recorded and later transcribed. Moreover, I did not manage to organize a workshop, but did manage to set up a roundtable discussion between platform workers, union representatives and platform studies scholars, during the Welfare after Digitalization Conference held at the ITU, on November 29th, 2022 (Floros 2023). This discussion was also recorded and transcribed and informs my analysis on the chapters on workers' experiences against the flexibility/precarity nexus and Danish policymaking and regulations.

2.4 Analysis of material

Conducting fieldwork in a rapidly transforming environment is a very challenging task. While I was collecting my material, constant changes were reconfiguring housecleaning platform work in Denmark: The COVID-19 pandemic impacted in various ways the composition of the labor force; the 'presumption of employment' rules gained traction both at local and EU levels; housecleaning platforms made continuous changes in their business models; and public agencies issued several controversial decisions, to name but a few. Such changes challenged some of my initial theoretical assumptions and reinforced others. This also underlines that fieldwork and analysis are not two distinct processes within my PhD project, since it is hard to temporally delineate them, as they overlap and inform each other (Feldman 2000). Especially, my shared conversations with platform housecleaners provided continuous feedback for my analysis, as some of them continued sending me news, trivia and insight into how platforms restructured their models, even after my fieldwork was completed. I consider this iterative process between desk-based research, interviews, digital ethnography and further encounters with my research subjects to be a particular strength of my project, since it acted as a constant reality check of whether the empirical material and theoretical framework were bound together in a way that made sense not only to me but also to my interlocutors.

I organized my material into five different analytical categories before the analysis process began. These categories correspond to chapters four to nine in this thesis namely, platform housecleaning as migrant labor, the precarity/flexibility nexus, workers' resistance to platform mediated work processes, algorithmic management, and the role of the state in platform housecleaning in Denmark (this last category is broken down to two chapters). For each of these categories, I decided on a set of indicators, which I developed with my theoretical framework in mind. Indicatively, in order to describe and analyze how workers evaluate and experience flexibility both in discourse and practice, I broke down flexibility into three indicators, based on prior theoretical attempts to conceptualize flexibility in platform work. According to my indicators, flexibility is a worker's unhindered ability to unilaterally, a) decide on working hours that allow for the optimization of their non-relating-to-work schedule and, b) self-determine which job offers they will accept or reject. Then, flexibility should c) not be hindered by external regulatory factors. Following that, I read my material with these indicators in mind and scored it accordingly. My empirical material has been coded manually. By this I mean that I used hard copies of my transcripts, in which I took notes and highlighted parts with different colors according to the analytical category. I decided to work in that way and not code my findings with a digital tool because I did not wish to fragment my interviews into phrases and paragraphs. As Kvale notes, when this happens "it is then easily forgotten that in open, nondirective interviews, the interviewee tells a story or several stories to the researcher" (Kvale 1988: p. 103). Having the full story at hand makes it easier to have a glimpse at what preceded or followed the quote used for the analysis and thus avoids any possibility of instrumentalizing a quote out of context.

Another technique I used to analyze my empirical material was 'drawing as analysis', suggested by Rachel Douglas-Jones (2021). This technique helped me approach my fieldwork data in a way that revealed aspects of my material that would otherwise remain unarticulated as such (cf. Ballestero & Winthereik 2021). Drawing as analysis promotes drawing, sketching, mixing words, images and diagrams on paper in an attempt to move one's analysis forward and thus closer to the final textual form of the research project (Douglas-Jones 2021). The goal of the analytical protocol is to assist the researcher in discerning patterns, identifying disjunctures and gaps and forming aggregates even between diverse objects of potentially different scales; more than drawing in an artistic way, it is an

endeavor to think “affinities, shapes, circles, proximities” (ibid: p. 105). In my case, this also provided the first fragments of text for my monograph, which were already there, lying in the notes and the drawings in my papers. This aversion to using digital tools in my analysis was probably environmentally counterproductive in terms of paper usage but helped me reduce screen-time and focus better. Moreover, I constantly worked with large sheets of paper surrounding me, which helped me at all times to maintain a more holistic view of my empirical material.

2.5 Ethical considerations of researching platform housecleaning

This last section of my methodological chapter aims to address the specific ethical challenges and implications stemming from conducting research on housecleaning and other domestic work platforms and how I dealt with them in my project. As research on digital labor platforms has proliferated in recent years, many concerns arose regarding the ethical codes of conduct to which this research adheres. An early example of these concerns was the open letter signed by academics of various disciplines that introduced a set of principles for ethical research in the gig economy (Gigeconomyresearchersunited 2020). The principles related to conducting quantitative research only with transparent and publicly available data, engaging deeply with the work-life realities of workers and especially the invisible labor they provide, and cautioning against the undermining of workers in relation to the platforms where they worked. The letter was a response to a study commissioned by Uber and Lyft and therefore engaged with issues more pertinent to the study of ridehailing platforms and the problems originating from corporate-financed research. Investigating domestic work and housecleaning platforms presents an extra set of challenges due to the isolated nature of working in private homes and the gendered and racialized composition of the workforce (Kampouri 2022). At the same time, common issues arising in projects investigating all sectors of platform work are also at play here. Protecting the anonymity of the workers so that their positions on the platform and therefore their livelihoods are not at risk, avoiding providing platforms and authorities with insight that might jeopardize the livelihoods of vulnerable workers, and obtaining informed consent by clearly stating one’s research purposes must always be well thought out, both during fieldwork and in the writing process (Iphofen et al. 2022).

In the previous section on my fieldwork and method, I presented some of the strategies I employed to reduce these kinds of risks. Given that my access to the platform's closed Facebook group was facilitated by the manager, I carefully avoided any kind of open interaction in the group – except of course from posting the invitation to an interview. All my written communication with housecleaners was carried out through private messages on Facebook, SMS and emails from my professional account. In the case where I signed up as a customer with another platform and directly contacted workers' profiles, I urged them to contact me through my professional email by explaining to them the risks they might face if contacting me through the platform's interface. When sending messages in the five open Facebook groups for housecleaning and expats, I also instructed the workers to contact me personally and not in the group, especially after I realized that administrative staff from at least one platform were members of all these groups. Finally, all my interviews with housecleaners started with a thorough presentation of who I am, what my project is about, and my motivation for conducting this research. I then proceeded to inform my interlocutors on issues of informed consent and ultimately provided them with a legal form of informed consent to sign. The recordings from the interviews do not contain the names of my informants and are stored separately from the transcripts, which have been pseudonymized and stored securely on my professional laptop. As a result, throughout the stages of my project, I sought to minimize the risks for the vulnerable subjects in my research (cf. Ustek Spilda et al. 2022).

Wolfson et al. (2022) note that there are various levels of ethical concern when researchers engage with vulnerable and precarious workers out of political concern and try to draw attention to social injustice. In their article, they pose a series of open questions to researchers (ibid.: pp. 106–7), which resonate well with my own concerns. The first set of questions is epistemological, and I have already addressed them throughout this chapter. The second set refers to ethical concerns and includes issues of consent, considering the legal impacts of bringing illicit workers' practices to the fore, anticipating adverse reactions and protecting workers from retaliatory actions, and reflecting on researchers' appropriation of workers' experiences for furthering their career and enhancing their reputations. I am confident that, based on my former experience of grass-roots union organizing and working in precarious jobs, I meticulously protected my interlocutors' anonymity and considered

thoroughly which parts of their disclosures could jeopardize them and their livelihoods. Regarding the appropriation of workers' experiences for personal gain, I refrained from publishing sensationalist accounts of my research – despite being invited to by journalists – which would have enhanced my reputation. My only stated promise when inviting workers to interviews was that I intended to bring the voices of platform housecleaners to the fore. My articles, blogposts, conference presentations and this monograph are one part of this promise. The other part was my communication of the results to Danish labor union members and my effort to build bridges between platform workers of various sectors and labor unions, through a roundtable discussion and personal contacts. The extent to which my career will be positively – or negatively – impacted by this research is a combination of the fieldwork data, the rigidity of my analysis and the quality of my writing. Indeed, the workers' participation is the core of my work. However, the question of the scholar's personal gain is hard to answer in a society that commodifies knowledge production. Unless we agree that research on precariously employed and vulnerable subjects should be carried out voluntarily and should never relate to remunerated positions, there will always be some sort of gain for the waged researcher and their prospective career.

My only disagreement with the questions posed by Wolfson et al. is the framing of their question "Might these research subjects feel let down and betrayed if they see no positive result from the research and, if so, what responsibility, if any, does the researcher have for taking up their time and attention without delivering any benefits?" (ibid.: p. 107). I made no promise of a positive result and the platform workers I interviewed were very aware of the low possibilities of such research providing "solutions" of any kind. Moreover, I decided not to offer remuneration of any kind to my interviewees. Although I agree with a lot of the arguments posed by researchers who take this path (Ustek Spilda et al. 2022), I was concerned that paying for interviews might distort the original interest of platform housecleaners and transform the encounter into a timed financial interaction. Therefore, I let the interviewees decide on the place and "free" time more convenient to them for the interview. A lot of the workers I invited asked for money in order to participate in the research. Though this would have helped me conclude collecting my sample much faster, I did not offer money. Nevertheless, two of the cleaners who asked for remuneration decided to participate regardless of

that, after I communicated my reasoning with them. Most of the participants considered the effort to disseminate their experiences and opinions a benefit of its own and felt a need to publicly describe their everyday participation in platform work beyond the smiley faces in the platforms' app interfaces. Drawing again on my experience in grass-root labor union organizing, I am aware that nobody is ever guaranteed benefits when taking up action. If we accept benefits as a given and not delivering them as failure, we risk reducing human actions to a cost-benefit calculation, homo economicus behavior. This would require discarding centuries of disinterested emancipatory action against oppression of all kinds.

CHAPTER 3

Recent historiography of Danish (housecleaning) digital labor platforms

In this chapter, I briefly present Danish and international literature on housecleaning platforms before moving on to describe how digital labor platforms were introduced and have been promoted and dealt with by policymakers in Denmark to date. I start by providing an overview of the international literature on housecleaning platforms and connecting this to broader academic literature on location-based platform work. I then situate the creation and evolution of housecleaning platforms operating in Denmark within the broader evolution of the Danish gig economy. My recent historiography builds not only on existing academic literature but also on expert interviews from my fieldwork and data from Danish news media articles, policy documents, and public agencies' decisions.

3.1 The global rise of digital labor platforms

Digital labor platforms, which nowadays have millions of users and heavily influence livelihoods, labor markets, social policies and urban settings, are a relatively new phenomenon. The Amazon Mechanical Turk was launched in 2005. Care.com inaugurated its online marketplace for contracting babysitting, elderly caretaking, housecleaning and relevant tasks in 2007. Uber followed shortly after in 2009, and Didi, the Chinese transportation platform with over half a billion users, only opened for business in 2012. Digital labor platforms span a wide variety of tasks and feature diverse organizational models. When the first labor platforms began operating, they were considered part of what was broadly depicted as a 'collaborative economy' (Botsman 2013), 'sharing economy' (Schor & Fitzmaurice 2015) or an 'on-demand economy' (Maselli et al. 2016). The swarming mass of online platforms that proliferated around the turn of the first decade of the 21st century was initially deemed as part and parcel of a desirable and inevitable future. What Sam Harnett described as a "collective media swoon" (Harnett 2021: p. 169), helped boost the popularity of platform companies with very

diverse characteristics, such as Airbnb, Uber, TaskRabbit or Couchsurfing under the aforementioned blanket terms.

Following this rapid rise, scholars engaging with the emerging ecosystem of digital platforms started introducing taxonomies and typologies to provide conceptual clarity. The need for clarification regarding digital labor platforms was pioneered to a great extent by legal scholars interested in providing labor protection for the growing number of contingent, self-employed gig workers (e.g., De Stefano 2016; Aloisi 2016). The term 'gig economy' gradually prevailed both in popular and academic discourse, when referring to digital labor platforms. Platform work has been described by Kovalainen, Vallas and Poutanen to have five typical-ideal features. According to them, platform work a) is facilitated through online apps that match customers to workers, b) is characterized by the intermediary role claimed by platforms to avoid shouldering employers' risks, c) consists of "just-in-time" tasks instead of jobs, d) individualizes the platform workforce, and e) is algorithmically governed (Kovalainen et al. 2019: pp. 36–38). Mariano Zukerfeld goes further than these criteria to claim that the term platform work should include the totality of productive activities needed to generate profit for platform companies, namely developers, prosumers, self-employed asset owners, warehouse workers etc. (Zukerfeld 2022: pp. 105–106). Finally, Piasna, Zwysen and Drahokoupil define platform work more narrowly, as a subset of the broader category of internet work, which comprises all activities aimed at generating income through the use of online platforms (Piasna et al. 2022: pp. 11–13). According to them, the distinctive feature of platform work is that it is performed solely through digital labor platforms, which they distinguish in different types.

Despite the variety of typologies of digital labor platforms, which derive from a plurality of criteria, there is a general trend towards dividing them into two principal categories. The first category includes platforms that offer remote online tasks and have been described as crowdwork (De Stefano 2016), web-based (Berg et al. 2018) or cloud work (Schmidt 2017). The second category includes platforms facilitating tasks that can only be performed physically in specific locations and have been termed as platforms offering geographically tethered work (Woodcock & Graham 2019), gig work (Schmidt 2017) or location-based platforms (Berg et al. 2018). Platforms providing domestic services

such as housecleaning, babysitting, elderly care etc. fall under this second category. Throughout this thesis, I refer to this category as location-based platforms, following the International Labour Organization terminology (ILO 2021). According to the ILO, location-based platforms share three distinct features: a) They introduce algorithmic management in their operational process and performance evaluation, b) they do not need to invest capital in equipment or operational costs related to the tasks, but rather outsource costs and risks to the workers, and c) they are based on a dual, segregated labor market consisting of a small workforce of employed workers running the platform (internal employment) and a large workforce of self-employed, independent contractors whose work is mediated through the platform (external employment). All three features are evident in platform housecleaning for three main reasons. Firstly, regardless of the exact operational model, there is some form of algorithmic management – definitely in performance evaluation. Secondly, housecleaners get no equipment from the platforms and pay for their own transportation costs. And thirdly, internal and external employment is distinct.

When discussing digital labor platforms, regardless of the taxonomy in which they belong, it is crucial to remember that their global rise is a complicated process. This rise cannot be solely explicated based on the media hype that supported them (Harnett 2021) or technological determinist accounts of progress (cf. Thompson & Laaser 2021). The development of digital technologies has, after all, been premised on the pursuit of profit rather than progress (Wajcman 2017). The rise of digital labor platforms coincided with the global financial crisis of 2008, leading analysts to correlate this rise with widespread unemployment (Farrel & Greig 2016; Kluzik 2021). However, the growing figures of unemployment and the fiscal austerity policies proliferating after the crisis only explain the demand part of the platform labor equation, which is the surplus labor force that was available and willing to undertake platform work to earn a living during and after the crisis. Regarding the supply part of platform work, multiple scholars from different disciplines stress the prevalent role of venture capital investment in shaping the gig economy (Langley & Leyshon 2017; Birch 2020; van Doorn & Badger 2021). Although this thesis does not engage with the financialization aspect of housecleaning platforms in Denmark – beyond a few explanatory remarks in the next section – a short comment on how (and if) digital labor platforms produce profits globally helps to clarify platforms' business

practices. Moreover, the extensive financialization of labor platforms further explains the diverse and absolutist positions held by lobbyists, policymakers and social partners when it comes to the overall regulation of the gig economy.

In a nutshell, digital labor platforms did not expand because of their ability to create profit in existing labor markets such as taxi-driving or domestic work using novel information communication technologies. On the contrary, many platforms suffer losses by continuing to operate at the point of production (van Doorn & Shapiro 2023). For example, Uber's cumulative losses according to the generally accepted U.S. accounting principles (GAAP) had reached $33.3 billion by 2023 (Horan 2023). However, digital labor platforms thrive feeding on venture capital, which supports predatory and disruptive platforms' innovation strategies (Birch 2020). Platforms become objects of financial speculation based on their potential to monopolize the market niche in which they belong and extract rents from the participants in their networks (Langley & Leyshon 2017). They also have the potential to accumulate vast amounts of data, which have a special value in contemporary capitalism (Zuboff 2019; Sadowski 2020). This results in continuous sponsoring of platforms through venture capital funds betting on future portfolio rents, consecutive rounds of investment, participation in local stock markets and a complex sequence of corporate rivals' buy-outs, and mergers between highly valuated labor platforms. In simple words, digital labor platforms are not profiting primarily from their intermediary role in labor transactions. They mainly make money on data extraction and finance-driven modes of accumulation (van Doorn & Badger 2021).

Location-based platforms providing domestic and housecleaning services are no exception. Indicatively, Care.com, a multinational platform focused on providing domestic services, was bought out for $500 million in 2019 following a huge devaluation of its stock due to journalistic investigations over unsafe service provision and a rapid resurge of the stock due to the company's participation in a holding company's portfolio (Cosgrove 2019). In Denmark, the housecleaning platform Happyhelper was valuated at DKK 120 million in 2018, when it had an annual turnover of only DKK 1.2 million. Eventually, the platform had lost 97% of its stock market value by 2022, after raising more than DKK 38 million from investors (Pedersen & Kirketerp 2022). Despite the extensive journalistic coverage of

these topics, academic literature on the financialized aspects of digital labor platforms is limited and this has led platform labor scholars to highlight the need for more research in this respect (e.g., van Doorn & Shapiro 2023).

3.2 Literature on domestic work and housecleaning platforms

3.2.1 International literature

The rapid emergence of the gig economy sparked a fast-growing corpus of literature. Initially, researchers were more engaged with conceptualizing this new phenomenon (e.g., Schor 2016; Healy et al. 2017), and estimating participation in this new type of work (e.g., Huws et al. 2018; Pesole et al. 2018). Early case studies focused mainly on ridehailing (e.g., Lee et al. 2015; Rosenblat & Stark 2016) and crowdworking platforms (e.g., Irani 2015a; Lehdonvirta 2016). Location-based platforms providing housecleaning, and other domestic tasks were investigated at a significantly slower pace compared with ridehailing, crowdworking and food delivery platforms. The main reason for this involved the advanced level of difficulty in conducting fieldwork with platform housecleaners, given the individualized and isolated nature of this kind of work, which rendered workers invisible in the public sphere.

Early empirical research on domestic work platforms includes Julia Ticona and Alexandra Mateescu's seminal paper on visibility regimes and employment formalization in online carework marketplaces in the USA (Ticona & Mateescu 2018), a mixed-method study of female gig work (including domestic work platforms) in Kenya and South Africa (Hunt et al. 2019), as well as an early report on sub-Saharan on-demand domestic work (Hunt & Machingura 2016). Further empirical work based on in-depth interviews with platform workers features both Niels van Doorn's comparative analysis of how housecleaners in New York and Berlin experience the conditions of structural domination and selective informality imposed by platforms (van Doorn 2020), and Tandon and Rathi's ethnographic account of platform domestic and care work in India (Rathi & Tandon 2021). Kavita Dattani demonstrates, through the perspectives of female gig workers, how the Indian sector of domestic platform work failed to "uberize" domestic work (Dattani 2021). Abigail Hunt and Emma Samman, following their early pioneering work in sub-Saharan Africa, investigate the entrance of domestic work

platforms in South Africa, including interviews with workers (Hunt & Samman 2020). In a European context, projects using qualitative methods have studied mainly the German-based housecleaning platform Helpling. Gerold and colleagues combine housecleaners' and customers' interviews with data from an online survey to conclude that Helpling controls its workforce to such an extent that it makes no legal sense for the workers to be classified as self-employed (Gerold et al. 2022). Lisa Bor's research draws on housecleaners' and customers' interviews plus insight gained by working herself through the platform for several months. She concludes that the crisis of reproduction at household level can be resolved only by the gig economy through the entrapment of a highly gendered and racialized workforce in a constant state of working life crisis (Bor 2021). Marisol Keller (2022) also conducted an autoethnography, working for a housecleaning platform in Switzerland, to investigate socio-spatial practices created by the platforms and how these are experienced by workers. Inspired by the first wave of projects that included workers' experiences and perceptions in their data and analyses, a new cohort of researchers is currently investigating domestic work and housecleaning platforms through ethnographic methods and conducting interviews with platform workers. My thesis is part of this emerging body of qualitative research (e.g., Rodríguez-Modroño et al. 2022; Floros & Jørgensen 2023; Orth 2023).

The difficulty of interviewing housecleaners has led other researchers to pursue alternative ways of investigating these platforms. Frances Flanangan takes a historical approach on home-based service work to discern continuities and changes in the role of intermediaries facilitating this kind of work. Building on extensive desk-based research, she argues that the novelty of matching processes and network effects should be confronted with skepticism when portrayed as innovative gig economy features, since they existed also with "analog" intermediaries. Flanagan claims that the extraction of data and their use for purposes irrelevant with the completion of working tasks is the truly novel aspect of domestic platform work. Finally, she concludes that the paradigm shift taking place is that platforms turn the control mechanism of the workers from dyadic (employer – employee) to structural (diffused and decentralized) domination (Flanagan 2019). Another means of investigating platform housecleaning has been the walk-through method. Gruszka and colleagues employ netnography and the walk-through method on the Helpling platform to demonstrate how the gig

economy retains the sociocultural and legal invisibility of housecleaners and perpetuates the traditional devaluation of domestic work (Gruszka et al. 2022).

Another research strategy is to analyze platform work through the terms and conditions that platform companies impose on their users. An Australian project chose to combine web content analysis with comparative analysis of nine platforms' terms and conditions. Using Labor Process Theory, these scholars describe the various forms of control over labor that the platform model affords and highlight the importance of including workers' perspectives in providing holistic accounts of the labor process (MacDonald et al. 2021). Legal scholar Natalie Sedacca adopts a desk-based approach, reviewing previous literature and analyzing web content and contractual features on several domestic work platforms internationally. She concludes by highlighting the need for further research on the gendered and racialized aspects of platformized domestic work and calls for more rigid regulation on behalf of policymakers (Sedacca 2022). Following a different desk-based approach, Fetterolf performs a qualitative content analysis of workers' platform profiles on Care.com, to assess the factors that enhance/impede profile visibility, consequently leading to higher/lower ranking in online searches (Fetterolf 2022).

3.2.2 Danish literature

Danish research on domestic work and housecleaning platforms has evidently been invigorated by the signing of the collective agreement between the 3F labor union and the housecleaning platform company Hilfr, in 2018. This was the first collective agreement in the world including a housecleaning platform and sparked international interest and optimism about the possibility of regulating aspects of platform work (Sedacca 2022). The Hilfr agreement has been discussed and analyzed in several Danish research papers, from various perspectives, including industrial relations (Ilsøe 2020; Ilsøe & Larsen 2023; Ilsøe & Jesnes 2020), social security (Jacqueson 2021) and legal (Munkholm & Højer Schjøler 2018; Munkholm 2020). Yet, the terms of the Hilfr agreement were not renegotiated after 2019 and platform housecleaners did not express a tendency to unionize (E5). Hilfr has been struggling to maintain a foothold in the Danish housecleaning market (Magnussen 2022), and scholarly interest on this case has subsequently declined.

Some of the studies on the Hilfr agreement, as well as others investigating aspects of platform work in Denmark, include interviews with housecleaning platform managers and platform housecleaners. Anna Ilsøe and Louise Madsen provide a wide overview of the Danish "sharing economy" in 2018, which includes two interviews with managers and four interviews with workers from the Happyhelper housecleaning platform (Ilsøe & Madsen 2018). These interviews provide insight into these workers' perceptions of several issues, such as the (in)flexibility of platform housecleaning, work intensification, tax declaration, income, and performance ratings. Ilsøe and Larsen's paper on digital labor platforms' strategies in relation to collective bargaining draws on data from various sources including a small number of workers[10], nevertheless the role of these interviews in the analysis is secondary (Ilsøe & Larsen 2023). On the contrary, in the chapter discussing the Hilfr agreement within the Nordic platform work context, three interviews with housecleaners covered by the company agreement (Superhilfrs) inform the analysis and display the satisfaction of these workers regarding their employment with Hilfr under the agreed terms. The chapter also provides information on the subject positions of Hilfr's housecleaners, who, according to the company's manager, are young, migrant and/or students. This highlights that platform workers do not participate in the union or express their opinions collectively in any way (Ilsøe & Jesnes 2020). Cabi, a private research institution that carries out projects assigned by Danish authorities and labor market stakeholders, has also conducted interviews with platform housecleaners and managers for their report on the participation of vulnerable unemployed workers in platform work[11] (Cabi 2021). Finally, the two most recent articles on platform housecleaning in Denmark are informed by my fieldwork. The first discusses the role of humans in algorithmic management of workers in food-delivery and housecleaning platforms (Kusk et al. 2022) and the second investigates platform housecleaning in Denmark through a Migration Studies lens (Floros & Jørgensen 2023).

[10] In their methods section, they inform that they interviewed six managers and 13 workers from three different platforms, namely Hilfr (housecleaning), Uber (ridehailing) and Chabber (hotel and restaurant staffing), but do not offer more details.

[11] The report looks into eight different platforms, which Cabi classifies as customer intermediary, task intermediary and crowdworking gig-work platforms. Only one of the customer intermediary platforms is a housecleaning platform. In total, the report features seven interviews with "task-solvers" and eight with platform managers, and provides weak conclusions.

3.3 A brief history of digital labor platforms and platform housecleaning in Denmark

3.3.1 Envisioning Denmark as the European "Mecca" of the sharing economy

When composing a brief history of the Danish gig economy, terms and concepts have their own very special meanings in the narration. What is referred to as the 'gig economy' and 'digital labor platforms' in this thesis, was originally coined in public discourse as the 'sharing economy' and 'sharing services' or 'sharing economy platforms' in Denmark (Regeringen 2017; Kjelland 2017). Even though scholarly work and policy documents soon began to distinguish between labor platforms and capital platforms (e.g., Ilsøe & Madsen 2018; Disruptionsrådet 2018), the term sharing economy was officially maintained until the end of the term of the Sharing Economy Council in 2021.

The first well-known sharing economy platforms to appear in Denmark were GoMore, which started as a carpooling platform, in 2005 and Handyhand, which followed in 2009 as an online marketplace for the completion of small tasks[12]. However, the sharing economy did not gain traction and these business models had marginal presence in public discourse. This changed with Uber's entry into Denmark, in the autumn of 2014. Rasmussen and Madsen point out that the term sharing economy first appeared in national newspapers in the first half of 2012 and had only very few mentions until 2014 when it started skyrocketing (Rasmussen & Madsen 2017). Uber's entry caused heated political debates as it plainly defied Danish taxi legislation. The Danish Transport Authority reported Uber to the police for unauthorized taxi driving, only a few hours after the service kicked off in Denmark (Ilsøe & Madsen 2018). Despite Uber's success in the market, within about a year of its launch, several Uber drivers were arrested and charged by the police. While the Uber conflict was unfolding, Uber was registered as a sharing economy company in the Danish Business Authority register, in 2016 (Bernsen 2021). A series of drivers' convictions, tax audits and fines imposed by Danish authorities followed over the years, until Uber announced in April 2017 that it would quit operating in Denmark. Although Danish politicians announced a new taxi regulation, Uber considered that the taxi market should be further deregulated and decided to leave the country (Oppegaard et al. 2020).

[12] Housecleaning is among the tasks provided by Handyhand. Handyhand still operates under the same name, although it was taken over by a rival platform Pinploy in 2022.

After the 2015 national election, a new right-wing government assumed office, and it began promoting the sharing economy agenda. The vast majority of Danish political parties supported the idea of a sharing economy that would promote growth, sustainability and innovation. Indicatively, politicians expressed themselves along the lines of making Denmark a "Mecca" or "experimentarium" for new ideas and turn Copenhagen into a "Silicon Valley of the sharing economy" (Bernsen 2021; E3). The minister for Business and Growth in the new cabinet criticized the inability of the Danish state to embrace the new platform business models quickly and competently (Klarskov 2015). The scope of the sharing economy was rather small at the time, and approximately ten digital labor platforms were in operation at the beginning of 2016 (Rasmussen & Madsen 2017). These two years (2016 and 2017) were pivotal for the incremental growth of the Danish gig economy. Several digital labor platforms started operating in 2016, among them the Danish startup housecleaning platforms Happyhelper and Cleady[13]. Hilfr was launched in 2017, the same year as Workr, an app facilitating housecleaning, and other tasks. Care.com had already been providing services in Denmark since 2015, however the company still runs its business from its Berlin-based European office headquarters.

In late 2016, a new cabinet was formed after the liberal right-wing party established a new government coalition. Among the new government's first announcements was the formation of the Disruption Council, which was meant to "prepare Denmark for the future and take advantage of the opportunities created by robots, artificial intelligence and new business models" (Beskæftigelsesministeriet 2017). By "new business models" the Council was referring to the sharing economy, which was one of the focal points of its work. The Council was commissioned to protect the basic principles of the Danish model, acknowledging that the sharing economy it promoted would advance "looser forms of employment" (ibid.). Beyond the work to commence in the Disruption Council, the government also prepared and launched a national "Strategy for Growth through the Sharing Economy" (Regeringen 2017). The sixty-page Strategy engages more with aspects concerning capital platforms, such as Airbnb. Danish policymakers were preoccupied with setting up a portal to provide legal clarifications and guidance to new start-ups and existing platforms. The Strategy

[13] Cleady was bought out by Happy Helper in 2019.

therefore focuses mainly on business opportunities, consumers' rights, competition rules and taxation issues. Regarding labor, the Strategy voices concerns on the compatibility of the Danish model of industrial relations with the sharing economy but provides no concrete proposals. The document refers mainly to the ability of the Danish model to accommodate changes and to future meetings of the Disruption Council as a site where labor issues could be discussed and potentially resolved (ibid.).

The creation of the Disruption Council and the Strategy for Growth through the Sharing Economy are a clear demonstration of the Danish government's 'future essentialism' regarding the gig economy (Schiølin 2020). According to Schiølin, future essentialism is the production and promotion of an imaginary where a specific future – often revolving around science and technology – is presented as inevitable, and it is society's job to adapt to it or face dire consequences (ibid.: p. 545). The composers of the Strategy pick their words carefully when referring to the sharing economy as "part of a changing labor market", a tendency or trend that is accelerating, a conveyor of a "labor market that provides better opportunities for a flexible working life" (Regeringen 2017: p. 16). Likewise, the text suggests that the sharing economy's uptake by the Danish society will provide efficient solutions and a more sustainable and smart future (ibid.: p. 24).

The inevitability of the projected future was not just rhetoric for the Danish government, which took action immediately. Three concrete examples display the support of the Danish government towards digital labor platforms. The first example is the financial support that the Danish state provided to newly established labor platforms. In June 2017, the Danish Growth Fund, a public investment fund, invested DKK 3.5 million in the housecleaning platform Happy Helper. This was the first time the Danish state supported a platform economy company. At the time, the platform claimed to host over 2,300 active housecleaners and had set a minimum hourly fee of DKK 120. In 2017, the minimum hourly fee for an employee at a cleaning company was DKK 140 according to the collective agreement, however if one adds the supplements, insurance, pension contributions etc., the hourly cost for an employer was ca. DKK 250/hour (Honore 2017). The labor union 3F criticized the investment, claiming that Happy Helper was a salary-dumping company, while the minister of Business issued a press release praising the innovative aspects of Happy Helper and repeating the

government's commitment to help sharing economy companies (Arbejderen 2017). The Growth Fund replied through its spokesman that it co-finances only companies with proper wage and working conditions and that they would follow up on that (Honore 2017).

The second example of support was the signing of the Hilfr-3F collective agreement. I am including this here as an example of the government's support towards platforms because the agreement was not a bottom-up procedure triggered by the labor union, but a business strategy initiated by Hilfr (Ilsøe 2020), which was then very actively promoted by the prime minister (E3; E5). The dialogue on a tentative collective agreement was triggered during a Disruption Council meeting, in a discussion between a Hilfr manager and the general secretary of the 3F labor union (E2). Following up on that, the Danish prime minister asked the social partners directly why there was no model for a collective agreement that would guarantee that digital labor platforms are compatible with the Danish model. The general secretary of 3F asked the Hotel and Restaurant sector of the union to provide a blueprint and this is how the political will for the existence of such an official deal culminated in the signing of the Hilfr-3F collective agreement[14] (E5).

The third example of support was the government's intention to initiate partnerships between labor platforms, temporary work agencies and the local Danish unemployment centers. The original plan was that vulnerable categories of workers, such as long-term unemployed people, would be nudged to re-enter the labor market through "platform companies that have entered into a collective agreement or offer conditions resembling those of a collective agreement" (Danish Government 2019: p. 46). The plan was rolled out by the Disruption Council, and it follows the lines of what I described above as future essentialism. The Hilfr-3F agreement provided the ground for the government to claim that the gig economy was underway to being regulated by the social partners and should therefore be included in the overall plan of combating unemployment in Denmark. This

[14] The Hilfr-3F agreement stated that housecleaners who had worked above 100 hours on the platform would automatically be considered employees (Superhilfrs), unless they opted out from the collective agreement. Superhilfrs were entitled to sick pay, holiday pay and pension contributions, but no parental leave or benefits. A minimum hourly fee was introduced for Superhilfrs but they were free to negotiate a higher payment. Freelance Hilfrs who had worked less than 100 hours cumulatively could apply to become Superhilfrs. Until then, they had a lower minimum fee, had to report tax themselves and were not entitled to benefits. Hilfr could refuse to "upgrade" freelancers who had not reached the 100-hour limit (Collective Agreement 2018).

plan never took off. However, traces of its reasoning were transplanted into the mandate for the newly formed Sharing Economy Council.

The Sharing Economy Council was the outcome of an agreement supported by a broad majority of the Danish Parliament, announced on May 17th, 2018. The agreement consisted of ten initiatives, five of which focused on the facilitation of short-term house rental and its taxation, namely regulating the Airbnb market. The Sharing Economy Council was meant to act as an advisor to the Ministry of Business, discussing and suggesting how some of the initiatives set out in the agreement could be better implemented. The composition of the Council – decided in the agreement – reflected the positive predisposition of policymakers towards expanding platform business models. Out of the fifteen members, six were chosen by the social partners (three representatives of employers' organizations and three representatives of labor unions) and nine were appointed by the government. Besides Anna Ilsøe, a sociologist specializing in employment relations and researcher of digital labor platforms, the remaining eight chosen members were a mix of platform managers, CEOs, venture capital investors, consumer representatives and entrepreneurs. The chairman of the Council was the CEO of Tryg, one of Scandinavia's biggest insurance companies, which was the first company in Denmark to offer insurance policies for digital labor platform companies and platform workers (Kjelland 2017). Indicatively, another member of the Council was a business entrepreneur and TV personality, starring in the Danish version of the Dragons' Den reality show for entrepreneurs. She was a shareholder of a housecleaning company and had invested in Cleady (E6), a housecleaning platform company that went bankrupt in 2019, before being bought out by rival platform Happyhelper. The Council held regular meetings between January 2019 and January 2021, and in June 2021, published its 13 recommendations for a well-functioning sharing economy in Denmark (Rådet for Deleøkonomi 2021). However, during these two years, the political landscape of Denmark changed, causing shifts in policy making.

3.3.2 Shifting narratives, contradictory decisions and imperfect policymaking

In June 2019, elections were held in Denmark and a bloc led by the Social Democrats replaced the outgoing right-wing government. The new governmental coalition adopted a different agenda in

relation to digital labor platforms. This quickly became evident in public discourse, since ministers referred to location-based platform workers as “false self-employed”, working in an unregulated sector of the labor market (Scheer 2019b). The newly elected government was not hostile towards the overall narrative of the sharing economy, however it wanted to clarify from the start that many issues were involved with – especially location-based – digital labor platforms, such as tax evasion on behalf of workers and misclassification of workers as solo self-employed (E6). A governmental MP I interviewed in the autumn of 2020 stated that people working through platforms are workers and not companies and “in all aspects of the law they should be considered as workers and they have the right to organize, (and) they have the right to negotiate collective agreements” (E2).

The first intervention of the government in the platform labor market was the restriction of holiday-working visas for young people coming from Argentina and Chile, in December 2019. Beside a quota restricting visas from the two countries to 150 and 50 respectively, all holiday-working visa holders were banned from working as self-employed, which made it illegal for them to work on platforms. The number of Argentinians coming to Denmark on such visas had tripled within two years, reaching almost 2,000 in 2019 (Scheer 2019b). Most of these people worked for location-based platforms such as Wolt and Happyhelper, and the restriction was understood as a direct move against these platform companies (Scheer 2019b; Forchhammer 2021; E4; E5). Danish labor unions undoubtedly played a major role in putting pressure on the government to restrict the visas (E5; E6; Bernsen 2021). The restriction came to force just before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in 2020, which further inhibited mobility of migrant workers, and created a shortage of labor supply for housecleaning platforms.

In 2020, platform housecleaning in Denmark remained in the international spotlight. The Hilfr-3F agreement, which had been advertised as the Danish way to regulate platform work, was partly challenged by a decision by the Danish Competition and Consumers Authority (DCCA). After a lengthy procedure, the DCCA announced in August 2020 that both Hilfr and Happyhelper had agreed to remove minimum fees/hour imposed on the platform cleaners, because this went against competition rules and created cartel conditions (Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020a;

Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020b). Both platforms had advertised the set minimum hourly prices as a socially responsible way to avoid a race to the bottom. Hilfr committed to remove minimum prices for the freelance platform workers and ensure that Superhilfrs are employees by stressing the superior/subordinate character of the employment relation and assuming the financial risk of Superhilfrs' work. Likewise, Happyhelper committed to removing minimum fees and therefore the DCCA did not issue sanctions against the platforms (Jacqueson 2021).

The DCCA decision was not a binding legal document, which also meant that it could not be officially challenged. By conforming with the decision, the two companies avoided legal procedures and penalties for infringing Danish competition law. On the other hand, the DCCA grasped the opportunity to deliberate on an issue that had not been previously clarified through legal procedures; namely the classification of platform workers as independent companies (self-employed persons). Danish labor and social security law contains no clear definition as to who can be considered an employee, which leaves a lot of space for diverse assessments from different authorities (Munkholm 2020). The DCCA decision was based on communication with platform managers and desk-based work. This means that the Competition Authority assessed what constitutes an employment relation without ever consulting a worker, and with only minimum interaction with labor unions (E5). Given the sensitivity that the new government had displayed in relation to location-based platform work, the decision was met with surprise. The minister of employment allegedly contacted DCCA and made clear that any future decisions should be based on fieldwork research, which would take into account the actual working conditions of platform workers (E3). When I contacted DCCA in 2021 for a statement or interview, the Authority refused to contribute to my research and referred me to the decisions' official texts.

In 2021, the Council for the Sharing Economy concluded its mandate by publishing its thirteen recommendations on the future of the sharing economy. During the 2-year spell of the Council the public discourse had shifted from viewing the sharing economy as an opportunity, to viewing digital labor platforms as a labor market in need of regulation.

> Actually, the discussion changed from how we get more of those kinds of models, business models, to the discussion on how we can get this kind of economy, if we can

> make it more responsible, and how this can be focused on the circumstances the workers work on. And the big discussion […] is whether you are an employee or self-employed, and how this of course is running with competition law as well. (E6 public official)

After the result of the election changed the political landscape, the Council now had a "slim mandate" (E6) to provide recommendations to the government on how the ten initiatives of 2018 could be fulfilled. Nevertheless, the Council proceeded as agreed and created a one-stop-solution portal for businesses that wanted legal clarifications on how to run a platform business model and discussed and provided recommendations on sharing platforms and their contribution to sustainability and green transition policies. Short term rentals (Airbnb) were also discussed, and taxation solutions were provided, according to the mandate (E9). The Council had some discussions on (mis)classification of employment relations in digital labor platforms but deliberating on this was outside the scope of the mandate (E3). The Council made various recommendations, including that a report should be drafted investigating whether platform workers should be classified as self-employed or employees. Also that the government should make it easier for platform companies to control workers' residence and work permits, and that the government should investigate the potential of labor platforms for (re)introducing vulnerable groups of workers from the periphery of the labor market into employment (Rådet for Deleøkonomi 2021). A substantive contribution to employment-related issues was blocked by the social partners:

> The thing is whenever there was something that was perhaps going somewhere, either the employers' association would shut it down or we (the unions) would. (chuckles). So, there were only some meaningless reports where people were stating the obvious, on things that you can't really argue with… (E3 union representative)

The next effort to deliberate on classification of employment was assumed within the "Denmark Can Do More I" policy proposal. This policy paper announced the creation of a permanent "Council for the future labor market", whereby the social partners would participate in consulting with the Danish government on challenges related to the future of the labor market. The policy paper documents the

government's intention to introduce a presumption of employment rule into Danish legislation. This would clarify the classification of employment relations of platform workers, whose work does not fulfill the criteria of self-employment (Regeringen 2021). These criteria were to be decided after the publication of a report commissioned from Danish legal scholars, which would form the basis for discussion between the social partners. The report came out in the spring of 2022, presenting the challenges posed by the current legal status in Denmark, in relation to people in atypical employment, and more specifically platform workers. Moreover, the report referred to the impending EU Directive on platform work and how its focus on the actual terms of the employment relation could challenge Danish courts decisions on (mis)classification of employment relations, since Danish courts emphasize contractual agreements (Munkholm et al. 2022). The report also presented and discussed in detail algorithmic management of work as factual proof of control over platform workers. In its tentative conclusions, the report suggested that the Danish government would do better either waiting until the EU Directive was decided or the social partners had decided on a solution. However, it proposed that a presumption of employment rule should be implemented, with employers bearing the burden of proving that members of their workforce are not employees (ibid.). The report clearly challenged the self-employed nature of platform work, disturbing labor platform companies.

Nevertheless, until the time of writing of this thesis in 2023, no Danish presumption of employment rule has been implemented, and the EU Directive on platform workers' final form has yet to be decided. At the European level, the Directive has generated much debate and political tension, due to the pressure exercised on behalf of several EU national governments that are against presumption of employment rules (Bourgery-Gonse 2023). At national level, a political crisis in the governmental coalition led to a Danish general election being held in the autumn of 2022. The outcome was a coalition between the Social Democrats and their traditional rival right-wing party, forming a centrist government. The third party in the coalition is led by the former prime minister of the right-wing party Venstre, who had also chaired the Disruption Council from 2017 to 2019, openly promoting the gig economy. Even before the election, when the red bloc was in government, the proposal on the presumption of employment had been discussed by the governmental coalition. However, a specific party vetoed proceeding with it (E3). Given the composition of the new government and the final

form of the impending EU Directive, it could be a while until more clarity on the employment classification of platform workers is reached in Denmark. Meanwhile, labor unions and workers in Denmark are refraining from bringing a court case against a specific platform company, since an unsuccessful judgement would potentially set a precedent that would be hard to overturn (E3; E8).

Adding even more complexity to the situation, the Danish Tax Authority (SKAT), deliberating in April 2023, concluded that all Wolt couriers are considered to be Wolt's employees, within the scope of tax law. As with the DCCA decision, SKAT's decision has no binding effect for the other Danish agencies or overall legislation. Moreover, it applies only to Wolt and not to all food delivery platforms operating in Denmark, which also raises concerns regarding competition (Ilsøe 2023). The decision was an outcome of journalistic work. A journalist working with Wolt to investigate working conditions asked SKAT to assess if he should be considered an employee or self-employed (Bech-Nielsen 2022). In January 2022, SKAT assessed that the courier was an employee, and in April 2023, it expanded the decision to cover the totality of Wolt's fleet in Denmark. SKAT's decision is one more piece in the puzzle of contradictory rulings and decisions comprising the governance of the Danish gig economy. The lack of clarity and the inconsistency of public authority decisions has been highlighted both in the recommendations by the Council for the Sharing Economy (Rådet for Deleøkonomi 2021) and in the report on the presumption of employment (Munkholm et al. 2022). Nevertheless, political inability to assume strong initiatives combined with weak efforts on behalf of the social partners to regulate the Danish platform economy have led to this impasse, which might only be overcome through a binding EU Directive.

With regard to platform housecleaning companies, the overall situation in the sector changed after 2020, due to a number of factors. The restriction of holiday working visas for Argentinians and Chileans was followed by the pandemic, which slowed down the demand for online housecleaning and impeded workers' mobility (Magnussen 2022). According to Happyhelper's CEO, another factor was the massive hiring of unskilled workers by public testing centers for COVID-19, which diminished the platform housecleaners' labor force (Pedersen & Kirketerp 2022). Negative publicity (e.g., Scheer 2019a) and platform housecleaners and customers' tendency to establish off-platform relations, as I

demonstrate in the following chapters, could also presumably have had negative effects. Whatever the main driver for this decline might be, key housecleaning platform companies in Denmark have experienced its repercussions. Hilfr was sold to new investors in 2022, after struggling with labor shortages and the pandemic (Magnussen 2022), and Happyhelper's share plunged by almost 97% by 2022, after the company's failed attempts to scale up, alongside the unstable outcome of its efforts to expand into Germany and Estonia (Pedersen & Kirketerp 2022).

Summing up, the housecleaning platform market seems to have lost the traction it had before the pandemic and its labor market pool has shrunk. Despite the legislation aiming to curtail the presence of Latin American workers on the platforms, the majority of the reduced workforce is still of Latin American origin, mainly workers with European – Italian or Spanish – passports (C23 female migrant). Calculating the current number of active platform housecleaners in Denmark without detailed official data from the platforms is impossible. Judging from the number of profiles in the largest platforms, an informed – but highly speculative – calculation is that between 1,200 and 1,600 persons had active profiles[15] at the end of 2022. This number has since shown a slight tendency to rise.

[15] Many profiles on the platforms belong to workers who have quit working or left Denmark without bothering to unsubscribe. Others have created profiles but have never worked. Moreover, some workers are listed on more than one platform. Indicatively, in 2021, a platform used mostly for contracting craftsmen and handymen had more than 2,000 profiles listed in its housecleaning section, nevertheless – based on the data provided by the platform interface – only two out of the forty top profiles (meaning appearing higher in the list) had performed a task within the last two weeks. This means that the list had not been updated or edited for a very long period, probably a few years. This demonstrates the difficulty of safely deducing the size of the Danish platform housecleaning labor market.

Platform housecleaning in Denmark in a nutshell								
Events/dates	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Platforms	Care.com launched in Denmark	Happyhelper launched, Cleady launched	Hilfr launched, Workr launched, Growth Fund invests in Happyhelper	Huge rise in holiday-working visas from Latin America	Cleady goes bankrupt and is taken over by Happyhelper	Pinploy launched, Happyhelper expands into Germany		Pinploy merges with Handyhand, Hilfr sold, Happyhelper's stocks dive
Committees, Decisions, Policymaking			Disruption Council launched, Strategy for Growth through the Sharing Economy published	Hilfr/3F agreement	Council for Sharing Economy (CSE) launched, Restriction of holiday-working visas	COVID-19 pandemic starts, DCCA decisions on Hilfr and Happyhelper	CSE publishes its 13 points, Denmark Can Do More I policy, EU Directive draft	Report on presumption of employment issued, SKAT classifies Wolt riders as employees

Table 3.1: Platform housecleaning in Denmark in a nutshell

CHAPTER 4

Platform housecleaning in Denmark: A case of migrant labor

4.1 Introduction

The difficulties that exist when estimating the size of the housecleaning platform labor market in Denmark also apply when calculating the percentage of the people of migrant origin working via these platforms. When I commenced my research for this project, I started browsing profiles on the websites of housecleaning platforms to get an overview of the labor market participants. It soon became evident that people of ethnic Danish origin were such a small fraction of the labor market they could be considered a negligible minority. The labor market composition was obvious to all the housecleaners I interviewed. When assessing her overall experience of platform housecleaning, a young ethnic Dane interviewed who had just finished school said, "I am kind of experiencing how it feels to be a foreigner working in Denmark" (C16 female Dane). In this statement, which had nothing to do with discussing the labor market composition, an ethnic Dane pinpointed, with Danish common sense, those who are expected to become (platform) housecleaners. Most Danish citizens would agree that housecleaning work is reserved for the female migrant workforce.

One labor union representative interviewed referred to platform housecleaning as a prolongation of a labor market tradition in Denmark that reserves low-paid physical labor for the "weak in the labor market" (E5). According to them, the weak workers in the labor market are migrant workers with compromised sociolegal status, who are exposed to labor market inequalities deriving from a long-standing systemic discrimination against them (ibid.). Most of my expert interlocutors in this project commented early in their interviews on the lack of credible quantitative data that could provide a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. At the same time, their references to migrants' participation in the platform labor market were often downplayed or came with cautious wording that was open to various interpretations, such as "overrepresentation of foreign workers"

(e.g., E2). My overall impression when conducting these interviews was that there was 'an elephant in the room', the elephant being the fact that platform housecleaning in Denmark is largely migrant labor, which is exactly the case in many other parts of the world (e.g., van Doorn 2020; Tandon & Rathi 2022).

When asked about the type of workers their platform attracts, the platform manager first said that their company tries "not to discriminate" and that they also have men on board. Only when I asked them about demographics, did they admit having "people coming from Spain, some from Germany and a lot of Argentinians" (E1). The Danish MP tried to downplay the centrality of migrant labor; for them "young" and "migrant students" were the most prominent users of platforms (E2). When asking if housecleaning platforms could be profitable without migrant labor, my interlocutors were not as eloquent as in other parts of their interviews:

> Q: Let's get back to housecleaning platforms, do you believe that these platforms could operate without the existence of international workers? Would they be profitable, would it be a feasible business model?
>
> A: (Laughs hard). I can't say. (long pause). I don't know. Some… maybe… (E6)
>
> Q: Do you believe that platforms offering localized physical tasks such as house cleaning or food delivery or babysitting could be profitable business models in Denmark without the supply of migrant labor?
>
> A: (Very long pause…) Only to some extent. […] the lowest rank of society, we call it society group 5, […] digital work platforms are interested in them, when it comes to cleaning. (E5)

These quotes underline the predominance of migrant labor in location-based platform work, which is inextricably linked to how platform housecleaning is experienced, governed, perceived, and referred to. In the sections of this chapter, I illustrate the subject positions of predominantly migrant platform housecleaners in Denmark and analyze how these intersecting positions influence their work.

4.2 Who are the platform housecleaners in Denmark?

4.2.1 Beyond the inexistence of official data: An indicative overview

While conducting my research, I extensively browsed through thousands of workers' profiles on all platforms offering housecleaning in Denmark. I signed up as a customer and a cleaner on two platforms and was granted access to a platform's closed Facebook group featuring more than 1,500 members, in 2020. Nevertheless, data acquired through this process cannot provide a fully coherent description of the labor force. On Facebook, workers self-report their nationalities, as well as other personal data. Similarly, profiles on platforms contain self-reported information, which cannot be verified. Moreover, several housecleaners had uploaded profiles on multiple platforms. It is not among the aims of this thesis to statistically calculate the share of migrants or their demographics within the overall population working on housecleaning platforms in Denmark. However, I provide some indicative data at this point since I believe the workers' migrant status is a key element of my analysis. Naturally, I do not expect the reader to accept this at face value without some corroborative background information.

In December 2020, I reviewed, one by one, 444 Facebook profiles of workers who had signed up on the housecleaning platform that had provided me with access to its closed Facebook group. These workers had signed up between 1 July and 30 November of the same year. Out of the 444 profiles, only 27 were registered under an ethnic Danish name. 97 profiles belonged to male housecleaners, but only one of them was under an ethnic Danish name. 195 workers clearly stated that their country of origin was either Argentina or Chile. Slightly above a hundred more profiles were under Latino names, and/or were also members of expats groups on Facebook, and/or posted in Spanish. Less than a hundred indicated in their profile that they were students. Other self-reported nationalities in profiles indicated South and Southeast Asian, African, and Eastern European origin. The prevalence of Latin American workers – especially Argentinians and Chileans – among those newly registered to the platform came during a time when holiday working visa holders were already banned from working as freelancers on platforms. This suggests that the limitation of visas and the work restrictions I referred to in the previous chapter were insufficient to prevent workers from these countries from signing up

to housecleaning platforms. At the time of writing of this chapter, in November 2023, I revisited the Facebook group and looked up the fifty latest profiles registered in the past two months. Only four of them belong to users registered under ethnic Danish names, while most newcomers had Latin American profiles. The monthly pace of onboarding new workers has reduced drastically.

In February 2022, I signed up as a customer on another platform and started receiving messages from housecleaners who were offering themselves for a booking. I received a total of 33 messages in the first week and only nine of these came from profiles of people stating their fluency in Danish and English. Many of the messages came from people identifying themselves as migrants who had lived for a long time in Denmark. In March 2022, I initiated a search for a cleaner within a 20km radius from the center of Copenhagen. The platform presented me with 324 profiles. Although I did not document the profile details one by one, non-Danish-speaking workers were by far the majority on the platform. Moreover, almost ten percent of the profiles belonged to Filipino female housecleaners, indicating that particular national clusters of workers displayed a preference for certain platforms. Finally, in December 2022, I investigated 72 profiles of cleaners offering services in South Copenhagen, who were enlisted on a third platform. Only five of the cleaners had an ethnic Danish name, while sixty were migrants, most of them with Hispanic names.

Though these rough numbers cannot provide statistical accuracy, they are triangulated with my interviews both with expert stakeholders and platform housecleaners and with existing literature. According to assumptions by a representative from a Danish labor union, Argentinian and Chilean working holiday visa holders comprised 75 to 80 percent of the labor force of one of the biggest Danish housecleaning platforms, at least until 2020 (E5). Previous literature also underlines how most workers on the Hilfr platform are migrants (Ilsøe & Jesnes 2020). Finally, workers themselves acknowledge that platforms rely primarily on migrant labor:

> To be honest, it is not the Danish people that work on the platform. […] It is mainly students who do that and people from Latin America, people who don't speak the language and try to survive. (C19 female migrant)

4.2.2 Migrant housecleaners' diverse and intersecting subject positions

As I demonstrated in the previous section, platform housecleaning in Denmark is a highly gendered and racialized sector. The majority of the workforce is comprised by female housecleaners from Latin America, Eastern Europe and Asia. Such a workforce composition coincides with findings in other European countries (van Doorn & Vijay 2021; Bor 2021), where migrants are disproportionately represented in this sector of the labor market in relation to the overall percentage of migrant population. In Germany, for example, housecleaning platforms are likewise replete with Argentinian migrant workers (Orth 2023). Defining who counts as 'migrant' is very important, since the migrant in law, the migrant in public discourse and the migrant in official data can all point to different subjects (cf. Anderson 2015). EU citizens, holiday-working visa holders, foreign students and non-Danish-speaking citizens may well fit under the umbrella term 'migrant' in public discourse but are not subject to the same legal provisions and restrictions in Denmark. Moreover, contrary to mainstream depictions of migrants as low-skilled and/or low-paid workers, a lot of foreign platform housecleaners are well-educated or students at Danish universities. This coincides with research findings in other Nordic countries, such as Sweden (Webster & Zhang 2022).

Bridget Anderson claims that 'migration' is a problematic category to define, and that deciding who counts as a migrant is contingent on migration signifying problematic mobility (Sager & Anderson 2018). Certain mobilities are classed and racialized – and in the case of housecleaning also gendered – and are therefore deemed problematic. That is what finally decides who counts as a migrant (ibid.: p. 99). When using the term migrant in this thesis, I am referring to all foreign platform housecleaners, but also to housecleaners who are not Danish nationals but may have Danish citizenship. This is the case for several workers who have resided in Denmark for a long time or are foreigners married to Danish spouses. Among my interviewees, there are also two second-generation migrants who were born and raised in Denmark, have Danish citizenship and speak Danish fluently. I refer to them as non-ethnic Danes, rather than migrants. Nevertheless, it is interesting how, due to their skin color and non-Western names, customers who booked them on the platform treated them as migrants.

> This customer wanted me to have my back bent with like a hand vacuum cleaner and vacuum the whole living room. And I, like, don't do that. It would take an hour and that would break my back. The customer called support because we had this discussion […] and informed them that I have an attitude problem […] then support called me, and she said, well we have got this complaint now, but she knows me, we have talked multiple times *and also in Danish*, and (she) informed the customer that I am an *integrated person*. (C11 male non-ethnic Dane)

This quote demonstrates that customers may book non-ethnic Danish housecleaners and treat them in demeaning ways due to racial prejudices, precisely because they think they are migrants. Moreover, the interviewee points out in this quote – and once more in his interview – that speaking Danish to customer support makes a difference. This implies that racial prejudice is also present in the platform company's management. The worker also felt the need to stress that he is an 'integrated person', which connotates that he believes there is a category of 'non-integrated' non-ethnic Danes. This shows how problematic the definition of migrant can become. Danish citizens who are not legally or statistically defined as migrants and do not suffer the labor market or welfare exclusions imposed on migrants, still experience discrimination because of their racial origin.

The amalgam of platform housecleaners in Denmark comprises workers with many different characteristics. Regardless of how widely or narrowly the 'migrant' is categorized, migrant platform housecleaners are not a homogeneous group. Accounting for how platform work unfolds in Denmark requires a nuanced understanding of how race, gender, ethnicity, class, ability, age and sociolegal status intersect to produce specific labor market inequalities and experiences of the studied phenomenon. Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlee Crenshaw (1989) to describe how discrimination and subordination do not occur along a single categorical axis (e.g., race or gender) but along multiple intersecting axes that reciprocally construct an individual's identity to produce complex social inequalities. Intersectional approaches build mainly on black feminist scholarship (e.g., Combahee River Collective 1978; King 1988). Intersectionality is an elusive concept, sometimes applied as theory, sometimes employed as methodology, and other times considered a paradigm or a

heuristic device (Collins 2015). Regardless of how it is used, intersectionality denotes the existence of complex social inequalities, and presupposes users' emancipatory aspirations in alleviating them. In this case, I use intersectionality as an analytical strategy (ibid.: p. 3), which, by delving deeper into the diverse factors shaping cleaners' subjectivities, provides new angles and critical insight into platform housecleaning in Denmark.

Foregrounding the intersecting identities of cleaners illustrates the diverse power structures that shape the Danish context of platform housecleaning and affect how work is done. One example of this from my fieldwork is that a Danish, an EU migrant and a non-EU migrant student will make completely different work choices, given their eligibility to receive financial support in the form of the State Educational Grant (SU). A Danish student can combine platform work with receiving SU, whereas achieving this for an EU student is practically impossible[16]. Non-EU migrant students – with minor exceptions – are not entitled to SU (Uddannelses og Forskningsstyrelsen 2022) and depending on their student visa, they also have specific limitations on how many hours they can work while studying. This example illustrates how cleaners who are students experience platform work differently depending on their ethnicity, while cleaners of the same ethnicity, age and gender may face different challenges according to their sociolegal status (visa restrictions). Another example is that although all female cleaners can potentially experience sexual harassment in a private home, being a young migrant student newcomer, without any contacts in the area of residence and unaware of Danish culture, possibly creates more difficulties in dealing with harassment than a local, Danish, middle-aged cleaner would have.

> I had two customers (on this platform) and one of them […] kind of asked me if I would wash his back and this was approximately when I left. […] I didn't report him, I just said OK. The other one, I was actually cleaning for him for a while and it was OK but I didn't really feel respected and […] I just didn't feel safe actually in the home […] you have a

[16] During my PhD project, the Danish government further reduced EU students' access to SU. Before this, a self-employed platform housecleaner had to prove that they owned a tax-registered company for more than a year and attach balance sheets and yearly business plans. Both among my interviewees (e.g., C7 female migrant; C15 female migrant) and in the platform's Facebook group, I am aware of multiple attempts by EU citizens to combine SU with platform housecleaning, which all failed.

> strong man and then me and I am pretty thin, […] so I also left after a few months.[…] I didn't make any report on the second house, I don't think there was something special to report. (C19 female EU migrant)

The above quote from a very young Eastern European cleaner displays the multiple insecurities related to platform housecleaning, which are aggravated by her migrant identity. Enduring recurring cleanings in an unsafe environment for a few months indicates that the cleaner needed the income, hence experienced income insecurity. At the same time, she was not able to replace this booking with another one through the platform, hence faced job insecurity. This quote also highlights the gendered insecurity inherent in domestic work, which is further aggravated by being hired by unknown people without references. In the next chapter, I discuss in more detail multiple insecurities and how they add up to typify platform housecleaning as precarious employment. However, first, in the following section, I demonstrate how diverse migrant sociolegal statuses interlock with this overall precarity of platform housecleaning to aggravate the situation for migrant workers.

Before concluding this section, I underline that taking multiple identities into consideration does not serve to introduce a 'ladder of intersectional vulnerabilities' that measures the level of exploitation of platform housecleaners. Quite the opposite, my analysis aims at raising awareness about the existence of interlocking factors that augment labor market inequalities, while accounting for the workers' multifarious workarounds when navigating these inequalities, presented in chapter six. In this sense, intersectional approaches foreground workers' agency and are key for my non-fatalistic analysis of precarity in platform housecleaning.

4.3 How does being a migrant affect experiences of platform housecleaning?

In November 2020, I interviewed a Danish MP who claimed that platform workers are part of the precariat and who equated platform work with the "Wild West" because of the "big hole in the official state on having authorities that can handle these new platform economies and companies". However, he felt confident that the Danish industrial relations system will eventually handle this transition and "reset to this new world" (E2). At the same time, the multiple uncertainties of platform work and its precarious nature are acknowledged even by the proponents of the platform economy,

who nevertheless also believe that regulation will follow a painful and lengthy period of adaptation (e.g., Parker et al. 2016). Regardless of whether precarity in platform work is regulated by the social partners, as the Danish MP claims, or by the invisible hand of the market, as platform economy enthusiasts suggest (ibid.), both accounts assume that precarity is a uniform trait of platform work, pertaining to the structure of either the labor market or the business model. Yet, ethnographic accounts of platform work have highlighted how precarity does not manifest identically for all workers but is also relational (van Doorn 2023). This means that platform workers already living under precarious conditions due to their sociolegal status and/or their limited opportunities to generate income, are experiencing precarity more intensely due to their dependence on this work.

Among the cleaners I interviewed, most joined the platforms because of the immediate need to sustain themselves and others as a means of complementing their income. In the case of some migrant cleaners, their ability to contract other types of employment without restrictions is contingent on their visa regimes. A common denominator for all interviewees is that they consider platform housecleaning as a transitory stage until they find a better job. The transitory character of platform housecleaning is also openly discussed in the platform Facebook group that I observed. A migrant housecleaner in the group referred to this work as an 'in-the-meantime' job. An EU migrant I interviewed said that "I just did it because I was in need during this period. […] From the beginning I knew that this was only going to be a temporary job" (C7 female EU migrant).

4.3.1 Ambiguous liminality and migrants getting trapped in limbo

However, as other researchers have pointed out, this temporariness of precarious employment for migrants entering a labor market can easily transform into a persistent state of limbo. Scott and colleagues coin 'ambiguous liminality' for the contingent middle ground between achieving one's goals and getting trapped in limbo (Scott et al. 2022). Liminality in Anthropology is conceptualized as the in-between stage (between separation and incorporation) in the passage of rituals (van Gennep 1960, in Scott et al. 2022). According to anthropologists, liminality occurs in spaces that are usually hidden from view, thus rendering people in liminal stages socially invisible. Thinking with ambiguous

liminality is even more relevant in the case of platform housecleaning, given the invisibility of labor when cleaning behind doors of private homes.

Liminality signifies the existence of an initial stage (before) and a desired state (after). Scott et al. discern four realms of liminality, namely the temporal (employment), financial (income), social (community) and legal (citizenship) realms (ibid.: p. 8). Their framework facilitates the analysis of migrant workers' employment trajectories according to the workers' previous situation and the potential fulfillment of their desired outcomes after enduring precarious employment. My interviewees have diverse employment and income backgrounds, whereas most of them share a prior stage of stable community and family ties in their countries of origin, where they also possessed a citizenship status. Their diverse backgrounds can be categorized in three broad groups: a) Migrants who had good jobs and/or higher education before coming to Denmark following their spouses, who are either Danes or migrants hired by Danish companies, b) Migrants precariously employed in their country of origin, who came to Denmark to work, and c) Young migrants who study or travel to Europe and partly sustain their residence through working.

Applying the lens of ambiguous liminality to analyze these groups provides the following insights. The first group is the most susceptible to getting trapped in limbo, as their liminal stage is indefinitely prolonged; they can't find stable employment matching their skills, working individually obstructs them from learning Danish, and the existence of family obligations tends to idealize the flexibility aspect of platform housecleaning. Moreover, their residence status and health insurance are covered by their partners, which minimizes the immediate need of typical employment. The second group has lower career development aspirations, and they are the most likely to end up working exclusively through the platform to fully sustain themselves. Their financial dependence on the platform augments the precarity they are experiencing, and they will only shift to another job position if it is guaranteed and pays equally. They typify ambiguous liminality, since what they consider a positive livelihood transformation is contingent upon multiple factors. For example, one of the most successful – in terms of income – cleaners I interviewed was forced to leave Denmark after suffering a work-related chronic injury. She was not entitled to sick pay, the platform insurance did not cover

such injuries, and she could not afford life in Copenhagen, so she moved back to her home country (C6). Finally, the third group of migrants usually experiences liminality in a positive way. Aiming at finding a full-time job after their studies, continuing their studies, or having no imminent job aspirations – as in the case of working holiday visa holders and young travelers – they are content to have a source of income, despite the difficulties platform housecleaning entails. The liminality and in-betweenness that this third group experiences is evident in the following quotes:

> In Corona times, I could not get a contract for a company, so I found what was available […] I don't know, I'm not sure if this is a middle step between unemployment and better employment whatever that is… At least I never thought about it. For me this was good because it was something that worked for me, because I was able to pay the rent. […] I was selected for a master's program in Germany so I'm leaving. (C5 female EU migrant)

> The owners want them (freelancers) to be as effective as they can and as cheap as they want, so there is not much that an individual can do to progress and not see this as a temporary solution for income problems […]. I know that there are people who have been working in this for four years, […] but if I were to be working as a cleaner for all these years, I would prefer to get hired by a company […] because this is completely absurd to just go into that without any benefits. (C14 male non-EU migrant)[17]

In these quotes, younger workers express themselves along the lines of "paying the rent" or "income problems". They are not yet preoccupied with pension schemes or insurance policies, as they are transitioning between life stages and countries. Although they share with the rest of the workers the precarious experience of platform housecleaning (in terms of e.g., cancellations, contingency of work, ratings etc.) and they equally weigh the pros and cons for enduring it, they are relatively better off in terms of their ability to opt out from gig work. Non-EU migrants possessing student or holiday working visas usually have middle-class backgrounds, which allows them to pay the costs of obtaining such visas and travelling to Denmark (cf. Orth 2023). This means that many of these migrants have

[17] Part of this quote has been used in my previous work (Floros & Jørgensen 2023) to support my argument that platform housecleaners perceive their work as temporary.

some recourse and can opt out of platform work – at least for a period – if needed. Other migrant students and visa holders though, borrow money or use up their family's savings to initiate their migration trajectory, and in this case, they are bound to platform housecleaning or some other form of low-paid, precarious work. This is also the case for the female migrant in the introductory vignette to this thesis, who after working for almost two years on the platform while studying, has recently transitioned to an industrial cleaning company, continuing her multilayered precarious migrant trajectory.

4.3.2 Liminal precarity of migrant housecleaners

Promises of a better future entrap migrants in a state of expectancy, where they endure working under precarious terms, while anticipating a better future (cf. Kapsalis et al. 2020). Niels van Doorn suggests 'liminal precarity' as a concept denoting migrants' own subjective understanding of platform work as a temporary stage in the migration trajectory (van Doorn 2023). Liminal precarity is a non-fatalistic analytic tool that considers migrants' compromised agency, while they are opting for and trying to navigate precarious and sometimes demeaning work. According to van Doorn, migrants' liminal precarity is "an act of wishful thinking – a promise to oneself" (ibid.: p.174) that the precarity they will experience will be only temporary. This reading of precarity, while interpreting platform work as a compulsory outcome of economic necessity, also ascribes migrants the agency of choosing gig work based on their assessments and livelihood plans. All the migrants I interviewed shared this wishful thinking of enduring precarious employment only temporarily as part of their overall strategy. And all of them were looking forward to contracting stable employment or starting a business of their own in their field of interest.

By contrast, the ethnic Danes I interviewed had concrete plans about how long and under what circumstances they would engage in platform housecleaning. The big difference here is that Danish cleaners knew that they had other options regardless of their choice to take on platform work. "I didn't want to work in supermarkets like Netto […] it sounds so dry. Taking and scanning things for 8 hours, no not my type of thing" (C12 female Dane), one of them said, who undertook platform housecleaning as her second part-time source of income and soon decided to quit the platform for

another job opportunity. Another Dane acknowledged in her interview all the difficulties and the precarious nature of platform housecleaning; however, she had planned from the outset to work a maximum of one year and ended up working less than that (C16). When applying the lens of liminal precarity, this is a notable difference between migrants and Danes. Migrants' livelihood plans are more than often wishful thinking, whereas Danish platform housecleaners make plausible plans and usually have options if they decide to quit. This is an indicative demonstration of the relational aspect of precarity that I referred to in the introductory paragraphs of this section.

Until the time of writing of this thesis, at least nine out of my eighteen migrant informers were still – one to three years after I had interviewed them – working fully or part-time as housecleaners, through a platform, the black market or a cleaning company. This does not mean that they have abandoned their plan to transition to another employment sector. Nevertheless, it is a sign of how the promise they made to themselves – their liminal precarity – is contingent on the structural difficulties that migrants with compromised sociolegal status and non-Danish speaking migrants face in the Danish labor market. Myong and Andersen (2015) when analyzing Danish immigration policies between 1973 and 2015 concluded that domestic work is one of the few primary options that non-EU migrants have to achieve a prolonged work and residency permit. Other researchers point out Danish policymakers' continual intention to instrumentalize domestic services for creating jobs for migrants and unskilled workers, as well as using domestic work as a possible solution to achieve further integration of migrants in the Danish labor market (Kvist et al. 2009). Of course, this does not mean that migrant domestic workers – working under any employment relation – are straightforwardly eligible for long-term permits. On the contrary, as researchers have claimed in the past regarding migrant labor in other national contexts (cf. De Genova 2002), sociolegal vulnerability guarantees the existence of cheap and superfluous labor power; in this case to cover the need for domestic services. Especially in a country with a strong welfare and social safety net, such as Denmark, it is less likely for workers without sociolegal vulnerability to work as housecleaners.

4.4 Platform housecleaning, migrant mobility and institutional attempts to control it

All types and forms of domestic work in Denmark are often conducted by migrant workers. More than half of the workers in the formal cleaning sector, including industrial cleaning etc., are migrants, while statistical data on self-employed cleaners working for private households are not available (Mailand & Larsen 2020). Moreover, a widely used au pair scheme exists that grants two-year temporary residence permits to young, unmarried, and childless, non-EU nationals coming to work for host families in Denmark. In the last fifteen years, an average of about 1,500 au pairs – eighty percent of which come from the Philippines – enter Denmark annually (Hansen & Pedersen 2019). Especially in private housecleaning, informal/undeclared work is a widespread phenomenon, and some of the almost 20,000 irregularly residing migrants in Denmark are working in this sector (Mailand & Larsen 2020). Housecleaning platforms cover only a modest share of this labor market, given the estimates that more than one in ten Danish households use some sort of private cleaning service (ibid.).

These figures indicate that there is high demand for housecleaning services in Denmark, which combined with the relatively high wage levels, make it an attractive destination for labor migrants, despite strict immigration controls (Myong & Andersen 2015). Not surprisingly, over time, large numbers of migrants have worked in housecleaning, both formally and informally (e.g., Arnholz & Hansen 2009). Drawing on the Autonomy of Migration (AoM) approach, I argue that digital housecleaning platforms are part of an institutional response to such mobility. They serve the purpose of controlling and exploiting this workforce, while simultaneously formalizing some aspects (e.g., taxation) of private housecleaning, which makes this work visible to institutional authorities (cf. van Doorn 2020). The Danish state has attempted to provide its own response to informality earlier, first by subsidizing formal domestic services such as housecleaning (Kvist et al. 2009) and then by introducing tax deductions for household services (SKAT 2023)[18].

[18] Subsidizing domestic and care services was first introduced in 1994 as a broad measure, but by 2004 it was circumscribed and offered only to citizens aged above 65 (Kvist et al. 2009). Laws on tax exemptions for handyman tasks, gardening, cleaning etc. have been at play under various names and schemes since 1997 (Mailand & Larsen 2020). Nowadays, the maximum annual tax deduction for housecleaning per person is DKK 6,600, but only 26% of each transaction can be deducted (SKAT 2023). This means that a customer paying DKK 600 for a 3-4 hour cleaning gig, is

> This is our biggest competitor, more than 90% of all households who have cleaning, they do it through the black market, so the idea was to use a platform to kind of fix this issue. And when we began, we saw that there was both the need on the demand side, people wanted safe and affordable cleaning and […] people who wanted to get an easy job as a freelancer. (E1 platform manager)

Later in the interview, the manager complained about the low level of tax deductions for private housecleaning. He claimed that this does not further incentivize Danish households to spend on the platform's services and avoid contracting cleaners in the black market. With the AoM approach in mind, this statement illustrates how undocumented housecleaning performed by migrants has been formulated as a problem in public discourse (cf. Bacchi 2009), predating the attempts to control it. Moreover, when the manager was asked if their platform would assume an employer's role if Danish policymaking fosters such a development, he said:

> If, from the political side, there came a huge tax deduction on cleaning, that would shift the market and enable the people to have a decent profit, having the regular business model (of being an employer)… But for now, there is no sign for that, and I think our platform works, and it is beginning to work better and better, so the short answer is no. (E1 platform manager)

In this quote, the manager takes one step further, admitting that the platform business model of acting as intermediate will persist even if Denmark subsidizes housecleaning to an extent that a decent profit would be guaranteed both for the workers and the platform. In admitting this, their former quote of "fixing the black labor market" is exposed as a strategy of controlling and cashing in on migrant labor rather than a socially responsible endeavor to combine profitmaking with alleviating labor market inequalities.

eligible for a tax deduction of DKK 156 for each cleaning session, and can have such weekly cleaning sessions for more than 40 weeks until the maximum amount of tax exemption has been reached.

4.5 Summary and conclusion

In the previous section, I demonstrated how platform housecleaning is a precarious occupation, especially for migrants. Building on this, I argue that setting up, funding and systemically supporting digital labor platforms for housecleaning contributes towards the institutionalization of migrant precarity (Floros & Jørgensen 2020). By this I mean that housecleaning platforms formalize and normalize the precarity experienced by their migrant workforces: Platforms formalize the labor transaction, so that tax is paid, but this mainly adds stress, invisible labor, and extra costs for migrant housecleaners. Platforms offer formalized means of payment through their infrastructure, however price competition between cleaners drives fees towards a race to the bottom. Platforms brag about offering flexibility and autonomy, yet – as I show in the following chapters – workers are nudged, evaluated, threatened with deactivation, and algorithmically managed, so that their flexibility and autonomy conforms to each platform's business model. Platforms claim to combat undocumented labor and the black market. The extent to which they succeed in attracting workers already in the black market is debatable. In fact, as multiple sources indicate, they used recruitment tactics such as targeted Facebook advertising (E4; E5; Scheer 2019a) to lure workers from the other side of the Atlantic in order to create an abundant, superfluous workforce.

These factors, which normalize precarity at platform level, intersect with legal factors regulating migration, labor and welfare state provisions in Denmark, which further institutionalize migrants' precarity: The deadlock regarding presumption of employment does not allow a uniform approach to workers' rights. The impasse of collective agreements between the social partners does not allow the regulation of the platform labor market according to Danish principals. These two factors impede setting minimum wages, sick pay, holiday pay and other work-related benefits for platform housecleaners. Moreover, restrictions on migrant students' and workers' visas regarding how much, where and if they can work, confine their work choices and very often compel them to adopt hybrid approaches of working both formally through the platforms and informally. Finally, the reforms introduced to enhance the social safety net for atypical workers in 2018, encounter systemic setbacks when it comes to platform workers, therefore augmenting inequalities (Munkholm 2020: p. 199).

The concept of 'institutionalization of migrant precarity' suggests that this overall uncertainty, unregulated flexibility and selective (in)formality of platform work is a precursor for spreading precarious employment to the rest of the workforce. Although this assumption is beyond the limits of my research project, there are some fragmental indications that support further investigation into such a hypothesis. These indications include the overall abridgement of unemployment benefits, especially for young people and first-time recipients, and the recent reduction of access to student benefits for EU students (Floros & Jørgensen 2023), which could prospectively channel more people into platform work. Moreover, the fact that platform work did not take off in Denmark as expected, does not mean that it will never claim a larger share of the labor market in the future, if unemployment rises due to a financial crisis or as an outcome of policymaking by the political powers promoting the gig economy.

In the introduction to this chapter, I referred to the association of platform housecleaning with migrant labor during my expert interviews as an 'elephant in the room'. None of my interlocutors referred to migrants during interviews, until I brought it up explicitly through a specific question. The overall disinclination of the experts to delve deeper into the issue of migrant labor runs in parallel with the very low level of engagement of policy documents on the same topic (e.g., Danish Government 2019; Rådet for Deleøkonomi 2021; Regeringen 2021). This comes as no surprise, since Denmark has restrictive immigration policies, which are supported by parties across the political spectrum (Hagelund 2020) and xenophobia influences public discourse and debates on public policies (Wiggen 2023). Therefore, openly accepting the influx and predominance of low-waged, precariously employed migrants in a sector promoted (or at least tolerated) by the Danish state, requires explanations that most of my interlocutors did not wish to provide. As I demonstrated in this chapter, most of the migrant platform housecleaners are excluded from receiving any welfare support according to Danish legislation. This, as well as the temporariness of their presence in Denmark, is common knowledge among my interviewees. I argue that it is precisely this knowledge that blocks discussion. These workers will never acquire permanent permits nor full welfare rights through platform work. Therefore, they pose no threat to Danish social imaginaries of the welfare state or

integration (cf. Rytter 2019). As such, they are not only invisibilized as platform housecleaners but also invisibilized in the public discourse.

CHAPTER 5

A nexus of flexibility and precarity. Workers' experiences of platform housecleaning

5.1 Introduction

The workers I interviewed found out about the existence of housecleaning platforms in various ways. Some of them had a friend already working through a platform, some received targeted Facebook ads, others were aware of the platforms' presence even before migrating to Denmark, and others found out about platforms through their promotion by social media personalities and influencers. When browsing through platform websites as somebody interested in making money by cleaning houses, you find platform work portrayed in very promising terms. The key assumption promoted by platform companies is that users who sign up to provide work will enjoy flexibility when creating their work schedule. This is often condensed into the motto "be your own boss", which figures prominently on the websites of platforms offering housecleaning, such as Happyhelper or Handyhand. Pictures and videos of smiling workers attest to this idyllic representation of flexibility. A prospective worker reads about other workers' experiences:

> She does not have fixed meeting times, and she decides herself how many hours she wants to work per week. In this way, she is her own boss, and that is a big advantage, she explains: It is very flexible, and I myself am responsible for planning my time, how much I want to work and when. […] For me, such an electronic platform suits me very well, because you are your own boss and organize your own time. (Happyhelper.dk n/d)

Here, flexibility is presented as the workers' unilateral choice of when and how much they want to work; it resembles a promise of independence. However, this all-encompassing use of the term flexibility, which is derived from managerial discourse, fails to address who sets the conditions of flexibility and who is prepared to adjust to demands on being flexible (Kubisa & Mendonça 2018).

Unlike traditional employment settings, where the conditions of flexibility are decided between employer and employee, flexibility becomes more complex with platform work. Here, conditions of flexibility involve the worker, the client, and the platform, all of which influence the outcome to a bigger or lesser extent.

Instead of desired flexibility, platform work very often entails precarious working conditions. More precisely, flexibility and precarity seem to represent two sides of the same coin, as both coexist in paradoxical harmony. Flexibility and precarity can be evoked to depict the same phenomenon, depending on the angle or point of view that is analytically adopted. In my thesis, inspired by the argumentation of Anwar and Graham (2021), I investigate flexibility and precarity in tandem, stressing the tensions and overlaps between these two concepts in relation to platform housecleaning in Denmark. Anwar and Graham suggest that when assessing job quality in gig work, we should not differentiate freedom and flexibility from vulnerability and precarity (ibid.: p.238). In my analysis, I combine the dimension of freedom into the all-encompassing term flexibility and consider vulnerability as a specific trait of precarity. As presented in the theoretical framework of the introductory chapter, precarity denotes uncertain income and multiply insecure employment conditions, deriving both from the nature of employment relations but also from the vulnerability generated by workers' intersecting identities. Montgomery and Baglioni (2021) claim that location-based gig work should be considered as simply a subtype of precarious labor, due to its inherent instability and overall uncertainty. In the sections of this chapter, I briefly refer to previous literature on flexibility and precarity in platform work, before proceeding to analyze interviews of platform housecleaners and classifying their experiences and practices according to a set of indicators that disentangle the nexus between flexibility and precarity.

5.2 Flexibility and platform work

Previous literature on flexibility in platform work focuses mainly on cloudwork platforms (e.g., Lehdonvirta 2018; Wood et al. 2019; Gandini & Leonini 2019; Anwar & Graham 2021; Jarrahi et al. 2020). These papers highlight the tensions between workers' autonomy and control exerted by the platforms to argue that the narrative of flexibility advertised by platform companies should not be

accepted at face value. Regarding location-based platforms, on the one hand, Cano and her colleagues (2021) draw attention to how algorithmic management constrains flexibility, based on qualitative accounts of workers' experiences of food delivery platforms. On the other hand, several research papers build on administrative data provided by platforms such as e.g., Uber (Chen et al. 2017; Berger et al. 2019) or Door Dash (Katsnelson & Oberholzer-Gee 2021) to reach the conclusion that workers value highly and benefit from the flexibility afforded by these platforms.

In a recent article, Michael Dunn and his colleagues (2023) investigate in parallel both cloudwork and location-based platforms. They provide a framework that aspires to demarcate dimensions of flexibility for the whole spectrum of digital labor platforms. This framework discerns between task flexibility, which is workers' freedom to choose between the offered tasks without risking deactivation of their platform accounts, and spatial flexibility, which is workers' freedom to choose the location where they work. Their classificatory schema and conclusions suggest that low skilled, geographically tethered platform work tends to be precarious and inflexible per definition. Nevertheless, this framework does not account for e.g., the impact of local legislation and regulations or workers' intersecting identities on how flexibility is experienced. In their analysis, Anwar and Graham (2021) conceptualize flexibility as the workers' ability to define and control their place and pace of work, as well as their schedule and desired number of working hours. However, workers' agency is exercised within a social context marked by possibilities and constraints, and realizing flexibility depends on plentiful demand, which is seldom the case (Lehdonvirta 2018; Wood et al. 2019). At the same time, flexibility is also conditional on the dependence of each worker on platform work. Workers who depend strongly on platform work to earn a living tend to experience low levels of flexibility, due to their need to grasp every work opportunity, to gain more income (Lehdonvirta 2018). Based on my empirical material, in the following sections I present how flexibility unfolds in relation to platform housecleaning in Denmark, both as a promise for workers and in practice.

5.2.1 Flexibility as a promise

Labor platform marketing policies – both in Denmark and internationally – rely heavily on advertising workers' flexibility and, indeed, this trait of platform work is highly appreciated by the workers. The

promise that they would be able to arrange their own schedule and combine it with their other obligations – family, work or study-related – was key for most of my interviewees when pursuing work through platforms. Most of them provided the same answer when asked about their decision to work through a housecleaning platform: Easy access and flexibility.

> I was having a hard time finding a job that would fit with my schedule with school, a baby, and a husband who works overseas. […] I think digital labor platforms are great in that they allow the user to work during the times that is convenient for them. (C8 female migrant)
>
> It depends on what sort of life you have, but for me it worked fine, because I felt like I had more time and I could self-manage when I wanted to have time, if I wanted to work weekends or in the weeks and which hours. (C23 female migrant)
>
> I started to work through the platforms not really by choice but because I could not find another job when I came in Denmark, because they ask that you speak Danish which I completely understand. This was the easiest (way) for me to start and earn an income. […] In the beginning I thought it was nice, flexibility. (C6 female migrant)

I chose these three quotes here because they display how flexibility is desired not only by workers whose schedule is constrained by multiple obligations, but also by workers who feel restrained when having a fixed schedule or workers with few employment alternatives, who end up considering flexibility as advantageous.

Here, we witness an ongoing shift in traditional perceptions of workers towards flexibility. This shift is largely an outcome of top-down policies, which promoted flexibility over typical full-time employment relationships, which was the norm in the Global North after World War II. The move towards flexibility that has been occurring in Global North labor markets for more than four decades was triggered by neoliberal policies (Fullerton & Wallace 2007) and has been described and coined by critical scholars as flexploitation (Bourdieu 1998). Bourdieu claims that flexibilization of the labor market aims at a rational management of insecurity, which individualizes the workers and reduces their bargaining

power (ibid.). However, as the era of flexibility (cf. Kubisa & Mendonça 2018) is now consolidated in the labor market, research demonstrates that workers who pursue flexible employment and can influence their working schedules are largely pleased by the impact of flexibility on work-life balance and job satisfaction (e.g., Kelliher & Anderson 2008; Peters et al. 2009). Even early research documenting how employer-induced flexibility outsources risks to employees and has multiple detrimental effects on their lives, acknowledges that workers who have a say in determining their schedule display higher job satisfaction (Purcell et al. 1999). That said, the centrality of flexible scheduling in the marketing strategies of housecleaning platforms aimed at attracting workers seems to meet keen interest from cleaners wishing to work under such arrangements, despite the multiple insecurities deriving from such work (cf. Myhill et al. 2021; Rodríguez-Modroño et al. 2022).

In any case, invoking flexible scheduling masks the invisible features of housecleaning platform work, which I present in the following sections of this chapter. These include commuting between jobs, dealing with baffling self-service tax declarations, updating schedules every time there is a new booking, and being constantly available to answer messages from customers and the platform. Moreover, flexibility is in some cases curtailed by specific management features (deactivations, nudges etc.). To describe and analyze how workers evaluate and experience flexibility both in theory and practice, I break flexibility down into three indicators. According to these, flexibility is the workers' ability to unilaterally, a) decide on working hours that allow for the optimization of their non-work-related schedule and, b) self-determine which job offers they will accept or reject. Moreover, flexibility should c) not be hindered by external regulatory factors.

These indicators are meant to nuance the overall impression of flexibility inherent in platform work. This impression is widespread especially in platform housecleaning, where bookings are decided between customers and cleaners, rather than being algorithmically distributed, as is the case in other forms of location-based platform work, such as ridehailing or food delivery. Two important factors that affect the three indicators I use for my analysis are a) workers' dependence on the platform and

b) temporality of work[19]. When workers depend on platform work for the biggest part of their income, their flexibility is limited by their need to accept as many bookings as they can. Given the fact that customers have their own scheduling preferences on when to have their houses cleaned, this restricts workers' ability to negotiate optimal timeslots for themselves. By temporality of work, I refer to the period a cleaner expects to be working through the platform. When workers know that they will soon transition to another job position or another country, they tend not to (or cease to) be concerned about their platform reputation, which allows them to more easily decide to reject or cancel bookings that interfere with their life schedule.

> (Another cleaner asked me) if I could go to a booking, and it was 5:00 o'clock in the evening and she had to be there at 8:00 o'clock in the morning. She wouldn't go but still the customer was out for the day, so she wanted me to go instead of her, but also I didn't look at all like her and I thought that this was horrible so I didn't do it (chuckles). Because I risk my reputation also, for doing crazy things like that. (C2 female migrant)

This quote shows how the same booking assumes a completely different meaning for the two cleaners. The cleaner who has been cleaning the house repeatedly will soon leave the country and is not so dependent on the money she will lose. Therefore, she does not mind risking her account by doing something forbidden by the platform's terms and conditions (sending a replacement without notification) to flexibly adjust her schedule. The interviewed cleaner needs the money but will not jeopardize her platform reputation or the deactivation of her account for a single cleaning. Dependence on the platform and the temporality of work prompts these workers to behave in very different ways. Myhill and her colleagues refer to the temporality issue as 'short-termism', which most likely leads to workers' misbehavior (2021: p. 4129). This means that workers who know that

[19] Various scholars have created typologies of platform workers according to different combinations of factors, such as income dependency on platforms, motivation for work, full or part-time work, temporality of work, voluntary/involuntary work, success, primary or secondary employment etc. (e.g., Ravenelle 2019; Gray & Suri 2019; Dunn 2020). Nevertheless, the plethora of different sociolegal statuses of workers, sectors of platform work, local legislations and labor markets, platform business models etc., cause these typologies to be very generic, with limited analytical value when it comes to specific contexts. Therefore, in this thesis I am applying my own theoretically informed indicators, which are in accordance with the specificities of platform housecleaning in Denmark.

they will not be working for much longer through platforms are more prone to non-compliant behavior in relation to agreed terms and conditions.

As I noted at the beginning of this section, most of my interviewees embarked on platform housecleaning appreciating the flexible schedule opportunities it promised. As I present in the following section by analyzing the workers' interviews against the three indicators of (in)flexibility, the longer most of them remain attached to platform housecleaning, the less flexible they feel their working life is becoming.

5.2.2 Flexibility(?) in practice

Except for very few of my interviewees who unwillingly opted for platform housecleaning as their last resort to generate much-needed income, the rest stated that they were motivated by the advantage of flexible booking opportunities and the lack of a formal contractual relationship. The incentive of deciding one's own schedule without being accountable to anybody is very strong (cf. Lehdonvirta 2018). However, the modus operandi of on-demand housecleaning platforms creates tensions regarding such flexibility, which are hard to resolve. The platforms' promise of flexibility depends on plentiful demand from customers. At the same time, customers can only be successfully attracted to the platform if the range of housecleaners is sufficiently plentiful to cover all bookings. This contradiction is bound to impact on workers' flexibility since several housecleaners compete against each other within their preferred time zones for the available bookings.

5.2.2.1 Failing to achieve flexibility through platform work

Before moving to how workers' flexibility is compromised according to the predefined indicators, in this section I discuss the possibility of workers' overall failure to contract cleanings through the platforms. As I presented in the methodological chapter and the section on previous literature on housecleaning platforms, limited empirical data on platform housecleaners has been available to date. Platform housecleaners are hard to reach and hard to interview. Nevertheless, when researchers manage to conduct interviews with these workers, this usually means that interviewees have already somehow established themselves on a platform or have at least had some bookings. This

creates a lacuna, which to my knowledge has not yet been thoroughly addressed in Platform Labor Studies. This lacuna relates to which workers and for what reasons fail to contract work through a platform. When I sent out invitations to interviews, I also included that I was interested in stories of failure. My sample of "failed" respondents comprises three workers. Although all three had different explanations and different stories to tell, it is interesting how their reasoning relates to the pursuit of unhindered flexibility.

> I even replied to some cleaning jobs, but then there was someone who needed cleaning, but weekly… But one of the weeks I couldn't clean, so she picked someone else… And I just applied to some jobs but I either declined because I wanted to go home to Copenhagen or for just… various reasons and in the end just gave up. (C9 female non-ethnic Dane)

Here, it becomes obvious that achieving flexibility takes two to tango. The interviewed student wished to combine her need for supplementary income with a flexible working schedule that would accommodate her other obligations and preferences. She accepted a booking for a recurring cleaning but was honest enough to say beforehand that she would not be available for one of the dates and consequently the customer dropped the booking overall. The next couple of times she was offered a booking, it was inconvenient for her schedule, and she did not accept it. This student is a Danish citizen, entitled to student benefits, who obviously could afford to reject bookings that were inconvenient to her. Regardless of that, if she strongly wished or needed to establish herself on the platform, she would have to back down from her original plan of working-life flexibility.

A second housecleaner who never contracted a booking was a female migrant student who had worked both for an official cleaning company and as an informal housecleaner before joining the platform. When she moved between two Danish cities, she had to drop her informal clients and was eager to find new ones. She joined a housecleaning platform, set a high hourly fee because of her experience and initially did not receive any offers. While she was waiting and also looking for another job, the platform contacted her and nudged her to accept predefined bookings at a lower fee. These automated nudges demonstrate how the freedom and flexibility promised by the platform is

outweighed by the platform's strategy to sustain activity among its on-demand workforce by nudging inactive platform housecleaners to accept cheaper bookings at inconvenient times. At the same time, they show how platforms' algorithmic management is inscribed with (in)flexible views on payment and scheduling (cf. Pelizza & Van Rossem 2023).

> It's also nice to have flexibility, in the way of lectures in the morning and then lectures in the evening, so the rest of the day you can fill it up with work… When you have the chance to move your work around in your working week, according to how many exams you have at the moment, according to where your lectures are, so it is nice to have flexible time, but it is also nice to have the security that you will have several guaranteed hours of work every month, that you will have the income. (C15 female migrant)

During the interview, the cleaner highlighted many times the importance of flexibility, which was something she had already experienced during her spell as an informal cleaner. However, she was conscious that unilaterally deciding her schedule and hourly fee would be hard through platform housecleaning and that to achieve this she would have to reject bookings and risk her income source. Unhindered flexibility was, for her, a luxury she could not afford. When she got the opportunity to choose between steady employment under a fixed part-time contract and flexible freelancing, she opted for the first solution. The cleaner described this as finding what she termed "a normal job, non-cleaning job" (C15 female migrant).

5.2.2.2 Flexibility to decide your own schedule

My first indicator for assessing whether platform housecleaners enjoy their promised flexibility is their ability to decide their working schedules for themselves, so that they can adjust working to suit their other obligations, such as family or studies. The interfaces or apps of all the platforms I investigated in this study offer the opportunity to cleaners to upload their available hours in a weekly or yearly calendar. This calendar is visible to customers, to minimize the occurrence of miscommunication and unsuccessful bookings. In some platforms, the profiles of cleaners who have their calendar booked or blocked do not show up when a customer performs a search for this specific date or timeslot. On paper, this should allow customers to easily book a cleaner, given that cleaners

have already set an hourly fee and displayed their availability in their calendar, therefore the only remaining details to be negotiated are the duration and specificities of each cleaning. Nevertheless, in practice, multiple factors interfere with this procedure and sometimes end up hindering workers' endeavors to set up their desired flexible schedule.

A common cause of problems is that many cleaners do not fill in or update their availability in their online calendars. There are different reasons why this happens. A common reason mentioned by many cleaners either in the interviews or in the Facebook group is that these calendars tend to malfunction. On two of the platforms, the workers did not have the choice to register recurrent bookings with regular clients, which were arranged every other week for the same timeslot. This means that they either had to block this timeslot every week or remove the booking from the calendar to retain the availability for this timeslot in odd weeks. Indeed, many platform housecleaners prefer to use their Outlook or Google calendars to manage their schedules and communicate availability with their clients by phone or SMS to minimize such problems and bugs. Consequently, their platform calendars remain misinformed, and they either receive bookings that they cannot accept, or they are technically excluded from working during one of their available timeslots. This produces a time-consuming procedure of negotiating with unsatisfied customers or having to reject bookings, which is something that causes trouble with platforms' customer service, as I analyze in the next section.

Another source of trouble is that calendars do not consider the time needed for housecleaners to commute between gigs. Customers can book cleaners back-to-back on the platform calendar; however, it is impossible for cleaners to finish a cleaning and directly begin working at the next location, especially when it is more than half an hour's bike ride to get there, which is often the case. Overall, calendar problems obstruct flexibility in bookings. An interviewed cleaner referred to the problems she faced when leaving on a 52-day long journey:

> I did this (manually marking whole days as blocked) for 52 times, […] some customers have the time with me, and I could not refuse them because I still had more cleanings before I traveled. So, I could not delete them in my platform because if you don't have

> more cleanings with them, they just disappear you know. One time I refused just one day with one guy and deleted all the cleanings that I had with him, but he found me again. (C13 female migrant)

This quote displays how technical issues lead to misunderstandings and loss of customers. Given that sufficient bookings are hard to get for most cleaners, such problems urge them to accept bookings which are not convenient for them. Another cleaner faced similar issues:

> Some time ago, when I was trying to set my class hours in the calendar, then it was becoming the whole day. Maybe it is OK now but that time I had this problem. That's why I couldn't do anything, because when I would set Monday 10 to 12 it was becoming the whole day. It was a problem. (C10 female migrant)

Here we see how flexibility is not just hindered by humans' choices but also by the technical configuration of the platform. The affordances of the online calendars partake in defining and ordering the scheduling of cleaners, who are, in turn, forced to adjust accordingly and work on days and timeslots beyond their preference to secure the income they need.

A post by the platform's management in the Facebook group in 2019 mentioned that the main reason customers complained or rated the app negatively was that either cleaners did not respond at all to bookings or that they accepted them and directly contacted the customer to change the date. The management's take was that cleaners were not updating their calendars according to their everyday life schedules. To tackle the issue, the platform's management introduced a monthly competition, where cinema tickets were awarded to one of the cleaners who had updated their calendars at least once every two weeks during the last month. Indeed, many cleaners unable to establish themselves preferred to leave their calendars open, accept all bookings and then try to convince customers to book another timeslot. However, such negotiations are not always favorable for the platform housecleaners' scheduling. Here again, dependency on platform income is crucial (cf. Dunn 2020). Workers in urgent need of income will stress themselves beyond limits or adjust their life schedules to accommodate customers' needs (e.g., C10; C1; C6). These examples do not suggest that all workers fail to combine platform housecleaning with an optimization of their non-work-related schedules.

Several of my interviewees, especially cleaners who only wanted to book very few cleanings to supplement their income, reported that they were fully satisfied with the flexibility to unilaterally decide when to work (e.g., C12; C20; C21). When only looking for one or two cleanings per week, achieving unhindered flexibility becomes much easier. Satisfaction with flexibility for workers who use platforms less frequently to supplement their income seems to be a more generalizable finding. This is not only the case in Denmark but also in Spain, where research on domestic work platforms coincides with my finding (Rodríguez-Modroño et al. 2022).

Before closing this section, I will refer to one more incident narrated in the Facebook group that exemplifies how contingent flexibility is in these platforms. In the summer of 2019, a foreign student started working through the platform during the holiday period. She was totally pleased to book four weekly recurring cleanings, in timeslots that fitted her schedule. However, her educational institution only announced the semester schedule a week before its start. Therefore, she did not manage to negotiate new timeslots with her permanent customers and lost all four bookings within a week. Thus, the cleaner transitioned overnight from having a fulfilling, flexible experience and perception of platform work to a complete lack of income. Although this incident is irrelevant to management or the algorithmic configuration of the platform, it stresses customers' (in)flexibility, when they know that a plentiful workforce is within reach via a few clicks and swipes on their phones. The insecurity deriving from this superfluity of workers (cf. van Doorn 2017) is one more argument as to why flexibility should be considered in tandem with precarity (Anwar & Graham 2021).

5.2.2.3 Flexibility to accept and reject bookings

My second indicator of unhindered flexibility is platform housecleaners' ability to self-determine which offers to accept or reject. Literature on location-based platform work has investigated mainly workers' autonomy and freedom of choice in the case of ridehailing and food delivery platforms. Previous research has demonstrated how certain platforms penalize workers who do not accept the tasks allocated by the app (e.g., Möhlmann & Zalmanson 2017; Veen et al. 2020; Griesbach et al. 2019) and how other platforms apply more lenient forms of algorithmic management (e.g., Kusk & Bossen 2022). Regardless of the harshness of the penalty, which ranges from deletion or temporary

deactivation to deprioritization of profiles, most food-delivery and ridehailing platforms exert some sort of soft or direct control over workers' autonomy to choose between tasks.

Until the time of writing of this thesis, research papers on domestic work and housecleaning platforms drawing on empirical data have not, to my knowledge, thoroughly engaged with platform companies' tactics to influence the acceptance or rejection of bookings. Existing literature has identified the information made available to cleaners before they decide on a booking (Ticona et al. 2018; Gerold et al. 2022) and the importance of acceptance rates for the prioritization of profiles (Ticona & Mateescu 2018; Ticona et al. 2018). According to what I described above as the promise of flexibility, housecleaning platforms advertise the cleaners' autonomy to decide when, how long and for how much they will work. Full autonomy to accept or reject a specific booking is only possible in one of the three platforms I investigated, namely the one which only charges a membership fee. When I signed up as a cleaner on this platform, I received 109 emails from the platform nudging me to contact over 300 clients who matched my criteria. Although I never responded to these emails, I kept receiving them for two and a half months. Nevertheless, my profile was not deactivated. This platform company's lack of direct sanctioning on cleaners who disregard or reject bookings is also confirmed by interviewees who used it (e.g., C20; C21). Nevertheless, a very serious implication is that workers' profiles are automatically deprioritized in online searches when they are not responding to customers' messages. Here we witness again how specific scripts are embedded in the algorithm that prioritizes profiles.

The other two platforms under investigation, which operate on the commission-based model, try more actively to persuade their workforces not to reject bookings. This became evident from the discussions in the Facebook group and many cleaners mentioned it during the interviews.

> […] when I rejected a booking, then the customer service lashed out at me, as if they were my boss. […] (it was) that lady who was… I think maybe she got mixed up that I work for her [...]. (When I complained in the Facebook group) one of the other customer service agents eventually spilled the beans, saying that it reflects poorly on (the company) if you reject a booking. We are supposed to have, like, free will and there is an

> accept and a reject button, and I asked that lady, […] "so are we allowed to use this button or not?". And she didn't reply to me, and eventually I said I do not appreciate these friendly reminders as she called it, so I was fuming, and then I made a post, and then this other guy said it reflects poorly on (the platform) if the cleaner rejects a client. (C1 female migrant)

This quote is from a cleaner who had only rejected bookings twice during a whole year that she was active on the platform. The reason for rejecting this booking was that the customer had lied about the true size of his house and had booked the cleaner for the minimum amount of 2.5 hours. As many interviewees pointed out, these kinds of bookings where customers report false size and request minimum hours, usually end up in arguments, and intensive work due to the underlying threat of a bad rating. Rejecting or cancelling such bookings, however, can sometimes prove risky for a cleaner, since the platform does not limit itself to emails.

> I have been canceling a booking, and also with a regular customer whom I had more than a year for example, 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 female migrant)[20]

Deactivation of profiles on this platform follows the pattern presented in this quote. Most interviewees had experienced a temporary deactivation of their profile due to a single or maximum two rejections or cancellations. This automated deactivation is something that the workers can fix themselves in their profiles and reactivate themselves, if they are aware of how this works. One of the most typical and meticulous workers I interviewed, who always kept her schedule updated and never used tricks to attract more bookings, told me how her account got automatically deactivated for multiple reasons. It happened every time she would reschedule a booking in accordance with the customer, between cancelling the previous agreement and typing into the interface the new timeslot.

[20] A more compressed version of this quote has already been used in Floros & Jørgensen (2023) to support in brief how flexibility and insecurity coexist in platform work.

The system considered this a cancellation and deactivated her profile. Likewise, once while updating her schedule, she received an offer that she couldn't accommodate and rejected it, which caused automatic deactivation of her profile. The most outrageous case was when she had back-to-back bookings and needed to commute. She got deactivated while already at the customer's house and trying to reschedule the ongoing booking to start half an hour later. Although this seems to be a simple platform glitch, several of my interviewees did not know that they could reactivate their profiles themselves and had to call customer support to fix this. Consequently, the supporters asked the workers for the reasons for rejection or cancellation, as we saw in the above quote, and advised them against rejecting or cancelling. These examples demonstrate how there is a specific deactivation script in the platform's algorithmic management. According to the interviewed customer support employee (E4) an automated function informs customer support if a cleaner has received three complaints or deactivations during a monthly period. After that, support had to "consider whether or not we should continue the partnership", and as he went on to say, "some of them did not live up to our expectations… so yeah… some got kicked out if they… yeah… didn't live up to the expectations" (E4).

The stress experienced by workers in relation to turning down offers, because of the fear of permanent account deletion, varies accordingly to their dependence on the income from the platform and their level of confidence when confronting customer service. One of the most successful profiles on the platform, who runs a cleaning company with employees, complained in the Facebook group because she received twenty-three SMSs pressing her to reconsider a cancellation, which also in her case was a cancellation agreed with the client in order to rebook the next day. These twenty-three SMSs were sent between 22.00 when she cancelled and 06.00 in the morning of the next day, which means that they were obviously automated messages. Other cleaners in the group mentioned receiving over twenty messages as well, every time they rejected a booking.

Aggressive messaging was also reported in the second commission-based platform I investigated.

> This guy just sent text messages to my phone, saying that I had bookings waiting […] and it was like bad behavior if I didn't answer, so they would give you a 24 hour window to

> respond and if you didn't respond to the bookings, then I would get a message from this guy at (platform's name) saying, "hi (cleaner's name) we need you to check out your (platform's name) account because people are trying to book you and you are not answering", and I feel like these were not standardized messages. They were, like, written at the time, so I felt that this was very pressuring and a bit too much actually. So that was, like, not faceless contact with the people at (platform's name). (C22 female Dane)

Personalized pressure goes beyond automated messaging, nudges and other forms of algorithmic management reported in location-based platform work internationally and presented above in the Danish case. What is novel in this case is the combination of algorithmic forms of control with personal management premised on aggressive and intimidating communication. A cleaner I interviewed (C19) reported using filters in her email account to avoid spamming from the platform. When customer support realized that she did not comply with the content of the automated messages, personal calls and targeted text messages were employed. The previous quote comes from a young female Danish cleaner who was very popular on the platform, had excellent ratings and multiple booking requests. Officially, this person is self-employed, and according to platform companies' marketing she enjoys flexibility and is her own boss. One might expect successful housecleaners to enjoy more appreciation from customer support, given the amount of money they generate for the platform. My fieldwork indicates that the more popular a cleaner is on the platform, the more attention they attract from management.

In a recently published book chapter, Marisol Keller (2022) shares her experience from working for an on-demand housecleaning platform in Switzerland, saying that she felt she needed to be available around the clock. She concludes that "the platform performs constant but subtle control through repeated phone calls, app requests, and surveillance mechanisms that monitor not only performance at work but also the speed of responses to gig offers and the numbers of accepted and declined gigs" (Keller 2022: p.145). This pattern of control documented in Switzerland coincides with my findings for Denmark. Does this control signify that workers cannot decide for themselves which bookings to

accept or reject? My fieldwork suggests that the answer to that question is contingent upon the level of self-confidence of workers, their dependency on platform income and their communication skills. Cleaners are usually able to control their schedules and preferences on most occasions, but even when they do, this flexibility comes at a price due to the stress induced by the platforms' control mechanisms.

5.2.2.4 External factors hindering flexibility

My third indicator assessing flexibility investigates how factors external to platform workers' management might constrain workers' flexibility. In Denmark, these factors include labor market and tax regulations regulating the hours and income that a platform housecleaner can work. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, restrictions on migrant students' visas dictate how much, and when they can work, and confine their work choices, very often compelling them to adopt hybrid approaches of working both formally through the platforms and informally through the black market.

> I have a work limit in my visa. It's a problem because most of the time I have to work in the weekdays but right now in the whole weekdays I have classes, so I have to choose only a few clients that I will work with and with the others I have not been working. (C10 female migrant)

Here, a migrant student with a large clientele is forced to drop some of her clients because of a combination of how much she is allowed to work and how her study schedule interferes with that. During summer, this worker has no limit on working hours, but when semester begins, she has to limit herself to 20 hours per week. My point here is that flexibility does not simply refer to when, but also to how much one can work.

An equally distressing external factor is the annual income level of DKK 50,000, above which self-employed workers – such as platform housecleaners – must set up their own sole-proprietorship company and acquire a Danish CVR (private company) number. Workers who earn above this amount are subject to retrospective payment of VAT and are obliged to make much more detailed and

demanding tax declarations. A lot of the cleaners I interviewed were very concerned as to how they could evade this tax limit. One of them said:

> You have to register as a CVR so I made some calculations, also on how much I can work and then literally limited myself, I cut it off. And if I see that I have… because there were some cancellations in the spring and the summer, so I was thinking of opening up my (platform) calendar a bit more in December because at that time people want more cleaning and if I have financial room for earnings so …. (I will) work myself into shreds. (C1 female migrant)

The above quote could come from many of my interviewees. Limiting the documented work to a few Danish kroner below the taxable level is one of the most common practices of platform housecleaners. However, as several clients refuse to agree to undocumented work, this means that these cleaners must reject law-abiding clients, and this hinders the optimization of their schedules. In the quote above, the cleaner concludes that her need for income will lead her to open up her calendar to contract more documented work at the end of the year. Her fear of "working herself to shreds" is literal, since she is facing health issues which also restrict her ability to work. If she was classified as an employee despite being self-employed, she would at least be entitled to sick leave, which would allow her to more safely risk contracting more work, since in case of health-related complications she would be able to claim benefits.

The entanglement of tax regulations and visa requirements with platform housecleaning in Denmark affects the workers' ability to optimize their working schedules. Cleaners who combine documented platform work with either waged employment, undocumented housecleaning or studies need to establish a strict balance in their schedule to avoid bureaucratic complications. This limits their flexibility as to what type of cleaning sessions they can book (recurring or one-off cleanings) to avoid exceeding the DKK 50,000 threshold and as to when they can book them, to avoid working over the weekly limit permitted by their student visa. Upper and lower limits of how much a student can work also apply when the student receives student benefits (SU). Failing to adjust one's flexible working arrangements to this framework can have dire financial consequences.

> The SKAT (Danish Tax Authority) people they sent me a letter that I need to pay I think 80,000 crowns. And I am still paying so half of it has not yet been paid. […] It is because I am still a student, so aside from my evening job, which is the job that I still have right now, I do also the (platform company name) and I also got the SU […] so this was too much. (C20 female migrant)

This cleaner was successful on the platform and was accepting all the bookings she could handle in her schedule, but at the same time she failed to realize that set limits apply to how much she could work. Other cleaners I interviewed were also unaware of such limits, especially the DKK 50,000 limit, and were therefore obliged to unwillingly acquire a CVR number and start declaring and paying VAT. One reason for this is that when they started working through the platform, they only saw this as a temporary engagement and never took a more meticulous approach to what that entails, until it was too late. A union representative I interviewed (E5), who had been in contact with several platform housecleaners, explained to me how most of these people had no knowledge of being self-employed. Since they were receiving their payment slips from the platform, many had the impression that the platform was handling tax issues, even though the contrary is explicitly stated in all platforms' websites and agreements on terms and conditions.

As I have demonstrated in the above section, although a contingent level of flexibility is possible for platform housecleaners, multiple factors – human related or inscribed in technologies – hinder unilateral decision making. Moreover, flexible working arrangements come at the cost of accepting a business model, which outsources risks to the workers. These risks, the various uncertainties deriving from platform housecleaning, and the algorithmic configuration of platforms determine how flexibility coexists with precarity and precarious conditions of work in this sector (cf. Anwar & Graham 2021).

5.3 Precarity and platform work

The theoretical lens of precarity has been widely applied in research on platform labor. (e.g., Cano et al. 2021; Montgomery & Baglioni 2021; Wood & Lehdonvirta 2021; Campbell 2022; van Doorn 2023). As I elaborated in the introductory chapter of this thesis, precarity is a theoretical framework denoting the worsening of employment conditions in the global North, a "watchword" (Bove et al.

2017: p.4) indicating uncertainty and exploitation. At the same time, it is a concept that highlights the individual and collective agency of workers and its emancipatory potential. Montgomery and Baglioni (2021) reach the conclusion that the gig economy should be approached as just a subtype of precarious work. However, rather than theoretically assuming that platform housecleaning in Denmark constitutes precarious work per definition, it is crucial to heed how workers themselves experience and perceive this kind of work. After all, the platforms' false promise of flexibility analyzed above does not automatically establish that platform housecleaning is a precarious undertaking for the totality of the workforce. Here it is also worth noting that the employment alternatives that most of these workers are presented with are low-skilled, low-paid, zero-hour contract jobs in the hotel and restaurant industry and equally low-paid jobs in cleaning companies, as mentioned by most of my interviewees (e.g., C1; C2; C9; C10; C13).

Defining and delimiting what constitutes precarious labor is an ongoing discussion. Over the previous decade, several scholars attempted to quantify precarious work using predefined indicators of subjective and objective insecurity within specific labor markets (e.g., Olsthoorn 2014; Pyöriä & Ojala 2016). Notwithstanding, feelings of insecurity are difficult to objectify in a measurable way and quantified markers fail to nuance the multiplicity of insecurities experienced by workers with intersecting identities. Simply classifying platform housecleaning as precarious just because stable work is obviously not guaranteed is not sufficient on its own. In this section, I analyze the interviews held with platform housecleaners in Denmark against four indicators of precarity, namely: a) job insecurity, b) income insecurity, c) insecurity experienced in the workplace relating to gender or race and d) exclusion from welfare provisions. These indicators assist me in providing a more detailed account of the variations of precarity experienced by housecleaners and do not serve as a model for quantitatively measuring the accumulation of precarity. As with flexibility, workers' dependence on the platform and temporality of work impact heavily on how workers experience precarity. My analysis addresses the huge variance between part-time cleaners who supplement their income in a precarious fashion and hyper-precarious (cf. Lewis et al. 2015) migrant subcontractors of platform accounts who are potentially subject to deportation if their strategy is exposed (cf. Mendonça et al. 2023).

5.3.1 Job insecurity

When signing up on platforms, workers are not guaranteed that they will contract gigs. Contracting a gig is dependent on plentiful customer demand (Wood et al. 2019), and on workers' ability – or platform reputation – to convince customers that they are adequately skilled to fulfill the task at a desired price (Fetterolf 2022). Obviously, platform housecleaning does not come with a guaranteed amount of work or a predefined job schedule. Given the business model of on-demand labor platforms, job insecurity is one of their inherent features, and this is also the case for housecleaning platforms. However, since most of my interviewees had already been active on platforms, the indicator of job insecurity relates to their subjective understanding and experiences of gig work and whether or why they fear that their gigs could be compromised.

The most common factor creating job insecurity among housecleaners is customer satisfaction. Especially cleaners who rely on this work as a primary source of income strive hard to secure some clients who want recurring cleanings. For those cleaners, satisfying customers serves a double goal. On the one hand, they can set up a stable clientele, which ensures a more stable income. On the other hand, satisfied and stable customers are more likely to provide good ratings, which can further assist cleaners with getting more bookings. Establishing oneself on the platform is an uncertain procedure.

> At the beginning, for the first month you feel precarious because maybe you're standing in the platform a lot of time, trying to take a bidding and not make enough, it's a matter of luck at the beginning to be honest. […] So, you are precarious at the beginning but after you have a good amount of customers, and you fill up your calendar and your schedule and you're good, I think you can define yourself as flexible or a freelancer. (C5 female migrant)

In this quote, a very successful cleaner presents her own understanding of the nexus between flexibility and precarity. According to her, being precarious means being uncertain of whether she will achieve her goal of having sufficient customers to sustain herself through housecleaning. When platform housecleaners fill their schedules with the desired number of bookings, they tend to

experience less job insecurity. They feel confident that their good ratings and work experience will secure them more customers from the platform's pool, should they need them. Another cleaner I interviewed shared the same opinion. She said that the situation was very uncertain at the beginning, when she only had very few bookings and customers were not rating her, despite her continuous pleas. Nevertheless, once she managed to get fifteen stable customers, she started feeling rather secure.

> It is very improbable that all customers will cancel you from one day to another. In that way it is more sure than another kind of job, where they can fire you and then you don't have anything. Here one might (fire you) – you can make a mistake for example – but this doesn't really happen (chuckles). (C2 female migrant)

My next question was about whether customers might cancel their bookings abruptly. She immediately got more serious and replied that "actually, a good customer that I had who was every week, five hours every time, he had a very big house and yeah they moved, so I lost one customer, very important" (C2 female migrant). Despite being a single customer, he accounted for more than ten percent of her monthly income. This shows how successful housecleaners are also exposed to sudden income losses. However, most of them eventually replace these bookings due to having good ratings.

Ratings are closely related to job insecurity, as most interviewees pointed out. Wood and Lehdonvirta (2021) coin the term 'algorithmic insecurity' to describe how successful workers on remote online platforms experience job and income stability because of their good ratings, yet at the same time report persistent uncertainty and stress over their platform reputation. As ratings in platform housecleaning have less complex algorithmic implications, I am not using their concept as a single indicator of precarity. However, platform reputation is a major source of job insecurity among my interviewees.

> It will probably happen again that I have one of those really sucky client experiences, and probably one of them at some point is going to give me a really bad review, but yeah… I don't know what (platform name) opinion is, but if it is like, they have the right

> to leave that review or if you can like modify and say that this is very unfair, because the experience went like this, it is not true… […] it is something that people stress about, trying to figure out the system and the algorithm. (C16 female Dane)

This cleaner has never received a bad review, nevertheless, she works under the constant stress that this might happen and jeopardize her platform reputation and prospects on the platform. Although more cleaners referred to ratings as a "source of worry" (C1), a "pressure" (C10) or a "threat" (C22), I chose this quote as it comes from a Dane, which due to her positionality has fewer reasons than migrant cleaners to feel precarious. The job insecurity generated by the menace of bad ratings and the contingency of gigs brings about stress and that pressures some workers into assuming submissive behaviors.

> You are saying yes to a lot of things because you don't want to lose the client. […] they have asked me for example to go buy something in the supermarket, which is not something we do, but you say yes because you can do it of course, but you also don't want to miss a job, or cleaning place. Or for example if they were saying just two days ago that they were going for a vacation and that they would not need you, it is also a kind of, you get angry and you feel that you're not respected, but you don't say so much because you don't want to lose them. (C23 female migrant)

Such demeaning behaviors from customers who treat housecleaners as though they were servants are rooted in traditional devaluation of reproductive labor, which is highly feminized and racialized (e.g., Duffy 2007). This means that platform housecleaners in Denmark usually face a double devaluation of their work, both because cleaning is portrayed as "help" rather than labor (cf. Gruszka et al. 2022), and because the workers are predominantly female migrants. In the interviews there are many accusations made against disrespectful clients (e.g., C4; C6; C10; C12; C18; C19), some of whom act extremely offensively. A female migrant cleaner (C1) narrated how she went twice to a recurring booking, where the rich owner of a villa had intentionally urinated on the bathroom floor both times, just before the cleaning. The way each cleaner reacted to these offensive behaviors was determined by their level of dependence on the platform and how early in their platform trajectory they had to

deal with such issues. Those who are more dependent, who had recently started working and were afraid of losing their reputation largely endured such behavior. Dependent workers with longer experience have also been reluctant to openly confront customers:

> I actually lied to them (a recurring booking by an offensive client) that I am leaving the city, and I cancelled their offer. And then they started calling me and then they saw me in front of my house, and they complained to the platform that I told them that I was leaving but I am still in the city. Then I told the platform that […] I am also worried about prestige and customer satisfaction, because if I say I am not happy to work here they will be angry, so I had to lie. (C10 female migrant)

Here, customer support took the side of the cleaner, telling her that she had every right to choose her clients. This quote, however, reveals the uncertainty cleaners experience when they need to cancel such a booking, due to the repercussions this might have on their overall presence on the platform.

5.3.2 Income insecurity

As there is no fixed wage for platform work, the cleaners' income is the sum of the money they make from the various gigs – recurring or not – that they have managed to book. In that sense, income insecurity partly overlaps with job insecurity; if customers drop bookings, that also signifies a loss of income. Beyond this overlapping of indicators, in this section I engage with income insecurity stemming from reasons other than securing customers. Such reasons include pricing one's services, sudden changes in the fees and terms and conditions on platforms, last-minute cancellations and workers' ignorance of their obligations and rights.

When setting up their profiles, almost all interviewed housecleaners set their hourly fee according to average prices of newcomers to the platform, rather than setting a fee corresponding to their subjective evaluation of their work, experience or needs. This is dictated by the competitive nature of platform housecleaning and the fact that a housecleaner's experience must be documented by each

platform's metrics, such as ratings, reviews, response rates or performed cleanings[21]. Most cleaners' strategies rely on first securing some customers and then slowly raising their fees for the new customers who, in turn, will be attracted by the cleaners' ratings. A few cleaners though, especially migrant newcomers from countries where waged labor is much cheaper, stick to their very low original prices. To them, having low income relieves their job insecurity:

> I picked like the low range price and hoped that I would have something to get started. And I am actually one of those who still keeps the low price, so I am still at 120 per hour […] I guess this was the price I promised for the families and then I just kept it. (C19 female migrant)

Competition between cleaners, public agencies' decisions to remove minimum fees from popular housecleaning platforms (Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020a; Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020b) and the option offered by a specific platform to choose a cleaner for the customers at a desired – usually low – price are all factors contributing to a race to the bottom. Nevertheless, during my fieldwork, the COVID-19 crisis and the restriction of holiday working visas from Latin America reduced the platform labor force, while the demand remained stable. This created an opportune situation for raising hourly fees.

> (at the beginning) they were just trying to make the wages lower and lower and there were so many that the system was completely saturated […] and I forgot to mention that, when (platform name) send a message encouraging the cleaners to raise their hourly rate, because there were not many cleaners around, because there was COVID and in Denmark there were not many immigrants, that wanted to work for this kind of service at the moment… So, they said you're only a few, so you can charge as much as you can and that is OK because the demand is high, and the offer is low. But the minute

[21] Although beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth mentioning how critical literature on classification and standards challenges the alleged objectivity of classification schemes and metrics and highlights the invisible power they exert over our understanding of social realities (e.g., Bowker & Star 2000).

> the table turns I can assure you that they will suggest you to lower the wages. (C14 male migrant)

The platform, of course, was concerned with generating more income rather than with workers' finances. Since fewer bookings were contracted, the platform aimed at cashing in on higher commissions due to raised fees. Nevertheless, most cleaners I interviewed during this period were reluctant to raise their fees because they were afraid that their customers would react and replace them. Instead of raising the fees, a lot of the cleaners opt to agree with their customers on taking their employment relationship off the platform. This way, the customer saves 10 to 30% in commission and can afford to give a small raise to the cleaner, who also saves money via tax evasion. In 2020, one of the platforms I investigated announced that besides commissions from customers, they would also deduct a set hourly fee from each housecleaner/gig. This provoked a long and heated debate in the Facebook group, where platform management suggested that cleaners raise their fees to make up for this loss. In this discussion, most cleaners expressed their insecurity in doing this, so ended up earning less at very short notice. Here again, workers dependent on platform income for making a living were the least likely to take the initiative to raise their fee.

> Yes, I did go up, one month I started with 110, then when I had a review that she is working good, I raised to 130 and then I started to see the Facebook groups, they started offering in the Facebook 180 or 150, so when I saw that someone was offering 150 I raised my rate at 150 and he said OK and I work. Another one would say 140, so I was going down to 140 and said yes, I will work. When I need work, then I will change frequently. It depends on what they're offering, I say OK yes, I will do it at this (price). (C10 female migrant)

This cleaner prefers fluctuation in hourly fees, which reinforces her income uncertainty, but at the same time makes her feel more secure that she will keep getting the jobs she needs.

One more typical reason augmenting income insecurity is that customers can cancel their bookings until the last minute without being legally accountable for compensating the worker. "If you get a cancellation due to Corona there is no coverage whatsoever, it is a bit insecure" (C7), as a female

migrant cleaner notes. The Danish Consumers Contract Act states that payment for any product or service ordered online can be cancelled if the product or service has not been delivered or used, unless otherwise stated in the terms and conditions. Only one out of three platforms I investigated had a condition in its agreement stating that customers can cancel whenever they want but are liable to pay a cancellation fee if they fail to cancel 12 to 36 hours before the booking. Of course, the fee is less than the money a cleaner would get if the cleaning took place. Moreover, it is stated in the terms and conditions that a cleaner can give up their claim to a cancellation fee if they reschedule the cancelled booking. This augments the feeling of insecurity for cleaners. Not only do they lose their income whenever a client cancels, since the cleaners have booked their calendar and cannot find another client at such short notice, but they are nudged by the platform to give up their compensation in case of rescheduling. On the other two platforms, customers can cancel until the cleaner starts the actual cleaning. In the Facebook group, there are several stories of cleaners complaining about commuting to a customer's house only to receive a notice of cancellation five minutes before reaching the house or knocking on the door only to find out that nobody is waiting for them.

Finally, another indirect cause of income insecurity involves the baffling tax declarations a worker must submit to the tax authorities. During the interviews, most workers referred to this topic as a time-consuming and stressful procedure, whereby they are constantly afraid that they will mess something up and end up paying a fine or extra tax. One female migrant cleaner (C2) said she puts aside money every month because she is sure she will be asked to pay a lot in tax when her declaration gets cleared. Also, several workers (e.g., C3; C7; C17; C19) narrated how they make long calls to the Tax Authority to get thorough instructions that will help them avoid paying fines. As I presented in the above section on flexibility, such fines can be huge when cleaners fail to follow the small print in tax instructions, terms and conditions agreements and other public agency documents. Especially for migrant cleaners who cannot speak Danish and only have basic knowledge of English, these issues become very hard to navigate due to the inexistence of translated directions in other languages (cf. Bor 2021; Orth 2023).

5.3.3 Insecurity relating to intersecting identities

Beyond job insecurity and income insecurity, which are commonly used indicators for a measurable assessment of precarious employment relations, platform housecleaners are also subjected to experiences of insecurity relating to their various and intersecting identities, such as gender, age, ethnicity or sociolegal status (cf. Marchetti 2022). Highly feminized sectors, such as domestic work, expose female workers to harassment and abuse (e.g., Baines 2006; da Conceiçao Figueiredo et al. 2018). Moreover, being a migrant worker and having a compromised sociolegal status add to the probability of all types of gender-related violence occurring in domestic workplaces (Cruz & Klinger 2011; da Conceiçao Figueiredo et al. 2018). Platform housecleaning in Denmark is no exception to this reality. Both in the interviews I conducted and in my observations in the Facebook group, discussion on sexual harassment was omnipresent.

Such harassment was explicit, as in the case already presented in the previous chapter with the customer who wanted his back washed (C19) or a widely discussed case in the Facebook group of a customer who booked cleaners to satisfy his fetishes and was eventually reported to the police by a platform's customer service employee. However, most of the time, harassment took more implicit forms, where male customers stayed at home during cleanings and e.g., asked cleaners to mop the floor on their knees (C6), treated the cleaner as a servant (C10) or generally behaved in a sexually improper or intimidating way (e.g., C12; C19). Platform companies – whether in their Terms and Conditions or in direct communication with cleaners in the Facebook group or on the phone (e.g., C12) – promote safety for all users and urge cleaners to denounce abusive behaviors.

> I trust that they have collected the right information on the clients, so that it's safe when I go to clean their house. Because I know that Denmark is safe, one of the most safe countries in the world, but still... I mean I know that I am not going to some crazy person's house to clean or somewhere where I could be in danger. But this is fake, it is just the idea that you are safe. (C17 female migrant)

This quote is from a cleaner who evaluates the platform she works through very positively and also has experience of platform care work in the USA. Her point is that regardless of how safe a country is

and what precautionary measures a platform assumes, uncertainty and vulnerability are inherent in domestic work. Ticona and Mateescu (2018) highlight how platforms formalize some aspects of traditionally informal and undocumented domestic work, but at the same time exacerbate intersectional inequalities between the most advantaged and the most vulnerable cleaners.

These inequalities become apparent in the way similar issues are dealt with by platform housecleaners with different intersecting identities. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the young female migrant cleaner (C19) who experienced abusive behavior, never contacted customer support or denounced the customers who treated her in an unacceptable manner. On the contrary, a young Danish cleaner is far more proactive against such situations.

> I can always call them (customer support) if I feel uncomfortable or say that I am not able to do that, because you know how some people can get you really uncomfortable, especially when you are a young woman working alone. (C12 female Dane)

Here, we see how this cleaner contacts customer support every time she feels uncomfortable. In the focus group discussion, which occurred after the completion of my interviews, the same person referred extensively to fellow cleaners' feelings of insecurity due to cases of gender-related abusive or demeaning behavior from clients and insisted that they should not be tolerated. However, she acknowledged that her privileged position – speaking Danish, sharing cultural understanding of intimacy boundaries, feeling more confident – acted as an extra layer of protection against offensive behavior.

Precarious conditions though, are not just gender related. In the Facebook group, there is a story where a customer asked a migrant worker to provide her yellow health card (as proof of holding a residence permit in Denmark) and her visa documents when coming to clean his house, so that he could check if she was working legally in Denmark. Other cleaners advised her to cancel the booking and argued that she should not work under intimidation by a person who does not trust the verification process of the platform. Regardless of the advice, the housecleaner confirmed the booking and went to the house with her legal documents, as this incident happened during the pandemic and the cleaner had a hard time contracting work. This story exemplifies how income needs

and platform reputation mechanisms coalesce to compel migrant housecleaners to succumb to racist behavior and work in domestic environments where they are mistrusted.

Concluding this intersectional approach to precarious working life conditions of platform housecleaners, I must mention a small fraction of hyper-precarious migrants (cf. Mendonça et al. 2023) who work through these platforms in Denmark. These are migrants who reside and/or work irregularly in the country, either because they are undocumented or because their visas have expired or due to having working holiday visas, which do not entitle them to lawfully work as self-employed. These migrants usually work through other cleaners' accounts and aim at taking their clients off the platform to minimize their risks.

> there are a lot of them (Latin Americans) who have to work in black… And that is very risky also and very unstable and the rate then is much lower […] sometimes it has been work performed through (platform company name) but then you ask the people, do you want to go black, and I would lower my rate? […] here in Denmark, they are very strict with that kind of things, and we are of course not so used to it. I don't know, I mean the taxes are not very important in Latin America, because the state doesn't really exist (laughs), so… It is also very difficult to understand the logic and to understand that it is a dangerous situation, and you can get deported because of it. The last year, I know of at least five or six cases of deportation because of that […] deportation is always with the police and they drive you all the way, and they get your passport because you have been deported and this means that for two years you cannot come at all to Europe, and it is a punishment for something you don't have any choices as a migrant in some situations. (C23 female migrant)

This cleaner's quote is informed by the online discussions taking place in a WhatsApp group, where over 250 Latin American platform cleaners who work in Denmark communicate with each other. As I refer to this WhatsApp group more extensively in the next chapter, here I simply accentuate the link between deportability (cf. De Genova 2002) and platform housecleaning in Denmark. According to my interlocutor, at least five platform housecleaners who evaded taxation and/or violated the terms of

their visas, were deported from Denmark. One can validly claim that sociolegal vulnerability of undocumented migrants is not a novel trait of platform work. However, in Denmark it was precisely digital labor platforms – and especially a housecleaning one – who actively invited Argentinian and Chilean youths to come and work in the country (e.g., E4 customer support; E5 union representative; Scheer 2019a). Of course, this invitation was aiming at reinforcing the platform's law-abiding labor force rather than contributing to spreading undocumented work. Nevertheless, when these workers were invited, there was no special mention of e.g., the difficulty they would encounter finding affordable housing options in cities like Copenhagen.

For migrants to receive their visa, obtain an ID number (CPR), and open a bank account – so that they can work – they have to be registered at a Danish address. In Denmark, there is an informal market for renting shared rooms (C2; see also Floros & Jørgensen 2023) and a black market for renting fake addresses to migrant newcomers so that they can obtain a CPR number (C23). Migrants who need to pay not only for the room but also for their "legal" address are in a more dire financial situation. Eventually, a lot of these people – after fishing for clients in the platforms – turn to undocumented housecleaning to evade paying taxes and platform fees and can usually negotiate a slightly higher hourly fee (C2; C23). Others stick with the platform. This tension between legality and coping with hyper-precarity shapes the practices of many migrant workers. That said, it becomes more obvious how expensive and uncertain housing conditions pushed several platform housecleaners to endure demeaning behaviors, as a strategy for securing the income required to sustain their presence in Denmark.

5.3.4 Exclusion from welfare

My last indicator of precarity refers to platform housecleaners' exclusion from benefiting from the Danish welfare state. In 2017, the Danish government voted in a reform, whose purpose was to enhance social protection of self-employed workers in atypical employment relations (Mailand & Larsen 2018). Despite some positive changes, the reform was unable to cover platform housecleaners' needs, as the eligibility criteria required minimum working hours and lengthy employment periods (ibid.). This led to platform workers experiencing "systemic setbacks"

(Munkholm 2020: p.199) in relation to welfare inclusion. The reason I include welfare exclusion as a single indicator of precarity is that it can prove detrimental even to platform housecleaners who could be classified as "success stories" in relation to the other three indicators I have selected.

A good example of this is the story of an EU migrant who took up platform housecleaning in Denmark as her only source of income. She experienced less job insecurity than most cleaners: Even though she complained about constant cancellations from customers, she had an almost fully booked calendar. She also experienced less income insecurity: When she ended up quitting platform work, she was being paid 250 Danish crowns per hour, which is almost double the amount of what newcomers on the platform request. She also experienced relatively less intersectional insecurity: Having worked for a long time, she had figured out protocols for dealing with her clients and had already experienced disrespectful behavior, so she was proactive in avoiding ambiguous situations. Moreover, as an EU migrant she faced less uncertainty in relation to her residence and job restrictions. This cleaner had registered her sole proprietorship (CVR) as she was earning far above the DKK 50,000 threshold.

> (Now) I have tendonitis on both my wrists, actually. I decided it was time to stop and yeah… anyway. I didn't make the money that I need in the sense that I had to pay, I started paying VAT you know and yeah, the only solution would have been to work more hours, but it is very hard and also it is very irregular, because you change a lot, and 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. It is very hard for cleaners to make it a full-time job. (C6 female migrant)[22]

This cleaner had to abruptly quit working due to health-related issues. She was not entitled to sick pay, she could not claim unemployment benefits and despite working hard, she had only very little money saved. Having a CVR number meant that she had to pay VAT at regular intervals, which only augmented her income needs. For her to receive compensation for sickness or unemployment benefits, she would have to pay contributions to unemployment funds and private security schemes,

[22] Part of this quote has been previously used (Floros & Jørgensen 2023).

which would lower her monthly income drastically. Eventually, she had to leave Denmark, as she could not find another job and could not afford the high costs of living in Copenhagen. Her health situation made it impossible for her to resume platform housecleaning. This story is also a prime example of what van Doorn (2020) refers to as 'selective formalization' of domestic platform work, which conceptualizes how housecleaning platforms formalize only some aspects of work, while perpetuating traditional informalities related to domestic labor. What became formalized in this case was tax contributions and the employment relation. Social security for this cleaner was non-existent, just as it would have been if she had been working informally.

One more example of welfare exclusion was the ineligibility of platform housecleaners to receive COVID-19 benefits. Here again, the exclusion that took place was not straightforward but an indirect exclusion due to tight eligibility criteria. Low-income self-employed workers who could not document an average and steady income for a twelve-month period before the payment of the benefit, were not entitled to this financial help. In that way, low-income platform workers were excluded from help when they most needed it. None of the workers I interviewed and nobody in the Facebook group chats was aware of a single housecleaner that managed to get income compensation for the job loss they suffered due to the pandemic. These welfare exclusions do not directly target platform workers. Nevertheless, platform workers are par excellence the group that suffers the most by the combination of policies creating these exclusions.

In concluding this section on precarity and platform housecleaning, I would claim that it is important for the understanding of the phenomenon to stress the fact that there is a certain ambivalence in how my interviewees referred to their experiences of platform work. Even workers who described platform housecleaning as demeaning in various ways, both as a job and as a business model, acknowledged the positive role of these platforms in the livelihoods of many migrants (e.g., C7; C15; C23). A female migrant who said she was lucky enough to finally contract "a normal job, non-cleaning job" away from platforms, went on to say that,

> One of my classmates was only able to stay in Denmark because of (platform name). She couldn't get anywhere else, and this was the only income she could get, uhm… So, I

> think the platforms can be a good thing, but it is not something that I would personally want to do long term, because it is just so unstable and it's not a long-term solution. But it can save you if you are in need, so I guess I am glad that these platforms exist, because I saw it in my international class that they really help some people. (C15 female migrant)

Housecleaning platforms in Denmark are the point of convergence of flexibility, precarity, easy labor market access, quick income opportunities and welfare exclusions. It is to be expected that cleaners experiencing these simultaneously have ambivalent feelings towards and understandings of their work.

5.4 Concluding on the nexus between flexibility and precarity

As van Doorn (2023) argues in his conceptualization of liminal precarity, when migrants engage in platform work, they promise themselves that this is a necessary evil that will not last for long. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how it is relatively easier for Danish housecleaners to opt out of platform work, and how migrants' wishful thinking of quickly transitioning from platform housecleaning to better employment conditions is often refuted. Working under precarious conditions though, is not always experienced as detrimental by the workers enduring these conditions. As long as their work acts as a lifeline, securing the income they need to stay in Denmark and pursue their dreams, these workers express ambivalent feelings regarding housecleaning platforms. When opting for platform housecleaning, workers choose an undertaking that provides them with hope (or the illusion) that they can manage their own schedules and decide their own hourly fees, since employment alternatives at hand are often equally precarious. However, as I demonstrated in the previous sections, when precarity and flexibility are analyzed in relation to digitally mediated housecleaning, researchers should also take into account the agency of the platforms' technological configuration, with its affordances and glitches. When developing the apps, platform managers inscribe their visions of desired use in the algorithms and functions of the platforms (cf. Akrich 1992). Consequently, workers' experiences of flexibility and precarity in platform housecleaning are co-constructed by a variety of human and non-human actors.

In this chapter, I analyzed how housecleaning platforms promote the promise of flexibility as a strategy to attract a labor force but at the same time obstruct workers' unilateral decision making regarding the flexible organization of their schedules. This happens both directly and indirectly and is an outcome of both traditional and algorithmic forms of management. The deactivation or deletion of workers' profiles, automated nudges, and personal – often threatening – messages from customer support are direct ways of obstructing promised flexibility. Indirect reasons for which flexibility is hindered include – among others – the interdependence of cleaners and customers' schedules, the configuration and glitches in platform apps, and the impact of cancellations and rejections on cleaners' platform reputations. Moreover, Danish visa and tax regulations on when, how much, and under what taxation arrangements a cleaner can work, further obstruct flexibility.

Coinciding with previous literature (Lehdonvirta 2018; Dunn 2020), this analysis of the cleaners' interviews illustrates how their level of dependency on platform income is a decisive factor in how much flexibility is actually afforded to them by this business model. The various traits of housecleaning platform work presented in this chapter and the different needs, and working life trajectories of the workers, suggest that the volume of flexibility enjoyed by cleaners is very hard to determine. In my analysis, I introduced my own set of indicators to determine how flexible platform housecleaning is for workers in Denmark, building on the analysis of my fieldwork data and on previous frameworks conceptualizing flexibility in platform work (Anwar & Graham 2021; Dunn et al. 2023).

Parallel with flexibility, platform housecleaners in Denmark experience a variety of sources of work-related uncertainty, which go beyond the self-evident contingency of contracting work in the gig economy. These include – among others – limited access to welfare provisions, baffling tax declarations, unfavorable legislation regarding cancellations, sexual harassment, and the ever-present threat of bad ratings by rude and demeaning customers with vengeful intentions. Platform housecleaning in Denmark can be classified as precarious work, in line with Kalleberg's (2009) and Waite's (2009) conceptualizations, both as part-time, contingent work and as a meeting point of all these uncertainties. Here again, for my analysis, I developed my own set of indicators of precarity.

Along with commonly applied indicators of subjective and objective uncertainty, such as job insecurity and income insecurity, my set of indicators includes insecurity experienced in the workplace relating to gender or race and exclusion from welfare provisions. These two extra indicators offer a more holistic understanding of precarity as experienced by platform housecleaners in Denmark. However, as with flexibility, the level of precariousness these workers experience varies according to workers' dependence on platform income, their knowledge of the Danish language and culture, their sociolegal status, their temporality of work, which platform they work for etc.

By making this relativist claim about flexibility and precarity, I am not suggesting that platform housecleaning can only be assessed at individual level for each worker. Drawing on the theoretical framework on precarity and based on the experiences of workers, my research demonstrates how platform housecleaning in Denmark overall falls well within the definitions of precarious work. The existing platform business models, the legislation relating to platform work(ers) and the intersecting identities of the workforce attracted to platform housecleaning are factors that clearly augment precarity. My research adds nuance to the understanding that platform housecleaning is not uniformly experienced. The lives of the people comprising its workforce range from hyper-precarious deportable migrants to ethnic Danish students complementing their student support income through a precarious form of work. This is one reason why platform housecleaning – as we see in the next chapters – cannot easily be contested, managed or regulated in a unitary way.

With flexibility and precarity in tandem now taken into consideration, I follow the reasoning of Anwar and Graham (2021), who claim that this is the only way to understand how job quality plays out in platform work. My analysis showcases how flexibility and precarity are not necessarily contradictory but form a nexus containing various tensions. Accepting precarious working conditions is a lever for some workers to achieve more flexibility, while others trade their flexibility with accepting all bookings to reduce their job and income insecurity. In any case, within this nexus, a certain level of flexibility is always afforded to the worker, but precarious work is – to varying extents – the norm. As I expounded in this chapter, platform housecleaning in Denmark, and this could be a plausible hypothesis for more countries in the Global North, is premised upon two promises: the platforms'

promise of unhindered flexibility and the workers' promise to themselves that enduring precarious work is only temporary. However, both promises very often end up being beyond reach.

CHAPTER 6

The everyday resistance practices of platform housecleaners

6.1 Introduction

Despite being an emergent subject, platform labor studies already feature extensive literature on gig workers' resistance. This literature includes accounts of: a) Collectively organized resistance (such as grass-roots initiatives and informal or traditional unionism) against platform companies (e.g., Marrone & Finotto 2019; Cant 2019; Tassinari & Macarrone 2020), b) Gaming the algorithmic management of work (e.g., by using fake GPS apps or sharing accounts) as individual forms of workplace resistance (e.g., Heiland 2021; Iazzolino & Varesio 2023), and c) relational approaches to resistance in platform labor, such as Ticona and Tsapatsaris' (2023) study on how workers and customers form online communities, which enable the production of discourse that resists the platforms' dominant narratives. Very often, papers use the concept of resistance without elaborating further on what exactly resistance signifies. Indeed, resistance is a concept, term or category that is often used in an all-encompassing way (Timmons 2003). In relation to work, it has been primarily invoked by researchers employing Labor Process Theory to investigate workers' resistance to managerial control in capitalist economies (e.g., Mulholland 2004; Lloyd 2017). David Collinson and Stephen Ackroyd consider resistance to be a term describing "employee practices that have an oppositional or subversive intent or effect" (2005: p. 305). However, gig workers are not employees but are usually classified as self-employed – regardless of whether this classification is false or not. Therefore, when resistance in platform work is discussed, clarity is needed regarding what counts as resistance, and whom, how and why the workers are resisting (cf. Reid-Musson et al. 2020; Purcell & Brook 2022).

Platform workers' resistance can take multiple forms and have various targets. It can be directed towards the platform company through which the workers trade their services, the state and its institutions that shape the regulatory framework in which platform work occurs, and the customers

who book the workers' services. Over the last fifteen years, a trend has emerged towards investigating precarious workers' resistance practices by adopting bottom-up approaches and positioning workers and their environments in the analytical spotlight, rather than focusing on the institutional context of resistance through an industrial relations perspective (Cini et al. 2022). This trend also exists in platform labor studies, especially among scholars adopting what I referred to in the introduction of this thesis as non-fatalistic analytics of precarity (e.g., Sun 2019; Veen et al. 2020; van Doorn 2023). In this chapter, I also espouse a bottom-up perspective to delve deeper into what constitutes resistance in the practices of platform housecleaners in Denmark, using James Scott's (1985) conceptualization of everyday forms of resistance as a theoretical framework.

Nevertheless, before proceeding with everyday forms of cleaners' resistance, in the first section of this chapter I start by exploring why Danish labor unions – within the institutional framework of the Danish industrial relations system – fall short of providing precarious platform housecleaners with the means for collective organization and resistance. The next section is dedicated to analyzing platform housecleaners' online communities as spaces of *embryonic solidarity* (Atzeni 2010). However, the main body of my analysis in this chapter presents different forms of everyday resistance, building on the empirical material from my interviews with workers and my digital ethnography in the Facebook group. As mentioned in the thesis introduction, the theoretical leitmotif permeating this chapter draws on the Autonomy of Migration (AoM) approach and its *operaista* origins. Accordingly, digital housecleaning platforms in Denmark are seen as capital's triple response to demands and social dynamics of the workers, both at individual and collective level. First, these platforms evade the established Danish collective bargaining model, thus minimizing labor costs. Second, they respond to the existence of a large pool of informal migrant housecleaning and attempt to subsume informal workers under their business model. Third, they act as instigators of an entrepreneurial culture and strive to individualize the labor force. The result of this triple response is that housecleaning platform work becomes a site of contestation between the platforms' management, (migrant) cleaners, customers, and state policies. It is within this *platform battlefield* (cf. Benvegnù et al. 2021) that everyday resistance practices of workers are unfolding.

6.2 Housecleaning platforms and the Danish industrial relations system

In his work on collective resistance and organization of European platform workers, Kurt Vandaele (2021) asserts that according to his typology of workers' structural power, location-based platform domestic workers are the least expected to collectively organize their work, as their workplaces are small and dispersed, thus making coordination among workers very difficult. In a Danish context, structural power becomes even weaker due to the demographics of platform housecleaners. Being migrant, most often newcomers and young, means that platform housecleaners have diverse cultural backgrounds and understandings of collective organization and share no common language. Therefore, the lack of homogeneity of the labor force acts as one more barrier to worker coordination. Nevertheless, Denmark is the first country in the world where a collective agreement between a labor union and a housecleaning platform (3F and Hilfr, respectively) was signed, in 2018. However, this agreement was not at all premised on the competing interests between labor and capital, nor was it the outcome of platform housecleaners' unionization or collective struggle. On the contrary, as I demonstrated in my chapter on the short history of the Danish gig economy, this agreement was the outcome of political pressure from the Danish government that was promoting platform companies and wanted to show that the gig economy was compatible with the Danish industrial relations system. It was not the workers or the union, but the Hilfr platform that assumed the initiative for signing this agreement, marketing itself as a socially responsible company within the Danish platform housecleaning sector and aiming at increasing its market share (Ilsøe & Larsen 2023).

The outcome of this collective agreement is far from positive, if seen through the prism of collective organization of workers. According to interviewed labor union representatives (E3; E5), 3F's unionized platform workers can literally be counted on the fingers of one hand.[23] The top-down character of this agreement is not only evident in low participation of workers in the union but also underlined by the fact that Hilfr and 3F informally agreed that the platform would facilitate the participation of some of

[23] The overall understanding of workers (e.g., C1; C2; C12) is that union contributions are costly. This is indeed the case for full-time workers, but part-time workers have low membership fees and student cleaners can receive advice for free or pay only DKK 60 if the union provides legal support for an ongoing court case. Despite low membership fees, platform housecleaners (especially students) are either unaware of this fact or are not interested in signing up (e.g, C12; C16; C22).

its workers in focus groups organized by the union. The goal of these focus groups was for the union to get a grasp of the needs, preferences, claims and circumstances under which these cleaners work (E5). This lack of empirical knowledge on behalf of 3F demonstrates how the signing of the Hilfr-3F agreement was based on speculation and assertions regarding the true needs of the platform housecleaners, who of course were not consulted before the agreement. The focus groups generated contradictory outcomes. Three out of five employees in one of the focus groups had the impression that they were employees rather than self-employed. Nevertheless,

> they had an interest in working more, depleting all weekends, depleting all holidays, always being available to the market, to the customers, at all times. That was their interest. And they took the decision to deplete the boundary between private life and work life. (E5 union representative)

In this quote, the representative suggests that traditional claims and values of the working class and the labor movement (such as having a stable program, demarcation between work life and free time, etc.) seem to be inverted by platform workers. The union representative goes on to suggest that cleaners "were very quick to learn and adapt to the unwritten dynamics of the platform and conform to all of them" (E5). The material from my interviews with cleaners contradicts the outcome of the focus groups, since many of the interviewees – albeit conforming to some extent – showed great interest in subverting platforms' unwritten dynamics. Moreover, the wording used by the union representative (e.g., "unwritten dynamics") indicates that what was shared with me was an analysis of the focus group, rather than straight-forward accounts and workers' quotes. I argue that the representative's analysis takes the Danish industrial system and typical full-time employment as its point of departure, and therefore fails to depict what might be contentious in platform workers' behavior. According to my empirical material, part-time migrant cleaners with short-term visas are likely to have completely different strategies than typical employees, especially when they are not planning to be working for long as platform housecleaners.

Combining the interests of diverse types of platform workers with those of traditional employees is a difficult task for labor unions, both in Denmark and internationally. Not surprisingly, even where

platform worker protests exist, traditional unions are not the main organizers (Borghi et al. 2021). In some cases, labor unions act complementarily to grass-roots initiatives of gig workers, often with positive effects for mobilization (cf. Cini et al. 2022). In the Danish gig economy, there are a couple of examples of such complementarity in the cases of food delivery couriers and interpreters with 3F and HK unions, respectively (Floros 2023; E5; E3). However, there are no actual relations established yet between platform housecleaners and the respective unions in Denmark. The reasons for this are twofold. On the one hand, blue collar unions in Denmark focus on the representation of rank-and-file employees and have a formal structure and institutional purpose, which discourages precarious and contingent workers from joining them. On the other hand, platform housecleaners regard their work as temporary, which prevents them from engaging in time-consuming attempts to engage in collective organization. Moreover, many of them have diverse cultural understandings of what unionizing means or entails, which is one more factor hindering such engagement. The outcome of this disengagement is that employment conditions on housecleaning platforms are not actively disputed by the workers.

Another reason for the distancing between platform housecleaners and labor unions in Denmark is that social media groups have come to replace a core function, which until recently was traditionally carried out by labor unions. This function is the provision of all sorts of information workers need regarding their employment conditions. Both in the Facebook group I observed, which was set up by the platform company, and in the WhatsApp group I refer to in the next section, workers are continuously asking for information on tax issues, social security and welfare supplements, work and residency permits, etc. In fact, only a couple of my interviewees had thought of contacting the union to ask for such information. This lack of contact between platform housecleaners and the union signifies an impasse as to how the union can fulfil its role as a proponent of workers' solidarity. At the same time, as presented in the following section, living in an online world – and platform labor being a vivid manifestation of that – leads to the emergence of new modes of organizing that exceed traditional ways of unionizing.

6.3 Online communities of solidarity

Recent research reveals how migrants – and more specifically migrant women – participate in virtual communities on social media, once they reach their country of destination (Calvo et al. 2023). These communities are usually created among migrants who speak the same language and foster the social and labor inclusion of their users. Discussions in these groups vary from being purely informative to actively offering social support to their members (ibid.). Mathilde Mondon-Navazo and Annalisa Murgia (2023) have investigated a WhatsApp group in Berlin that was composed by female Spanish-speaking platform housecleaners working through the platform company Helpling. While conducting my fieldwork, I became aware of the existence of an almost identical WhatsApp group in Denmark, where Spanish-speaking – almost exclusively Latin American – female platform cleaners communicate on a variety of topics regarding their work. These groups are online communities of solidarity, which contribute to the empowerment of their members. As Mondon-Navazo and Murgia point out, their members build intersectional forms of solidarity, as they help each other navigate the intersecting realities of simultaneously being workers, migrant and female, in a sector with blurred boundaries between work and personal life (ibid.). Although it is unclear how the Danish and German groups came to exist or whether there is some common thread leading to their creation, the two groups share many similar features.

The Danish WhatsApp group was initiated by Latin American cleaners working through a specific platform. The group has multiple goals and provides a forum for discussing many topics[24]. Migrant cleaners ask questions about administrative procedures relating to visas and permits or ask for help with tax declarations. Moreover, they seek help with finding accommodation, which is a difficult issue to tackle, especially in the city of Copenhagen. The group is also a site for finding a last-minute replacement, in case a cleaner gets sick and does not want to cancel her booking at short notice, to

[24] The following account of the WhatsApp group comes from one of my interviewees, who has participated in the group for a long time (C23). Although I was presented with the opportunity to join the group and see the content myself, I decided not to for reasons of ethical conduct. This opportunity came very late, towards the very end of my fieldwork. This means that – had I accepted to join the group – I would only have time to introduce myself and my project and extract data created prior to my introduction. I would not be able to further discuss this data with the group's participants nor would I have had time to conduct more interviews informed by this data, as was the case with the Facebook group.

avoid negative ratings or the cancellation of a recurring cleaning by the customer. A very interesting feature of the group is that its participants have created a blacklist of customers, whom the members should avoid. The reasons for blacklisting customers range from sexually abusive behavior, to being aggressive, plainly rude or asking the worker to overperform or work unpaid beyond the agreed hours, because the customer's expectations have not been met. In the group, newcomers to the platform are provided with guidance and advice on what hourly fee to initially state under their profile, according to e.g., experience, location of work or how swiftly a cleaner wants to contract bookings.

As my informant states, "because it is a freelance job, there is also a lot of solidarity between (workers)" (C23). Solidarity is expressed not only through work-related information, blacklists and guidance. Latin American housecleaners socialize in this group and invite each other to meet up, go to the beach in the summer or join social events taking place to "not feel alone in Denmark" (C23). Most importantly, the group offers female cleaners working in unknown persons' homes a sense of security, since they are able to contact somebody if they feel threatened by their customers. Contacting the police can sometimes be hard for these cleaners, either because of language barriers or cultural distrust towards security forces, let alone that some of them are working irregularly and this would endanger both them and the people whose account they are using. Platform housecleaners' solidarity as expressed in this WhatsApp group is a form of what Atzeni (2010: pp. 28-29) refers to as *embryonic solidarity*. Embryonic solidarity signifies practical expressions of workers' unity, which have not yet transformed into mobilization or collective organization in the workplace. According to this perspective, migrant cleaners' online groups are actions of solidarity in progress, which can potentially act as a springboard for more pronounced forms of workers' organization and resistance.

The existence of the Latin American platform housecleaners' WhatsApp group is the outcome of migrant workers' self-organization efforts and a safe space for their work-related communication. At the same time, the platform company's closed Facebook group to which I was granted access is also a channel for communication among housecleaners. Many of the 250 Latin American cleaners who

participate in the WhatsApp group are simultaneously members of the Facebook group, since they are working through this platform company. The members of the Facebook group fluctuated between 750 and almost 2,000, during the years when I conducted my research. According to the platform's manager, the creation of the Facebook group aimed at facilitating communication among cleaners, so that they could help each other out with information and tips or tricks for better cleaning. Moreover, he added, the group is a site for discussing complaints and claims against the platform.

> If they think something is wrong with the platform, they're angry about something, well they can take it there. And […] we wanted to make this as transparent as possible, being a listed company that is sometimes a bit difficult, but in that group we allow almost everything. We haven't kicked out anybody yet and there are a lot of discussions and I mean they refer to us as modern slave owners, but we don't delete stuff like that, we may, like, leave the community to answer back… Well, it works when you have a certain level of confidence that you treat people fairly, then you can have an open debate. So, I don't think this would work if we worked like modern day slave owners… (E1 platform manager)

Looking into this platform's specific practice of sustaining such a group through the lens of AoM suggests that the platform prefers to promote an open yet surveilled space of protest against the company itself, which nevertheless can keep the company up to date with platform housecleaners' perceptions and expressions of discontent. To diminish platform housecleaners' recourse to traditional channels for employment-related information provision and denouncement of malpractice such as labor unions, the platform company set up its own controlled forum. Indeed, management does not censor or punish housecleaners expressing themselves in an offensive manner against the platform. However, the group also acts as a pressure relief valve. One of my informants was one of the fiercest criticizers of platform practices and policies in the Facebook group. I chose to interview this person because she was very critical in the group and the frequency of her commenting – usually against the platform's decisions – was among the highest. Despite claiming that collective organizing

could pave the way for better employment conditions in platform housecleaning, she admitted that contacting a union had never crossed her mind (C6).

Following the management's reasoning, one could claim that the Facebook group affords expressions of worker solidarity. Cleaners' mutual help with tax issues or administrative procedures and their exchange of advice on how to overcome professional difficulties or manage the clients are abundant in the chat. On closer inspection though, these posts are mixed with advice and guidance provided by customer support, managerial communiques on shifting terms and conditions, posts from researchers – like me – inviting housecleaners to participate in various research endeavors, and housecleaners' posts praising entrepreneurship and the platform's management. Some of these latter posts come from account holders who have their own cleaning companies and contract bookings through the platform, which are carried out by their own employees. In that sense, despite the existence of dispersed expressions of solidarity, the group features a diversity of participants with contradictory and often conflictual interests. Therefore, it falls short of forming a unitary whole and cannot be identified as an embryonic form of solidarity (Atzeni 2010). At the same time, albeit platform-owned, this group is the largest online community of platform housecleaners in Denmark. Drawing on AoM, in my analysis and my references to the Facebook group, I approach it as a site of contestation, where workers and the management debate and disagree. Yet, notwithstanding the manager's truthful claims concerning freedom of expression, there are evident power asymmetries inscribed in the function of the group (cf. Akrich 1992), also because it is established, moderated and monitored by the platform company[25].

6.4 Everyday resistance practices of platform housecleaners

The previous sections of this chapter demonstrate how platform housecleaners have never assumed any form of collective action against the platform companies through which they work. Despite the publicity of the Hilfr-3F agreement, and the journalistic interest in working conditions and inequalities

[25] The reader should also take into account how Facebook groups and other social media restrict or promote specific behaviors and shape the ways in which users associate (e.g., Baym & boyd 2012; Van Dijck 2013). However, it is beyond the scope of the thesis to elaborate more on this.

in Danish housecleaning platforms (e.g., Jakobsen 2017; Scheer 2019a), workers have not expressed any public claim, shaped any grass-roots initiatives or joined any existing union to exert influence over their employment conditions. Nevertheless, as I show in the following section, platform housecleaners engage in everyday forms of resistance against the platform companies, the customers who book them and the Danish legal framework that regulates their working conditions. Although resistance is usually invoked when public confrontation and labor conflicts take place, various scholars have considered resistance in workplaces in more grounded terms. For example, Timmons (2003) discusses covert and individual acts of negating in practice the introduction of new technologies in the workplace as 'resistive compliance', whereas Thompson and Ackroyd (1995) coin 'organizational misbehavior' to account for employees' resistance and insubordination to managerial practices[26]. James Scott (1985) offers an alternative definition for resistance practices in his work on Malaysian peasants. He claims that

> class resistance includes any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are *intended* either to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example, work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis those super-ordinate classes (Scott 1985: p. 290).

I take this definition as a point of departure and customize it for the needs of my analysis; as Scott says, definitions are not ends in themselves but analytical tools (ibid.: p. 290). In line with the original definition, my analysis *considers platform housecleaners to be the subordinate class[27], mitigating or denying claims by superordinate classes (e.g., platforms' rents, state's taxes and sociolegal classifications, customers' devaluation of cleaning services) and advancing their own claims (e.g., better payment, security, respect).* This definition highlights workers' intentions and treats individual

[26] Organizational misbehavior is also employed by Reid-Musson and colleagues (2020) in their work on Uber drivers in Canada. However, the authors state that they adopt an inductive approach to their data and do not analytically focus on resistance as such.

[27] My point here goes beyond classic Marxist accounts and portrays self-employed platform housecleaners as members of a post-Fordist subordinate class, the development of which was propelled by the advance of new information technologies (cf. Linder 1992; Bologna 2014).

and collective agency equally. Moreover, as I noted in my introductory chapter, platform housecleaning is part of the organization of work in modern class societies, which is stressed in the definition as a division of subordinate and superordinate classes. As with the peasants in Scott's account, Danish platform housecleaners are not so concerned with institutional change, open confrontation and publicly expressed goals. On the contrary, their resistance is concealed and informal; they are mainly preoccupied with immediate, de facto gains, rather than with de jure change (ibid.: p. 33). In the following sections, I showcase how everyday forms of resistance materialize in the practices of cleaners, based on my interviews and the digital ethnography conducted in the Facebook group. For my analysis, I use some of Scott's concepts describing the weapons that the weak employ in their everyday resistance, namely false compliance, dissimulation and deception, feigned ignorance, and slander[28].

6.4.1 False compliance

The business model of digital housecleaning platforms is premised on the compliance of cleaners with a set of written terms and conditions, but also with implicit non-contractual obligations, which are ultimately made explicit by the platforms. Terms and conditions dictate – among other things – that platform accounts should be used only by their owners, that payments must be formal and go through the platform, and that cleaners reported by the authorities for not paying tax will be excluded. Non-contractual obligations include being responsive to clients, not rejecting bookings when available on the calendar and not cancelling bookings. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, failure to observe these obligations leads to automated or in-person admonishment, temporary profile deactivation or deletion from the platform. The reasoning behind these measures is to force cleaners to adapt to customers' needs, who are the source of revenue for the platform. At the same time, platform housecleaning is subject to laws and regulations imposed by the Danish state

[28] Scott also refers to arson, desertion and sabotage – which bear no parallels with platform housecleaning – and foot dragging. Given the rating system and the replaceability of cleaners, foot dragging is less likely to take place in platform housecleaning. If it does, it is probably marginal and there is no clear evidence from my fieldwork to support such a claim.

(e.g., taxation, work permits, visa restrictions), which also monitors workers' compliance through targeted audits and other means of surveillance.

Most of my interviewees, when signing up to the platforms, did not imagine that such restrictions would apply. Given their quest for flexibility and autonomy, it is hard for them to comply with all these demands. However, failure to comply jeopardizes their income, which is crucial, especially for those dependent on this income as a living. Therefore, platform housecleaners resort to pretending that they are complying with explicit and implicit demands by the platforms to stay below radar and secure their source of income. During my fieldwork, I quickly realized that my informants were not loyal nor honest towards the platform, and some were also not telling the full truth when interviewed. One of the most controversial points regarding workers' compliance is the fifty thousand Danish kroner income limit, over which cleaners must start their own sole proprietorship. Some informants openly admitted that they calculate their income to avoid surpassing the limit (e.g., C1; C19).

> DKK 50,000 is not enough […] to make a living[…] (but) it is very complex for me, so I don't want to bother with anything that is even more complex and then also the Moms (VAT), it is also financial… For the Moms it is 25%, right? So, I would have to raise my price more than 25% and that is just not perfect, not for anybody honestly, not for my customers, not for me, because I don't get more money and I don't get that much money out of it, then it is just much more expensive… (C19 female migrant)

This quote indicates some of the main issues stemming from switching from being a simple housecleaner to – administratively – becoming a company. Complexity, extra taxation, and price-raising – on top of contingency of gigs and income – discourage a lot of the cleaners from taking the extra step. The solution for cleaners unwilling to create companies is to resort to undocumented labor to complement their platform income. Cleaners take their clients off the platform, in a double move that secures less taxation for them and no commission for customers. That, in turn, allows customers to pay them a higher fee. Platform managements and customer service departments are aware of this danger; therefore, cleaners employ various strategies to fake their compliance with the rules. Fake

compliance here means that they adjust the style, amount, and timing of their work through the platform in such a way that they seem to conform with platforms' demands for availability and consistency, while avoiding surpassing the fifty thousand kroner limit. Although my interviewees gave on-the-record accounts of their practices of false compliance, I will not disclose the details of their tricks, to minimize the risks of exposing their practices to platform managements.

Among my informants, at least two cleaners (C3 and C5) provided evasive accounts of their work practices, to avoid revealing that they combine platform work with undocumented housecleaning.

> So, I switched my tax card from A to B, so from being employed to being self-employed and I registered, of course, the amount of money that I make in a year. I was sure to keep the number under DKK 50,000, otherwise I would have to pay for VAT, and you don't want to do that, so it was easy not to go over that amount because I was working part time. It was easy to be below that amount of money. Based on that calculation I think it was about 49,000 and something just below… borderline. I just received from SKAT every second month or three months, I don't remember when it was, the money that I owe to SKAT, "it is time to pay your taxes it is that amount…", that was very easy, so I was just notified when and how much, and I paid it. (C5 female migrant)

The above quote came late in the interview when we were discussing tax issues. Before that, the cleaner had revealed how much and for how long she had been working, let alone that she was charging well above the average hourly fee. It was obvious that she made more than fifty thousand, as she was sustaining herself in Denmark exclusively through housecleaning for over a year. The key phrase giving her away in her response is that she "would have to pay VAT and you don't want to do that". Platform housecleaners are mostly migrants working temporarily in a precarious setting. They know that this work practically excludes them from being eligible for welfare benefits or any other type of social provisions and their main reason for taking up platform housecleaning is a need to quickly generate income. Therefore, they choose to work under the most profitable terms for them. However, knowing that this is illegal and could end up in large fines or even deportation, most prefer

to give the impression of being law-abiding compliant workers, even to researchers like me, who claim to support their interests.

Here, my findings also disagree with the union representative who claims that platform housecleaners comply with all the unwritten dynamics of platforms (E5). The following empirical findings display how the bigger picture features a lot of false compliance. Several migrant workers contact and pay Danish citizens within an existing black market, to get registered at their address and use their postboxes, so that they can acquire an identity (CPR) number and start working faster as platform housecleaners (C23). Other cleaners, when sick or needing to cancel at the last minute, prefer to informally send someone to work instead of them, because cancelling might cost them a client or a bad rating (C2; C23). Taking customers off the platform is standardized practice (e.g., C1; C2; C17; C22; C23) and sometimes the customers themselves suggest this in the first place (C3; C23). Moreover, platform housecleaners generally know that tax evasion among platform housecleaners is widespread (e.g., C2; C4), both as working undeclared but also by cleaners who do not stay for long in the country and thus prefer to evade payments.

> I just know that they come, they work, they earn money and then they go back to their country or another country. But they don't pay, and that's nice. (C4 female migrant).

The above quote as well as the following come from people who claim to follow the platform's rules by the book.

> Because I just came to Denmark from America, for the Danish government that makes me not worth a nod […] the Danish government just says that you are not treated as an equal, like at the European level or so, because this is how things are in Europe and until you get a European passport, only then you will get benefits. […] they don't care about my well-being or if I find a job or if I learn Danish. […] (it) is completely absurd to just go into that (platform housecleaning for a long period) without any benefits. (C14 male migrant)

These quotes come from workers who claim to fully comply with platform terms and Danish legislation. And after analyzing their interviews, this sounds highly plausible and shows that even law-abiding platform housecleaners justify to a certain extent the noncompliant everyday practices of their peers. C4 admits that not paying taxes "is nice", although she is afraid to participate in such a practice. C14, when asked about if and how platform housecleaning working conditions could be improved in Denmark, tried to explain to me how things work under neoliberalism and why there is no solution to non-EU migrants' exclusion from welfare benefits. That reasoning shows that, regardless of this person's choice to work through the platform, they are fully aware of the exploitative nature of this undertaking. Although C14's own ethical code and plans for the future dictate compliance despite such exploitation, this analysis of what platform cleaning in Denmark entails, proves how reasonable it is for the rest of the workers to fake their compliance.

6.4.2 Dissimulation and deception

In her work on migrant platform workers in Berlin, Barbara Orth (2023) refers to the case of an Argentinian housecleaner who performs their queer identity for their clients to secure a clientele among the queer community of Berlin. Platform reputation is built on good ratings and customer reviews, which can attract further clients. Existing literature usually highlights the disproportionate power that customers possess in relation to platform workers due to rating systems, which can have detrimental effects on workers' platform reputation (e.g., Gandini 2019; Bucher et al. 2021; Chan 2022). Indeed, as presented in the previous chapter, performance evaluation acts to intensify pressure, causing a "qualitative intensification of the labor process" (Gandini 2019: p. 1047). Nevertheless, suggesting that platform housecleaners simply work harder, faster and more because of ratings and concluding the analysis there, is one-sided and fails to account for workers' agency and their everyday forms of resistance to such metrics.

According to my fieldwork, cleaners employ deceptive behavior and dissimulation to influence their popularity on the platform. They do so either by adding specific attributes to their profiles or by adopting pretentious behavior to influence ratings. Here, I do not mean to suggest that all self-branding and customer-attracting techniques workers use when setting up their profiles count as

everyday resistance. On the contrary, I agree with Gruszka and her colleagues (2022), who claim that most of the personal traits promoted in platform housecleaners' profiles, especially the ones presenting cleaning as a hobby or a natural – gendered – inclination, reinforce the traditional devaluation of domestic work and female labor. Therefore, I only refer here to workers who add misleading traits to their profiles, presenting themselves as something more, or else, than what they are.

> Through time, I have changed things and also like more specific things that people would like to hear, for example that you are constant… consequent… consistent, no that is the word! (laughs). So yes, people like to know that. And in the beginning, you don't think of that, because it is like your first job and you are not thinking like so long maybe. (C2 female migrant)

In this quote, a cleaner explained to me how she changed her profile three times, after signing up on the platform. These changes were an outcome of what she gradually came to perceive as the desired traits that customers were looking for in the profiles, after discussing this with customers and other cleaners. I classify this as deception, since it is a form of self-promotion based on what the customers want to hear rather than presenting own actual merits.

Practices of misleading the clients are coupled with dissimulation techniques, aimed at building trust, securing recurring bookings that guarantee stable income, and achieving high ratings. Here again, the boundaries between dissimulation and submissive behavior can sometimes be hard to discern. By dissimulation I mean practices of cleaners masking their true feelings about work and customers and adopting pretentious behavior to prompt good ratings. By submissive behavior I refer to cleaners who tolerate devaluating comments and demeaning behavior from customers and succumb to performing tasks beyond what was initially agreed. Submission does not signify resistance. Dissimulation, on the other hand, is part of workers' agency and is often proactive, therefore I classify it as an everyday form of resistance according to the definition I provided.

Many of the platform housecleaners I interviewed adopt dissimulative techniques. Some of them consider these to be part of a specific skillset needed to establish themselves on a platform (cf. Orth

2023). A female migrant bragged about how her former job experience in her country of origin helped her communicate with customers and build a clientele. She claimed that a platform housecleaner must be “like a politician […]. You have to be sort of clever there I think, not just complain or being rude, it’s part of the job, I think” (C1).

The analogy of the politician used by C1 reveals how cleaners orchestrate their relations with clients and adjust their behavior accordingly: They conceal their true feelings about customers’ kids turning the house into a mess just before the cleaning begins (C23) and claim they are animal lovers to get bookings from pet owners (C12). Another example of dissimulation is the example quoted in the previous chapter, where a migrant housecleaner (C10) faked that she moved out of town, because she wanted to stop cleaning for an aggressive client but was afraid of possible repercussions.

> I am also worried about prestige and customer satisfaction because if I say I am not happy to work here, they will be angry, so I had to lie. (C10 female migrant)

Everyday forms of resistance are the exact opposite of direct confrontation and outright defiance. This housecleaner felt trapped between a bad rating, being flagged by the platform for dropping a booking and enduring unacceptable behavior. Her only way out was deception.

Other platform housecleaners adopt more proactive approaches when resisting the menace of ratings. The most typical example among my interviewees is a male migrant working in Copenhagen who, rather than waiting for or begging clients to rate him, every time he did a cleaning went on the platform and rated the clients with five stars and a kind review. This platform function whereby clients can be rated, is seldom used, as most cleaners are unaware of its existence. However, the clients get a notification about this, and they might respond. Previously, during the cleaning, he admitted sweet-talking clients.

> So having this smart strategy and understanding that this is trust based, people trust me, and I will go to their homes and be good with their household items and I am also fluent both in English and in Danish and I am a kind person I think… (C11 male non-ethnic Dane)

The cleaner himself refers to his behavior as a strategy, leaving no room for misinterpretation of his motives when doing this. He actually went on to claim that the social and emotional skills he possesses make it unfair for most cleaners to compete with him in terms of ratings. Nevertheless, this exact claim highlights how some forms of everyday resistance are so individual that they augment inequalities between platform housecleaners with diverse skillsets.

Before concluding this subsection, one more practice of deception I encountered in my fieldwork is the recreation of cleaners' profiles. One of the veteran housecleaners among my informants narrated how people whose profiles had received a negative rating or ratings and were thus deprioritized in the platform ranking, opted to delete their account and start again with a new profile (C19). Apparently, one of the most popular platforms in Denmark allowed this course of action. This means that there was no automated check of whether a profile under the same personal identification profile had previously existed. This sounds plausible, especially since, when interviewing a former employee in the customer service department of this platform (E4), they implied that background checks on housecleaners' data, criminal records etc. were mainly confined to having the cleaners tick a box that they comply with the terms and conditions.

6.4.3 Feigned ignorance

When booking a cleaner, the clients must provide an address and, of course, suggest a duration for the cleaning, corresponding to the size of the house (or the rooms to be cleaned). One specific platform features a tool where the client enters the square meters of their house, and the platform automatically suggests the minimum time needed for the cleaning. A widespread phenomenon is that clients provide a fake account of their home's size to book a cleaner for minimum hours and therefore minimum cost. Then, when cleaners show up at the house, they try to convince them to work more intensively, often employing the argument that another cleaner had managed to clean the house within the initially agreed duration[29]. The ever-present menace of a bad rating if the cleaner fails to complete the tasks in time adds to such increased pressure. Platform housecleaners have two ways of

[29] In the micro-world of platform housecleaning in Denmark, there is very often a tug-of-war of deception between cleaners and clients.

protecting themselves against such deceptive clients' strategies. The first way is by checking the square meters of the client's house in the Danish Building and Housing Registry (BBR). The BBR dataset is openly accessible to everyone. This practice is common among cleaners who work through platforms for a longer period.

> When I'm bored, when I'm at home and feeling vengeful, I will take these addresses from the bid (here she means the procedure where the platform books a cleaner for the client) and I look them up in the registry, and I say yes, well, here's half an hour less (half an hour too little) … Well, I have everything calculated in hours. Often it is an hour less than people book, like according to the size. (C1 female migrant)

Only a few of the cleaners who resort to checking up houses' size against booked hours decide to negotiate with clients, thus revealing to clients that they are aware of their deceitful intentions. As discussed in the Facebook group, most cleaners decide to reject these bookings altogether, considering such clients to be untrustworthy. However, both the cleaners who accept and negotiate, and those who reject these bookings, work their way around revealing the true reasons to the customers. A migrant housecleaner narrated how she pretends not to know that the house is bigger than the client claims and uses communicational skills to ensure that she will work only for the duration of the booking, regardless of how many rooms she manages to clean (C4). In these cases, workers resort to feigned ignorance to avoid initiating arguments with customers, which can lead to bad ratings after the cleaning is concluded. Nevertheless, rejecting these bookings causes friction with platforms' customer service departments, as I presented in the previous chapter.

When such issues involving house sizes arose in the Facebook group, customer service employees suggested that the cleaners communicate with the customers to negotiate a prolongation of the duration of the cleaning. Most cleaners, though, prefer not to do this and there have been posts in the group asking for the platform to perform checks on the house sizes stated by clients. To avoid more conflicts with platform customer service departments because of clients protesting about such rejections, cleaners feign that they reject these bookings for other reasons.

The second way to find out if a customer is lying is only available to the users of the platform housecleaners' WhatsApp group, where there is a continuously updated blacklist of deceitful customers (C23). As mentioned in a previous section, the group comprises Spanish-speaking Latin Americans, for whom navigating the BBR, which is in Danish, might be challenging. Regardless of whether cleaners find out about these clients' tactics through the WhatsApp group or the BBR, they mostly react to this with feigned ignorance.

6.4.4 Slander

Finally, one more everyday practice of workers' resistance is slander. According to Scott (1985), peasants who feel too weak to openly confront landowners and rural elites, resort to defamation and character assassination of their opponents. The peasants' inability to impose material sanctions on their exploiters lead peasants to sanction them symbolically through slander. In the case of Danish housecleaning platforms, slandering refers to cleaners talking about platform work in a degrading way to highlight what they feel is unjust and problematic in relation to platforms and clients. Perhaps one of the most obvious acts of defamation is the willingness of several cleaners to participate in my research. By participating, they wanted to express and share widely their discontent with some aspects of platform work, or even this whole business model altogether (e.g., C1; C16; C18; C19).

Referring to her clients' negative reaction when she chose to raise her hourly fees, a young housecleaner said that

> I kind of wished that (housecleaning platform name) were the bad guys and the customers would only like feel empathetic about me and clearly more see where the money would go, and I wouldn't have the responsibility to explain this to them […] Sometimes it seems like… I end up like the bad guy for trying to earn minimum wage, which is insane actually. (C16 female Dane)

In this quote, the cleaner protests about how unclear it is to customers that the hourly fee of the housecleaners is not net payment but includes platform fees and insurance payments, while social security contributions, pension contributions and holiday pay savings are covered by the cleaner at

their own will. According to her, platforms should inform the clients more clearly that these amounts are to be paid by the cleaners and are not paid by the platform. This way, clients may understand that what they consider to be a cheap price means that cleaners are heavily underpaid. Here, C16 wishes to criticize both the clients for being ignorant of what their payment covers but also the platform for concealing the true costs that platform cleaners shoulder on their own. Later in her interview, she proceeds to make more defamatory comments.

> I couldn't be the CEO of the platform. I wouldn't think that it was ethical what I'm doing… I couldn't sleep well at night knowing that I am not like making a safety net for my employees, I don't know if (they) really thinks that it is ethical or if (they) just ignores it, I don't know… (C16 female Dane)

Here, the cleaner does not make any claim towards misclassification of platform work. Her reference to "employees" is an expression of the power asymmetry between management and cleaners and the management's unwillingness to openly admit that only a small fraction of what clients pay corresponds to what cleaners are paid net at that time.

Unlike C16, who criticized platform work in a more implicit way, other cleaners admitted more openly their intention to speak up against employment conditions in platform housecleaning by participating in my research.

> My experience was so negative that when I saw your post on Facebook, I thought OK I have an opportunity to speak out a little bit about what happened, and I think it is just a constructive approach […] and I wanted to participate because of that. (C18 female migrant)

> I think that it is important what you are doing, because even though I do this work and I work as a freelancer on the platform, I remember how bad it is for everybody literally, so I am not blind to it. So, I think it is very important what you do. (C19 female migrant)

These two quotes share a common reasoning, which displays how everyday forms of resistance contain the embryonic form of collective organization (cf. Atzeni 2010). Both cleaners share their

experiences with a focus on how their defamation of platform work can help to improve employment conditions for platform housecleaners by raising public awareness.

Another form of slandering as an everyday practice of resistance is the besmirching of clients and their behavior in collective fora for cleaners' communication. Both in the Facebook group and the WhatsApp group, chats are replete with comments criticizing the ways in which clients devaluate cleaners and their work, often followed by examples of such behaviors. According to C19, similar comments were shared in one of the few times that several cleaners organized an in-person social meeting through the Facebook group. There, the cleaners got to meet each other and discuss multiple issues. Collective organizing or claims were not discussed, however cleaners shared short personal accounts of bad experiences they had had with customers (C19). Moreover, in the roundtable discussion I organized during the Welfare after Digitalization Conference in 2022, a participating platform housecleaner took the opportunity to defame platforms and customers by sharing her personal experiences (Floros 2023). Finally, even cleaners who stated that their participation in my research was purely informational and they were curious to hear my questions, at some point employed slandering to make their accounts more vivid, as was the case with C11, who wished to stress how unfair it is to work without being able to receive sick pay.

> (Platforms) give you the opportunity to make some money, as long as you are healthy and strong, but if you are not, then you can go fuck yourself. (C11 male non-ethnic Dane)

The above quote comes from a worker who grew up in Denmark and is aware of the universal character of the welfare state. His defamatory words aim at pinpointing the unfairness experienced by platform housecleaners when it comes to losing their income because of sickness and the circumvention of typical employment protection inherent in platform work.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I employed the framework of everyday forms of resistance to analyze the everyday experiences of platform housecleaners in Denmark. Consequent to my non-fatalistic analysis of precarity, I showed that resistance is present in the strategies, practices, and everyday behavior of

cleaners, despite the lack of an organized, collective and conflictual form of resistance. Even though platform housecleaning provides a lifeline to various – mainly migrant – workers, it remains a business model tailored to the needs of Danish households, Danish consumers, and the Danish welfare state: Households enjoy easy access to a flexible labor force, consumers get tax returns on cleaning and the welfare state benefits from the taxation of cleaners, who are provided with very few benefits in return. Nevertheless, this does not mean that workers passively accept and comply with all aspects of this model. On the contrary, they very often fake such compliance and assume practices that aim at imminent, personal gains. Housecleaning platform work in Denmark is thus a dynamic outcome of an ongoing conflictual process between housecleaners' practices, platforms' strategies, customers' choices, and public policies, which all strive towards fulfilling their own interests.

This chapter takes a step beyond existing accounts in Platform Labor Studies, which either focus on resistance as a collectively organized process (e.g., Marrone & Finotto 2019) or stress the overwhelming power asymmetries and portray platforms as possessing hegemonic power (e.g., Griesbach et al. 2019), which, in turn, leads to implicit or explicit worker compliance (e.g., Bucher et al. 2021). By analyzing everyday practices employing Scott's (1985) framework, I have showcased workers' resistance within platform housecleaning in Denmark, as a low-key confrontation existing in less explicit and pronounced forms. Putting everyday forms of platform housecleaners' resistance in the spotlight is intended to advance understandings of platform work as a site where hegemonic despotism exerted by platforms dictates working conditions (cf. Purcell & Brook 2022). In this sense, platform housecleaning is very different to other forms of location-based platform work, such as food delivery and ridehailing. However, the existence of such resistance does not preclude that it will consequently lead to emancipatory effects. On the contrary, the individual expression of everyday forms of resistance – especially deception and false compliance – tends to reinforce the myth of housecleaning portrayed as non-work or help, which leads to further devaluation of such labor, obstructing collective claims for better payment and working conditions (cf. Gruszka et al. 2022). As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the need to collectively organize and voice such claims is balanced by individual self-help and the existence of informal networks that improve workers' chances for obtaining a better and more stable income.

The lack of collectively organized forms of resistance does not mean that solidarity among cleaners is absent. Contrary to institutional depictions of platform housecleaning in Denmark as a site where competitive conditions prevail (e.g., Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020b), my research reveals a different picture; one where bonds of solidarity are developing, especially between workers of the same origin and gender. Here, we witnessed how Latin American female housecleaners discuss and solve issues regarding their work in a self-organized WhatsApp group. The ways in which these women use social media groups for purposes of self-empowerment, safety at work, and creating a sense of community, classify such groups as a form of embryonic solidarity among workers (cf. Atzeni 2010). Unlike the WhatsApp group, the platform-owned Facebook group falls short of qualifying as a site where workers' solidarity is expressed. This group, viewed through the lens of workerism and AoM, is a surveilled site of contestation, which in various ways acts as a pressure valve and substitutes traditional channels for acquiring employment-related information and denouncing malpractice such as labor unions. The Facebook group promotes the individualization of platform housecleaners while also providing resources for workers to deal with problems on their own. Resolving problems alone rather than delegating solutions to traditional labor unions also relates to the emancipatory potential of governmental precarization, which I discuss in the final chapter of this thesis.

The analysis in this chapter also indicates that most platform housecleaners engage in platform labor while being conscious of its traits. When commenting upon how the platform business model works, several of my interviewees tried to convince me about how inequalities and precarity are part and parcel of exclusionary policies targeting migrants in the Global North and how platforms' management practices are to be expected in neoliberal regimes. Such accounts, as well as everyday forms of resistance, show that workers' participation in the platform labor market should not be viewed through the Marxist lens of false consciousness. Platform housecleaners do not passively and fatalistically accept the terms imposed to them by platforms and the Danish state, but consciously try to resist them in search of immediate individual gains.

Resistance in its everyday forms is broad in its conceptualization and at times difficult to discern. Nevertheless, it is a very useful concept, both analytically and pragmatically, as resistance takes part

in the process of actively shaping an idealized system (in this case platform housecleaning) within the specific social and institutional settings where this system is being used (cf. Timmons 2003). My argument in this chapter is that platform housecleaning in Denmark cannot be holistically analyzed without considering workers' resistance to this business model. To capture the subtle forms this resistance assumes, I employed and adjusted Scott's (1985) definition of everyday forms of peasant resistance, to accommodate the realities of platform housecleaners in Denmark. My adjustment of Scott's conceptual boundaries is consistent with scrutinizing repertoires of opposition in novel settings of digitalized and digitally mediated work (cf. Bélanger and Thuderoz 2010), where management is enhanced with algorithmic tools. In this sense, my argument regarding resistance also relates to challenging algorithmic management as an omnipotent technocentric practice that is part of the analysis of my empirical material in the following chapter.

I would like to conclude this chapter by underlining that focusing on everyday forms of platform housecleaners' resistance does not imply that means and strategies of collective resistance are mutually exclusive with such everyday forms. Nevertheless, the inexistence of more cohesive forms of collective resistance (cf. Però 2019), despite individual resistance and the existence of informal solidarity networks such as the WhatsApp group, calls for further research on how and if the goal of platform housecleaners' collective organization can be reached in Denmark and elsewhere.

CHAPTER 7

Minor algorithmic management of platform housecleaning in Denmark

7.1 Introduction

In the chapter on the flexibility/precarity nexus, I elaborated upon how workers' experiences of platform housecleaning are co-constructed by various factors, such as workers' conscious choices to accept precarious employment conditions, Danish labor, tax and migration legislation, and platforms' algorithmic management. According to Lee et al. (2015: p. 1603), what constitutes algorithmic management are "software algorithms assuming managerial functions and surrounding institutional devices that support algorithms in practice" (Lee et al. 2015: p. 1603). Platform labor studies have engaged extensively with algorithmic management of work (e.g., Wood et al. 2019; Kusk & Bossen 2022; Wiener et al. 2023), however, to date, detailed accounts on aspects of algorithmic management in housecleaning platforms are more limited (Ticona et al. 2018; Gerold et al. 2022; Fetterolf 2022). The reason for this is twofold. On the one hand, ridehailing, food delivery and crowdwork platforms employ more complex and sophisticated software algorithms in real-time to allocate, control, optimize, evaluate, and compensate work. This makes these platforms more challenging to investigate for researchers of algorithmic management, in contrast to housecleaning platforms that do not usually perform real-time monitoring of work and are simply considered online marketplaces for matchmaking. On the other hand, issues of fieldwork access make it difficult to draw overall conclusions on how algorithmic management plays out in platform housecleaning. Obtaining data both from developers or managers on how algorithms are constructed and from workers of the same platform on how they perceive and are affected by algorithmic management can prove very difficult.

As I have presented in the introduction of my theoretical framework, in this thesis I take Lee et al.'s (2015) conceptualization of algorithmic management as a point of departure. In this chapter, I delve deeper into how (and if) algorithmic management of housecleaning platform work in Denmark serves

the purpose of its developers. I achieve this by elaborating on what is prioritized by the matching algorithm, what are the "institutional devices" – according to Lee et al.'s (2015) definition – supporting algorithmic management, and how workers perceive and react to it.

As all definitions of algorithmic management (or algorithmic control) in platform work originate from research on ridehailing, food delivery or crowdwork platforms (e.g., Lee et al. 2015; Rosenblat & Stark 2016; Möhlmann & Zalmanson 2017; Griesbach et al. 2019; Jarrahi et al. 2021), it is reasonable to hypothesize that thinking with this concept in the case of housecleaning platforms can be theoretically reconstructive (cf. Burawoy 1998). By theoretically reconstructive, I mean that thinking with this concept when investigating housecleaning platforms can potentially add nuance and novel angles of vision to the theoretical understanding of algorithmic management. In my analysis, I employ Cindi Katz's (1996) notion of minor theory to challenge technocentric approaches to algorithmic management and foreground the subtleties of the interwoven human and nonhuman management practices existing in platform housecleaning in Denmark. My reasoning for thinking with minor theory is that – especially in combination with Lee et al.'s (2015) definition – it affords the necessary analytical openness to deterritorialize algorithmic management beyond the technological realm of the algorithm *per se*[30]. Moreover, minor theory's engagement with knowledge stemming from everyday practices of marginalized subjects "opens many spaces of betweenness from which to imagine, act, and live things differently" (Katz 2017: p. 597). This is the core of my social and scientific interest, as presented in the introductory and methodological chapters.

In the following sections of this chapter, I showcase what constitutes algorithmic management in the case of housecleaning platforms in Denmark and what role it is intended to perform. Next, I present available data on the prioritizations of platforms' matching algorithms and analyze which institutional devices support algorithms in the Danish case. Following that, I build on housecleaners' interviews

[30] Jarrahi et al. (2020) introduce the concept of platformic management to extend algorithmic management's focus beyond the algorithms and account for how working conditions, employment relations and workers' autonomy are also impacted by platform companies' policies, and not just the algorithm. By combining minor theory and algorithmic management, I take one step further – beyond the algorithm and the platform – to underline the role of policymaking and the institutions of the Danish state in shaping algorithmic management.

and insight from the Facebook group to discern effects of algorithmic management on workers' behavior, before analyzing my overall findings through the prism of minor theory.

7.2 What is algorithmic in management of platform housecleaning in Denmark?

Most definitions of what constitutes algorithmic management are relatively broad, in order to include the various traits of such management. Regardless of their broadness, they are, of course, all premised on the fact that a certain algorithmic component is present in the automated execution of some form of managerial work. The effects of algorithms in everyday human life have caused growing concern in recent years, given the centrality of computers, smartphones and all sorts of digital data processing in every aspect of it (Kitchin 2017). Algorithms can be simply defined in computer science terms as computational steps that transform a set of values – input – into a specific output (Seaver 2019). However, critical algorithm scholars suggest that algorithms be treated as "multiples", i.e., unstable objects that are enacted in various ways in practice, according to the people engaging with them (Seaver 2017; cf. Kitchin 2017). According to this line of thought, algorithmic management is not to be viewed as a predefined computational process driven by a black-boxed recipe, but as a dynamic sociotechnical phenomenon with multiple entanglements beyond the algorithm *per se*. A Danish labor union representative I interviewed framed the same kind of reasoning in their own words, while answering a question irrelevant to technical details or algorithms.

> Understanding how algorithms can create certain systemic atmospheres and environments that induce workers to act in their own disinterest, that is the biggest challenge of the digital work platforms. (E5 union representative)

Here, the union representative refers to the ways in which algorithmic software is designed to produce specific work behaviors. However, their choice of words, such as systemic atmospheres and environments, indicates that there are more factors co-producing these behaviors, beyond the way the algorithm is constructed.

7.2.1 Constructing algorithms

Nonetheless, adopting a broader perspective on what constitutes algorithmic management does not render the development of the algorithm of secondary importance. On the contrary, knowing the set of values that constitutes the input to the algorithm assists in understanding the aims that management is trying to accomplish. During my fieldwork, I was able to obtain information on how the profiles' prioritization algorithm works in two of the platforms I investigated. In the first case, my information derives from platform walkthroughs and the observation of my own fake profile as a worker and how visible (prioritized) it was within a period of two months, after I signed up with the platform. In this case, my knowledge is limited and speculative, given also that the platform's managers and customer service never responded when I contacted them, which might have helped me obtain more information. In the second case, though, the manager straightforwardly shared some parameters that weighed more in prioritization of profiles. Further information on parameters comes from the algorithm's developer, who shared this information in the Facebook group.

In the first platform, there are two different possibilities for increasing the visibility of cleaners. The first is prioritization of the profiles in customers' searches and the second is direct messaging from the platform to customers looking for a cleaner. In the first case, a safe deduction is that ratings are not enough on their own to prioritize a profile. On March 2022, I logged on to the platform with my customer profile and initiated a search for a cleaner living in a twenty-kilometer radius from Copenhagen city center. I was presented with over three hundred workers' profiles that qualified for my search. The underlying logic of the ranking algorithm for the cleaners was hard to grasp, as prioritization definitely did not follow the ratings. Some profiles on the first page scored only a 4.5/5 rating, while others that appeared on the third page had a 5-star rating from various reviews. Other factors that seem to feed into the algorithm are response rates and recent activity. I deduced this from how my own fake worker's profile appeared in the search. One week after I signed up as a worker, my profile in the exact same search came up 189th in the ranking. Two weeks later, during which my worker's profile displayed no activity, I was relegated to 267th in the ranking. Given that my hourly fee, proximity to the address of the gig, and non-premium status of my account had remained

the same over these weeks, it is rather safe to assume that being active on the platform is rewarded by the ranking algorithm. One more piece of information that appears when browsing for cleaners and probably affects rankings is whether the cleaner has a verified email address and mobile phone. Among the profiles in the ranking, those with verified contact details, as a rule of the thumb, appeared higher than those without. Nevertheless, it could be the case that cleaners who are into constructing a flawless profile, by verifying their details and paying for the premium subscription, are also the ones most active on the platform in their quest for bookings.

The second possibility for a housecleaner's profile to become more visible is through the automated emails sent by the platform to customers, which promote new members/housecleaners. During my membership as a customer, I received eight such emails in my inbox over a period of forty-two days. Each email suggested six new cleaners in my area. All but one of these messages were sent out between 22.17 and 22.26, both on weekdays and weekends. This indicates that the procedure for sending them out is automated and there is some prioritization regarding which names appear, rather than a one-off presentation of new cleaners. I deduced this from the appearance of my fake cleaner's profile in the emails I received as a customer. One day after setting up my profile as a cleaner, the platform's algorithm included it in the email sent to my customer's profile. However, that only happened once. Yet, there were four cleaners' profiles which appeared two to four times in these emails. Two of these profiles also featured in the same email as my profile, which means that it is not simply the most recently added workers that show up in these emails. More factors come into play. An informed speculation is that cleaners who pay for the premium subscription are prioritized over those who do not. When I tried to send a message from my customer profile to my cleaner profile through the link provided in the email, I was automatically informed that I must buy premium for this to happen. Since the platform's direct income is subscription-based, it is only natural that its algorithmic management targets prompting all users to pay for subscriptions. Another example of this is that the system allowed various premium cleaners to contact me as a customer after I had advertised a task, however I could not message them back or read their full messages unless I paid for premium membership. Although this function might not be algorithmic *per se*, it is part of the overall strategy broadly conceptualized as algorithmic management.

Although it is impossible to pinpoint the exact variables that feed into the ranking algorithm in the case of the first platform, my research on the second platform revealed more concrete details. During the interview, the platform's manager openly shared what was prioritized in the ranking algorithm.

> We have a very busy formula, where the most important criterion is that when you look for a (cleaner)[31] as a booker, the (cleaner) that will pop up first is the one closest to you, because we know that (cleaners) that can easily go to a cleaning job they will be more likely to actually want to keep cleaning, because it is convenient for them. (E1 platform manager)

The manager went on to elaborate on how proximity was followed in importance by ratings and then by the price set by cleaners. Here, they did not mention if cheaper or more expensive cleaners are prioritized. After conducting various searches myself, I deduced that average and higher prices are prioritized, since only a few very cheap cleaners were visible in the first pages. Nevertheless, the manager has stated in communication with public authorities that cheaper prices are prioritized by the algorithm. Accepting their word, this highlights the complexity of prioritizations in the algorithmic output, since very cheap cleaners appear quite low in searches. The manager acknowledged that ratings are a tricky part of the formula because customers are not so consistent with rating cleaners, and this affects the input to the algorithm. Therefore, the company had to iterate on this.

> It is difficult for new (cleaners) to get bookings, since they don't have any ratings. It's like the hen and the egg issue, so we are trying to solve that. It's not easy, people say it's just cleaning, but we say it's rocket science making the cleaning market work. (E1 platform manager)

Reading between the lines of this quote, in accordance with the rest of the interview, it becomes apparent that the platform is interested in maintaining as many cleaners as possible active in its service. This is vital for the on-demand model it promotes, as it needs several cleaners to always be available. For this to happen, it is crucial that cleaners get some initial cleanings to reinforce their

[31] Here I have changed the way the manager refers to the cleaners, because it openly relates to the company's identity.

attachment to the platform. In order to ensure that cleaners without reviews and ratings are also visible in customer searches, the platform also imports other values into the algorithm.

As another manager of the platform revealed in the Facebook group, values that help cleaners reach to top of the search box include speed of accepting bookings proposed by customers, speed of replying to messages sent by customers, and cleaners regularly updating their calendars on the platform. All these parameters are meant to favor cleaners who are consistent in their relations with customers and the platform, so that they appear higher in customer searches. These six components of the ranking algorithm (proximity, ratings, price, acceptance rate and speed, reply rate and speed, calendar updating) demonstrate the multiple roles that developers have inscribed in algorithmic management.

These roles are as follows. First, management wants to "tie" the workers to the platform to sustain a necessary pool of housecleaners. The ranking algorithm supports this by creating a balance between rewarding cleaners with good ratings and steady clientele and facilitating visibility – and thus bookings – for platform newcomers who are active and speedy in their negotiations with customers. In the next section, I showcase how human management also assists towards the same end. A second role is the evaluation of the workers' cleaning performance. This function is outsourced to customers, who rate and review the cleaners. Ratings are both introduced into the ranking algorithm, and – together with the reviews – are accessible to prospective clients during their search. As I demonstrated in the chapter on flexibility and precarity and further discuss in the section on anticipatory compliance, ratings have a disciplining and performative effect on cleaners, exactly because they contribute to algorithmic management. A third role is ensuring optimal matchings between customers and cleaners, which guarantees the maximization of successful task completion. What is important here is that as many customers as possible can have their expectations fulfilled when searching for a cleaner through the platform, so that the company expands its clientele and generates more profit. Fulfilling customers' expectations means that the cleaner will respond swiftly and accept the booking, will be on time and perform well, and will display consistency if the customer wants regular cleanings.

Nevertheless, the assumptions inscribed into the ranking algorithm (as well as in automated sanctioning procedures, such as deactivations, multiple messages addressing cancellations etc., which I presented in the fifth chapter) are not sufficient on their own to ensure that the imagined users (housecleaners) will adhere to the script of the developers (cf. Akrich 1992; Pelizza & Van Rossem 2023). In the case of housecleaning platforms in Denmark, algorithmic management must be actively supported by different institutional devices.

7.2.2 The role of institutional devices

In Lee and colleagues' paper defining algorithmic management as "software algorithms assuming managerial functions and surrounding institutional devices that support algorithms in practice" (Lee et al. 2015: p. 1603), a certain vagueness surrounds precisely which institutional devices might be in focus. The authors have backgrounds in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW), and their work is oriented towards optimizing cooperation between workers and intelligent machines, so that work can also be meaningful and satisfying; not simply efficient (ibid.: p. 1611). Albeit not explicitly stated in the paper, according to their argumentation, institutional devices seem to be online cooperative sensemaking communities, corporate transparency protocols, and humans-in-the-loop to ensure that a humane work pace, workers' emotions and existence of non-economic motivations are respected. Critical scholars drawing on this early work prefer to refer to devices in more literary terms, and consider censors, geolocation systems and surveillance programs as institutional devices collecting data and assisting algorithmic management in practice (e.g., Kellog et al. 2020; Newlands 2021). In my analysis, I adopt a wider definition of what an institutional device is. I interpret 'institutional' to include both corporate and public institutions and, inspired by STS and its focus on non-human agents, I expand my conceptualization of devices to signify more than technical artefacts. For instance, I include reports and policy documents, as well as human/non-human assemblages, such as customer support services and public agencies. Below, I underline why these institutional devices are a *sine qua non* for successful implementation of algorithmic management in Danish housecleaning platforms (cf. Stark & Pais 2020).

7.2.2.1 Customer support

In the case of Danish housecleaning platforms, the main institutional device assisting algorithmic management is platforms' customer support department. All platforms I investigated feature a customer support function or department, the existence of which is mentioned in the interfaces and terms and conditions documents of the platforms. The volume of people working for customer service depends on the platform's turnover and operational model. The customer support of the subscription-based platform is probably the smallest and least hands-on of the three. None of my interviewees who had worked through this platform ever had in-person contact with customer support. All messages they received were automated and sent in specific time intervals during the day (e.g., notifications for new tasks were sent around 07.20, 11.20 and 15.20[32]). My personal experience from communicating with the platform through my fake customer's and worker's profiles corroborated this. Even when I got expelled as a customer from the platform, shortly after inviting more than two hundred cleaners to interviews, the message informing me was obviously an automated template. When sending the invitations, I was mindful to mask my contact details so that my messages would not get flagged[33], which suggests that a human employee in customer support either received a cleaner's complaint about my messages or was alerted by their software regarding my multiple messaging. The human(s) running the platform's customer service cannot be reached on the phone, and handling of communication, marketing and complaints is carried out through emails and a complex set of assisting technologies, such as Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), tracking technologies etc.

Regarding the other two platforms under investigation, where the platforms' income is commission based, they both feature a very active customer support department. By active I mean that they interfere a lot in the algorithmically managed booking procedure. As I have already demonstrated in

[32] When summertime started in late March, emails were sent respectively at around 08.20, 12.20 and 16.20. This also shows that the procedure is automated rather than part of an employee's routine tasks executed roughly at the same time every day.

[33] Both customers and cleaners cannot upload contact details in their profiles. The platform's software detects phone numbers and emails included in profiles and censors them. I bypassed this by writing my email adding spaces and substituting @ with [at].

previous chapters, support staff on both these platforms, a) supervise automated messaging addressed to cleaners in the form of nudges, deactivation threats, and automatic deactivations b) resort to in-person communication with cleaners through phone calls, text messages and personal emails on the same grounds, and c) mediate disputes and conflicts between customers and cleaners on several issues. The reason for such interference is to guarantee customers' satisfaction with the provided service.

> We were mediating the contact between clients and (cleaners), so they would always call us if they had a complaint. And we also tried to teach them sometimes that they should call the (cleaner), because that was not scalable either, if we had to take all the complaints and stuff like that… So, we tried to teach them, but it was very difficult, because… what creates trust with the (cleaners) was also our brand, so of course they called us as if we were the boss. (E4 customer support)

In this quote, we witness how algorithmically managed ratings and matchings are not enough on their own to provide smooth transactions of housecleaning at scale. The problems deriving from last-minute cancellations, accidents and damage, disagreements on quality of service etc. cannot simply be resolved through ratings and automated messages. This is why institutional devices such as customer support are vital for supporting algorithmic management.

Customer support is an entanglement of human and nonhuman actors, aligned towards the production of the same outcome. This entanglement is manifested in the accounts of my interviewees (e.g., C1, C4, C6, C7, C17, C22), who described the existence of alternating interventions (e.g., phone calls, deactivations, messages) from humans and automated processes, as well as in the words of customer service employees themselves.

> We had like a system where we kept track of it, so we could see, for example, that this person had three complaints in a month, then we would consider whether or not we should continue the partnership. (E4 customer support)

Here, the former platform employee explains how customer support personnel were assisted by software in their task of deleting[34] unwanted cleaners from the platform. The same software assists them in deciding which cleaners are offered a booking when customers choose the option of letting the platform pick a cleaner for them. The standard procedure when the platform makes a selection is as follows. Customer support posts the address, desired price and timeslot for the booking in the Facebook group for all to see, cleaners send messages bidding for the booking and then customer support notifies one of them, assigning the booking. Many cleaners' first impression is that this is carried out with a first-come first-served policy, however, customer service has specific criteria for this bidding process.

> Sometimes we would give it (the bid) to a more new one… to get them started on the platform, if we saw potential in them, […] and we wanted to give the booker a great experience, so we were biased when we chose helpers. […] if a customer had really bad experiences, we would probably choose someone we trusted a little bit more […] if it was someone who would pay 170[35] we were more likely to give this to someone who was more experienced […] we had like a good idea of who were good cleaners and who were less… (E4 customer support)

This quote demonstrates how customer support assists in fulfilling the overall goals of algorithmic management. Depending on the price of the booking, they chose to either "optimize" the matching by assigning an experienced cleaner or "promote" a newcomer to facilitate their attachment to the platform. As my interviewee said, ratings and reviews were not enough on their own to showcase the quality of a cleaner, as most customers failed to engage with ratings. Therefore, customer support

[34] The choice of words is of the essence when people with contrasting points of view describe housecleaners' dismissals from platforms. Managers and supporters (e.g., E4 above) use terms such as 'terminate partnership' or 'discontinue collaboration' to stress the self-employment of cleaners. On their side, many cleaners refer to deletions of platform accounts as 'firing', getting 'thrown out' (terms used in Facebook) or 'dropping of profiles' (C6), which indicates their understanding of being in a subordinate position. The Danish Competition and Consumers Authority decision, which deliberated that platform housecleaners are not employees, states that platforms do not have a 'definite right of dismissal' but can proceed to 'exclusions' or 'disabling of profiles' (Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020a). Regardless of legal specificities and terms, the power asymmetry between platforms and cleaners is evident when it comes to the sanctioning power of housecleaning platforms in Denmark.

[35] DKK 170 per hour was a price above the average in the period the support staff member is referring to.

interferes with the rating process, by assigning bookings priced above the average to consistent cleaners who have not yet managed to convince their other customers to rate them and remind their new customers to rate them. It is also in this way that customer support acts in a complementary and supportive role in algorithmic management.

7.2.2.2 Other institutional devices

Another device assisting in worker management is a simple online tool embedded in the platform interface to aid customers when performing their search. This tool converts the customer's house size into a suggested duration of cleaning. As mentioned in the previous chapter, several customers manipulate the size to convince cleaners that the task can be performed in the given duration of the booking. Nevertheless, even when customers are honest when using the tool, this can lead to complications.

> Once clients have entered the size, they assume that the assigned time is sufficient since "the system said so", which makes negotiations very difficult. (Platform name) emphasizes that (cleaners) need to communicate with clients about sufficient time for tasks. Clients are usually inclined to believe the platform over a cleaner. The algorithm does not take into account that larger houses usually have huge kitchens and several bathrooms, all of which need more time for cleaning than plain floor area. It's as if we're destined to fail. (C1 female migrant)

Analyzing the above quote points towards various directions. First, it is interesting how the cleaner uses the term algorithm, although no algorithm-related question has been posed and this tool is a simple converter and not an algorithm. This implies that cleaners confuse the algorithmic with the non-algorithmic features of their automated management, which justifies Lee et al.'s (2015) conceptualization, seeing these two features as inseparable elements of algorithmic management. Second, the quote shows how this supposedly neutral intermediary platform, according to their narrative, introduces a feature that promotes intensification of work for cleaners. This happens because once cleaners accept these bookings with poorly estimated durations, they need to live up to customer expectations of fast and efficient cleaning (cf. Bucher et al 2021). Otherwise, their platform

reputation can be jeopardized by bad ratings, leading to their deprioritization in the algorithmic matching process. Third, the quote indicates how platformization of housecleaning transforms the way in which negotiations over this type of work were traditionally performed. In this case, we witness what Flanagan (2019) has suggested to be a shift from dyadic to structural domination, meaning from asymmetrical power relations between cleaners and employers to asymmetrical power relations between cleaners and diffused, decentralized systems of multiple masters (ibid.: p. 71). The words chosen by the cleaner, referring to being destined to fail, highlight how implementing technologies, both algorithmic and not, augments uncertainties for platform housecleaners in Denmark. This adds further precarious elements to housecleaning work.

Another example of a non-algorithmic device supporting algorithmic management is the check-in and check-out function embedded in the platform's app. Cleaners must check in and out when they arrive and complete a booking, respectively. This feature does not calculate the duration of the cleaning and subsequent payment, but merely serves as confirmation to customer support that the cleaning has been performed. Nevertheless, if a cleaner is one minute late in checking in, the check-in function is automatically disabled, and they must contact support by phone to report checking in (C3; C7). This function aims at exerting influence over cleaners' punctuality in carrying out their tasks and assists the platform in surveilling the labor process. The overall aim is fulfilling customers' expectations for optimal services and furthering their consideration of platform housecleaning as an overall seamless experience.

Algorithmic software supported by all these devices is designed to discipline cleaners and optimize the quality of the provided services. However, algorithmic management would be less effective if Danish legislation would acknowledge its application as signifying an employment relationship between the platforms and cleaners. Nevertheless, decisions by the Danish Competition and Consumers Authority deliberated that cleaners in the two biggest Danish housecleaning platforms are not subject to management, supervisory and sanctioning powers of the platform companies (Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020a; 2020b). These decisions have been fiercely criticized by Danish labor unions (E3; E5). A union representative I interviewed reproached the Agency for being

politically prejudiced against presumption of employment for platform workers and against attempts of solo self-employed platform workers to collectively organize (E3). An MP of the governmental coalition in 2020, claimed that these are "political decisions leading to social dumping" (E1). I analyze the union representatives' and politician's assessments of these decisions in the last chapter of this thesis. But my point here is that these decisions are institutional devices that support platforms' algorithmic software in practice. By denying the existence of management of platform housecleaners and downplaying the sanctioning powers of platforms, these decisions endorse the protraction of algorithmic management and establish platform companies' immunity when adopting such organizational models. Moreover, such decisions act preventively towards the potential attempts to collectively organize and voice claims related to their algorithmic management – attempts by not only platform housecleaners, but all platform workers in Denmark.

In the same vein, I consider legislative acts and policymaking documents, which promote and sustain the function of digital housecleaning platforms in Denmark under vague and ambiguous employment relations, as co-constitutive of algorithmic management. The importance of regulatory frameworks is also highlighted in the debates and tensions over the impending EU Directive on platform workers (European Commission 2021), which stresses the controversial nature of platform work in relation to (mis)classification of employment relations, algorithmic management of workers, and diversity in how local public policies affect platform labor markets (e.g., Stark & Pais 2020; Hooker & Antonucci 2022). Algorithmic management does not exist in a vacuum, nor are the workers nudged, sanctioned, surveilled and controlled by it simply influenced by its technological affordances. The legislative and policymaking framework (presented in chapter three), exclusionary migration and welfare policies (presented in chapters three and four), and the overall precariousness of platform housecleaners' livelihoods (presented in chapter five) are very influential in ensuring that implementation of software algorithms leads to platforms' projected goals of stimulating cleaners' desired behavior. Nevertheless, as presented in chapter six, cleaners refuse to fully adopt this desired behavior and instead employ everyday forms of resistance.

7.3 Is algorithmic management of Danish platform housecleaning omnipotent?

Existing literature often presents algorithmic management as exerting stringent control over platform workers (e.g., Griesbach et al. 2019; Veen et al. 2020). Omnipotence of algorithmic management has been portrayed as *algorithmic despotism* (Griesbach et al. 2019), a *form of biopower* (Walker et al. 2021) or as constituting an *invisible* cage (Rahman 2021)[36]. However, these conclusions are drawn from research on food delivery and crowdworking platforms, where the overall circumstances differ widely from housecleaning platforms. As described in the previous sections of this chapter, algorithmic management of platform housecleaners in Denmark is an outcome of multiple algorithmic and non-algorithmic factors. Its success in guiding cleaners to behave according to the values inscribed in such management is contested. Cleaners adopt a variety of reactions, ranging from pacifying the algorithm – *anticipatory compliance* according to Bucher et al. (2021) – to faking compliance and looking for workarounds to subvert it.

7.3.1 Anticipatory compliance vs non-compliance

Algorithmic management not only defines the prioritization of profiles and the matching procedure. Of equal importance for the success of the platform is its performative effect on housecleaner behavior. STS literature has highlighted the performative effects that algorithms have on the subjects they enact (e.g., Introna 2016). According to Bucher et al. (2021), platform workers try to fathom how algorithmic prioritization and distribution of tasks take place, and then behave accordingly in a quest to benefit from what they presume to be the values that are inscribed in the design of the algorithm. Bucher et al. (2021) describe workers' behavior as *anticipatory compliance practices*. Many of the workers I interviewed have visited the platform as customers to try and make sense of what is

[36] *Algorithmic despotism* suggests that food delivery platform Instacart's algorithmic control over the platform workers' time and activities resembles that of a tyrannical boss (Griesbach et al. 2019: p. 9). Walker and colleagues (2021) define algorithmic management as a *form of biopower*; a dehumanizing process, which takes advantage of the full life spectrum of the workers. The *invisible cage* is a metaphor employed by Rahman (2021) to conceptualize how criteria of algorithmic management – especially evaluation opacity – are so unpredictable that they eradicate worker's ability to meaningfully comprehend and react to them.

prioritized in customers' searches, trying to figure out how they could change their online presence to secure more bookings and thus a better income (e.g., C1; C2; C3; C14; C16; C19).

> I have been checking… I don't know, many times my profile on (platform's name). I think they (prioritization of profiles) are random because I have seen at the beginning in the app people who have good rates and people who just started to work there, so I think it's just random. (C4 female migrant)

The cleaners' thoughts are purely speculative. Most of them believe that it is foremostly good ratings that decide who shows up first in searches. In the above quote we see how the confusion caused by unrated newcomers' profiles appearing high in searches, causes this cleaner to assume that prioritization is random. Nevertheless, later in the interview the same cleaner speaks of the importance of ratings and how hard she strived to convince customers to give her good reviews, on which her platform reputation and consequent success is built. Another cleaner spoke of how she constantly tried to understand what the traits of a prioritized profile might be.

> I think it is probably something about the rankings, it, it must be, but it seems mysterious […] I understand why we should be ranked but again I don't think that it is very see-through (transparent) […] Every time I get a new booking, I wonder why did they choose me? […] I'm having a hard time understanding it and this is kind of stressing because you kind of rely on getting new customers on this information that you don't understand, so yeah… (C16 female Dane)

Here, we witness how lack of transparency and the need to generate income create uncertainty for housecleaners who are trying to live up to what they consider is expected from them. After posing the same question to all my interviewees working through the platform for which the manager disclosed the core of the algorithm's prioritizations, only one cleaner had figured out in correct priority the three main features on which the algorithm was built. This suggests that most of the cleaners adopted anticipatory compliance practices, considering good ratings and cheap hourly fees as their ticket to establishing themselves on the platform. The black boxing of the algorithm makes the ranking of profiles illegible for cleaners, who then attempt to satisfy its presumed prioritizations. Typical

examples of anticipatory compliance include cleaners offering their work at extremely low prices (e.g., C6; C10; C16; C19) and accepting demeaning behaviors or working unpaid overtime to avoid bad ratings (e.g., C6; C17; C19; C23). At the same time, some managers in the Facebook group hinted at how profiles achieve better rankings. These include updating availability in the calendars, replying swiftly to customers, and not rejecting bookings. By giving these hints, managers utilize the performative role of algorithmic software, trying to maximize cleaners' compliance with the projected business model. Sharing these hints provides an illusion of transparency rather than informed knowledge regarding the algorithm. Even when cleaners know what values inform the input to the algorithm, they are unaware of what weighs more or which combination of values creates an optimal output for their ranking.

As presented in the previous section, algorithmic management of housecleaning platforms in Denmark relies heavily on customer service departments and their complementary functions of distributing work and sanctioning cleaners. Lack of transparency is not limited to algorithmic features but is also present in cases where humans-in-the-loop support hybrid forms of human/automated management. A good example of this is the bidding process, where customer support decides which cleaner is assigned a booking. Most interviewees narrated how, when they first signed up with the platform, they were looking at their phones all day, because they believed that the bookings offered through the bidding process were handed out on a first-come first-served basis (e.g., C6; C11; C12). Others believed that selling themselves as optimal matches by referring to proximity or the quality of their work could lead customer service to assign the booking to them (C3). The criteria on which customer support assigns bookings have been widely discussed both in interviews and in the Facebook group. Many Facebook group discussions involve how cleaners can increase their probabilities of getting better ratings and reviews. Tips by experienced cleaners include enhancing communication with the customer and avoiding open confrontation, as well as creating to-do lists before the cleaning to align expectations. When assuming such behavior, cleaners optimize the customer experience, which is one of algorithmic management's goals. Simultaneously though, they add stress and invisible, unpaid work to their own workloads.

Despite being widespread, anticipatory compliance is not the overall rule regarding practices of platform housecleaners in Denmark. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, cleaners also resist their algorithmic management by adopting non-compliant practices. These include setting up new profiles when the original ones end up being rated poorly, attempting to take customers off the platform after the first cleaning, providing false accounts of availability to increase chances of a booking, rejecting bookings that report fake house sizes without negotiating, having a substitute work for them without notifying the platform, creating blacklists of unwanted customers etc. The outcome of these practices is negative for the platforms, as they obstruct the expected smoothness of the service and reduce credibility of the platforms in the eyes of the customers. As I have already presented non-compliant practices in the previous chapter, I do not mean to repeat myself here. I am indicatively referring to these practices to point out that algorithmic management of housecleaning platforms in Denmark is not omnipotent. It can have diverse levels of performative agency on housecleaners' working lives, also in relation to their level of dependency and the temporality of their engagement with platform work. Moreover, housecleaning platforms do not solely rely on algorithmic software and automated tools but on an entanglement of algorithmic and traditional in-person management practices.

7.3.2 Conceptualizing minor algorithmic management

In his account of how food delivery couriers in the UK experience their algorithmic management from the Deliveroo platform, Jamie Woodcock (2020) argues that the alleged omnipresence and efficiency of digital tools and algorithms is more of an illusion, intended to perform a cost-effective method of controlling workers. In a completely different setting and sector such as housecleaning platforms in Denmark, my ethnographic investigation of – predominantly migrant – cleaners' experiences points towards the same conclusion. Housecleaning platforms deploy a wide set of algorithmic and non-algorithmic tools, supported by in person management from human supporters and customers who participate by evaluating provided services. Parallel to that, platform housecleaners' work behavior is highly influenced by the regulatory framework governing migration, welfare and labor in Denmark. Building on my findings and inspired by minor theory (Katz 1996; Katz 2017), I argue that what takes

place in Danish housecleaning platforms is a form of *minor algorithmic management.* Minor here is a play on words combining a literal minor (which signifies low levels of algorithmic complexity and high levels of human management) and a theoretical minor (which signifies a reworking of the major theory of algorithmic management as an omnipotent management practice).

Minor algorithmic management is the entanglement of novel algorithmic and traditional in-person management practices employed by digital housecleaning platforms, aimed at optimizing the extraction of profit from migrant workers, whose employment opportunities are constrained by their socio-legal status. Optimization is pursued through a mix of human and automated/algorithmic management practices that reward or sanction platform housecleaners, according to a diverse set of variables. Simultaneously, optimization is contested by platform housecleaners' everyday work practices. As black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins (2015) suggests, definitions are not perfect final products of analyses, but rather constitute starting points for further investigation. By conceptualizing algorithmic management as minor, I want to draw special attention to the following specificities of domestic platform work and contribute new angles for its scholarly investigation.

First, algorithmic management of housecleaning platforms is not efficient without additional management carried out by humans. Here, the focus is beyond simply acknowledging the often-overlooked roles of humans within technological systems supporting algorithmic management (cf. Irani 2015b; Kusk et al. 2022). *Minor algorithmic management* means underlining the complementary, minor role of algorithmic management in relation to the central role of the human-centered component of management and the indispensability of customer support departments for housecleaning platforms. Customer support not only handles disputes and complaints from customers, but also nudges, sanctions, evaluates and assists cleaners in person, thus supporting the algorithmic software.

Second, following minor theory's aim of unsettling established concepts by introducing new understandings that account for the co-constructing of these concepts by social relations (Katz 2017), *minor algorithmic management* is meant to stress the importance of the intersectional gendered and racialized subjectivities of platform housecleaners. The existence and management of housecleaning

platforms in Denmark can only be efficient in parallel to restrictive migration, labor and welfare policies, which make platform work a desired undertaking for certain categories of migrants. By adding minor to algorithmic management, my conceptualization aims at becoming a constant reminder that minor algorithmic management is underpinned by major social inequalities and political frameworks. Such underpinning suggests that platform housecleaning cannot be regulated irrespective of public policies on these matters.

Third, *minor algorithmic management* challenges the depiction of platform housecleaning as being tightly controlled by despotic software. It is a concept showcasing how the allegedly omnipotent affordances of algorithmic management (supported by human and nonhuman institutional devices) are balanced by migrant housecleaners' agency, resourcefulness and solidarity. Creating this conceptual balance contributes to the framework of non-fatalistic analytics of precarity in platform work. On the one hand, *minor algorithmic management* acknowledges the major social and organizational importance of novel traits of algorithmic management, instead of claiming that platform work is a prolongation of existing forms of insecure entrepreneurial work (e.g., MacDonald & Giazitzoglou 2019). On the other hand, the concept affords a *minor* gaze into the working lives of platform housecleaners, who narrate stories of resistance, "vibrating within the claims" (Katz 2017: p. 598) of major techno-determinist accounts of algorithmic management as the inescapable future of work (e.g., Benlian et al. 2022).

7.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, my analysis departed from the early and highly cited definition of algorithmic management by Lee et al. (2015). A central part of my analysis engaged with expanding this definition by broadening the scope of what should be considered an institutional device supporting algorithms. I argued that the algorithmic matching process is inscribed with housecleaning platform companies' interests and visions of the desired behavior of their labor force, and that the input to the algorithm is prioritized accordingly. However, as Pelizza and Van Rossem (2023) suggest, scripts are merely assumptions that talk more about the intentions of their developers, rather than about the ways in which actual users engage with them. By employing the concept of anticipatory compliance (Bucher

et al. 2021) in the analysis and drawing on findings from previous chapters, I demonstrated how algorithmic management's success in guiding the working behavior of platform housecleaners in Denmark is contingent on various factors and that such management should not be portrayed as omnipotent. Finally, I concluded by defining minor algorithmic management as a concept more apt for describing the multiple entanglements between human and algorithmic management processes and the simultaneous insubordination of migrant platform housecleaners to its specific aims.

My argument is that algorithmic management in domestic work platforms deviates from what it is portrayed to be in policy documents and scholarly contributions that engage with platform work in broader terms (e.g., European Commission 2021; Munkholm et al. 2022); that is, portrayed as a highly sophisticated optimization tool with extensive monitoring capabilities. When algorithmic management is applied as a blanket term signifying all sorts of gig work, the concept lacks the nuance needed for it to function as a rigid tool for analysis. Moreover, when the focus is on the complexity and black boxing of algorithmic management, transparency is presented as the ultimate solution that will allow workers to attain knowledge on the algorithm's workarounds and help them circumvent the pressure exerted by such management. Nevertheless, as presented in this chapter's analysis and argued by other researchers (e.g., Lee et al. 2015), transparency is not a panacea. Disclosure of algorithmic formulas can be overwhelming and incomprehensible for workers. Also, platforms can easily apply small adjustments after such disclosure to ensure that the algorithmic outcome remains in the platforms' best interests.

Finally, by conceptualizing minor algorithmic management, I place emphasis on the human component of management and challenge the technocentric narrative of housecleaning platforms, which present themselves as tech-companies and intermediaries who rely heavily on complex software to achieve optimal matchings of cleaners and customers. This narrative is there to underline the flexible, self-employed nature of platform housecleaning and to obscure "analog" management and sanctioning practices assumed by customer support departments. In this way, platforms eschew the liabilities stemming from being classified as employers or temporary work agencies. As I present in the next chapter, this narrative has also been widely adopted by various Danish policymakers and

stakeholders, who continuously emphasize the positive and innovative features of platform work, and – more precisely – the fact that it can act as a stepping stone for vulnerable groups of workers to enter the labor market.

CHAPTER 8

Imagining platform housecleaning as a stepping stone for migrant workers

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze a recurring hypothesis appearing in policy documents (Regeringen 2017; Danish Government 2019), research papers (Ilsøe & Madsen 2018; Nielsen & Laursen 2020), publicly commissioned reports (Cabi 2021), and my expert interviews (E1; E5; E8; E9). This hypothesis – although articulated with variations – suggests that digital labor platforms in Denmark can act as stepping stones for vulnerable groups of workers to (re)enter the labor market. The variety of assumptions on those who precisely constitute such a vulnerable group range – according to the person or institution invoking this hypothesis – from the underemployed and long-term unemployed to migrant newcomers, long-term recipients of welfare benefits, and people with physical or cognitive disabilities. Different characteristics for each of these groups impede their recruitment in typical employment relations (cf. Cabi 2021). The stepping stone hypothesis has also been invoked internationally, in reports promoting gig work as beneficial for vulnerable platform workers (e.g., Manyika et al. 2015; Minifie & Wiltshire 2016).

My interest in the stepping stone assumption was sparked very early in my PhD research. During the first interview I conducted for this thesis, the manager of one of Denmark's largest housecleaning platforms suggested that its platform acts as a stepping stone into the labor market.

> We have also seen people use our platform when they had anxieties, a lot of people, especially young women who had shitty jobs in cafes and stuff like that… where they had a terrible boss… Doing cleaning for families, seeing the value of your work, actually lifted them up and then they went off to do an education or another full-time job. So, a lot of

> people can actually use the platform as a stepping stone, which is something that we are trying to nurture… (E1 platform manager)

The above quote from the manager came as a comment to a governmental plan of promoting platform work to long-term unemployed citizens, through public Danish unemployment centers. This plan was part of the final report of the Danish Disruption Council (Danish Government 2019). Rereading the report, I realized that there was an excerpt that made the exact same claim: "And for those who struggle to gain a foothold in the labor market, platform work can serve as a stepping stone to more permanent employment" (Danish Government 2019: p. 43). Delving deeper into policy and research papers during my desk-based research, I traced the first – to my knowledge – appearance of this hypothesis in the national "Strategy for Growth through the Sharing Economy" (Regeringen 2017), launched by the Danish government in 2017. Claiming that temporary, part-time, or piecemeal work, which are termed atypical employment compared to typical, full-time jobs, can serve as stepping stones to typical employment is not a novel argument. It has featured extensively in international research on temporary work agencies and subsidized workfare programs over the past thirty years (e.g., Booth et al. 2002; Ichino et al. 2008). However, it is very important to stress that Danish institutional actors have persistently employed this speculative argument, which promotes digital labor platforms without challenging the inequalities and exclusions that platform work creates. Rather than providing a symmetrical picture of the risks and opportunities of platform work, such positive depiction assisted in co-shaping the *sociotechnical imaginary* of the Danish sharing economy[37]. According to Jasanoff, sociotechnical imaginaries are "collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology" (Jasanoff 2015: p. 6).

This chapter therefore begins with a short overview of existing literature on the stepping stone hypothesis for temporary work agencies, workfare programs and platform work, that provides

[37] Kasper Schiølin (2020) refers to an array of imagined futures, such as the formation of the Danish sharing economy, Denmark as a country of innovation and disruption, and Denmark as a global digital frontrunner, which were combined to establish the Danish sociotechnical imaginary of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

context as to how this argument has been historically constructed and epistemologically produced. Next, I draw on Scott et al.'s (2022) concept of *ambiguous liminality* to analyze the platform housecleaners' objectives and aspirations regarding their employment as well as their own perceptions of gig work functioning as a stepping stone. Then, focusing on the stakeholders' opinions, I explore the rationales behind supporting that gig work is beneficial for vulnerable groups of workers. I conclude by discussing how the stepping stone narrative is a foundational part of the creation of the sociotechnical imaginary of the Danish sharing economy and the overall policy of the Danish state, regarding platform work more broadly and platform housecleaning more specifically.

8.2 Uncertain futures: The stepping stone vs dead-end debate in the literature

8.2.1 Temporary work as a stepping stone?

As discussed in chapter five, increased labor market flexibility in the Global North is an outcome of widespread structural reformation of labor market policies over the past two decades of the 20th century, following post World War II trends of promoting stable employment both in Europe and the United States. Flexibility was premised on e.g., curtailment of employment protection systems, a shift towards workfare policies, and the rise of temporary work agencies (Peck & Theodore 2000; Barbieri & Cutuli 2015). This led to increased scientific interest in the effects that these policies had, both macroeconomically and on the level of the individual worker (e.g., Booth et al. 2002; Amuedo-Dorantes et al. 2008). The main question driving research at the individual worker level was whether these newly introduced components of labor market flexibility (temporary jobs, workfare policies, etc.) were beneficial for the workers in the long run, in terms of their prospects for contracting stable, well-paid employment. This question crystallized in the literature as the stepping stone vs dead-end debate (e.g., Booth et al. 2002; de Graaf-Zijl et al. 2011). Filomena and Picchio (2021: p. 1) define this debate as a quest for causal relations between temporary jobs and future employment prospects, "by estimating at individual level the effect of experiencing temporary or atypical jobs on the subsequent career, in terms of employment satisfaction, job stability, and earnings". Many studies with various methodological approaches set out to explore whether temporary work agencies and workfare programs "facilitated or hindered labour market advancement" (Autor & Houseman 2010: p. 97) and

if they were “effective springboards” (Ichino et al. 2008), “stepping stones” (Hveem 2013) or “dead-ends”, “traps” (Scherer 2004) for workers choosing to enter the labor market through them. Filomena and Picchio (2021) provide a detailed review of all relevant articles between 1990 and 2021 and highlight the ambiguity of their results, concluding that the dead-end scenario prevails, albeit slightly, in the literature.

What is particularly interesting is that they discern a pattern, according to which specific research methods and approaches are more likely to support one of the two hypotheses (e.g., the Timing-of-Events method usually supports the stepping stone hypothesis). Factors other than research design affecting the outcomes of these studies include the institutional context and macroeconomic conditions of the country under investigation, but also the period under investigation and the subject of the journal where they were published (ibid.). The data used ranged from different types of public administrative records (e.g., Autor & Houseman 2010) and national longitudinal databases (De Graaf-Zijl et al. 2011; Scherer 2004) to registry data from temporary work agencies combined with surveys (e.g., Ichino et al. 2008).

The above literature reveals that investigating the stepping-stone vs. dead-end binary in temporary work, regardless of the outcome, has been premised on quantitative methods. Precarious work to some extent overlaps with temporary work, however, as Huws et al. remark when discussing the European normative model of work, it “is still counterposed to a normative model of ‘standard’, ‘typical’ or ‘decent’ work, leaving the dominant paradigm more or less intact, though increasingly problematic” (2018: p. 116). They claim that labor market statistics might be useful for discerning trends and providing evidence, nevertheless the binaries used by statisticians for classification reasons fail to capture the heterogeneity of highly diverse European labor markets (ibid.). This claim suggests that even if studies on temporary work could agree (which they do not) on a positive evaluation of labor market outcomes for workers entering the labor market through such precarious employment relations, this seemingly positive result might also bear negative characteristics, which statistics would fail to reveal.

These negative characteristics include transition into low-paid, yet permanent positions or into normatively regular jobs, yet with compromised working conditions. Despite the difficulty or unwillingness to consider such parameters, research on the stepping stone hypothesis has proliferated over the past two decades, also because of explicit or aspirational policymaking ambitions or implications. Almost all papers in Filomena and Picchio's (2021) literature review have policymaking suggestions among their conclusions. Some of these suggestions clearly do not consider the heterogeneity of European labor markets to which Huws et al. (2018) refer. For instance, De Graaf-Zijl et al. conclude that:

> although male ethnic minorities experience a high stepping stone effect on the transition rate to regular work, they rarely flow into temporary jobs, so they do not benefit from the effect. This suggests that policy measures should be taken to stimulate the use of temporary work by ethnic minorities, for example by helping them to register at temporary work agencies (2011: p. 136).

As the analysis by Huws et al. suggests (2018), such bold conclusions are drawn based on rather linear readings of a more complex reality, since 'regular work' in De Graaf-Zijl et al.'s study is defined as simply the opposite of temporary work (2011: p. 118). In other words, this policymaking suggestion does not consider employment conditions, wage levels or skill requirements of the jobs these migrants will transit to after registering at temporary work agencies or concluding workfare programs.

8.2.2 Platform work as a stepping stone?

The stepping stone vs. dead-end hypothesis has gained renewed prominence lately in scholarly research investigating whether labor market integration through location-based digital labor platforms facilitates transition into typical employment. Most of this literature employs ethnographic methods, providing thicker accounts of the phenomenon. This shift to qualitative methods relates to the scarcity of openly available, reliable, non-curated data from platform companies, as presented in the methodological chapter of this thesis. These qualitative studies usually focus on migrant workers, as migrants comprise a big part of the platform labor market, especially in location-based platforms offering housecleaning and food delivery (Barrat et al. 2020; Floros & Jørgensen 2023). Indicatively,

Van Doorn's (2020) chapter on platform housecleaners in Berlin and New York, as well as Lam and Triandafyllidou's (2021) study on platform work as a stepping stone for newcomer migrants in Canada provide detailed accounts of the particularities that shape the multi-dimensional phenomenon of migrant platform work in the respective cases. By stressing how local contexts and intersectional identities of the subjects run parallel in the analysis with infrastructural characteristics of different platforms, they expose the difficulty of providing definite responses to the stepping stone hypothesis. In a Nordic context, Gemma Newlands (2022) contributes to the debate with an article based on the experiences of food delivery couriers in Sweden and Norway. Newlands explores migrant gig workers' self-perception of employability, which, for various reasons, leads them to rethink their employment prospects and often leads to their entrapment in platform work. Her findings suggest that migrants consider gig work as more satisfactory than elderly care work or fast-food preparation in terms of gaining an occupational reputation to help them find a proper job (Newlands, 2022: p. 14).

In Denmark, several researchers and stakeholders quoted in research papers have claimed that platform work can act as a stepping stone into the labor market for vulnerable groups of workers (e.g., Ilsøe & Madsen 2018; Nielsen & Laursen 2020; Cabi 2021). Nevertheless, the various sources have diverse readings of who the vulnerable groups might be. Platform companies' managers quoted in research papers have referred to workers with chronic diseases, members of ethnic minorities with limited language skills, benefit recipients and early retirees (Ilsøe and Madsen 2018). The Danish Disruption Council, which supported this hypothesis in a public report, indicated long-term unemployed workers as the vulnerable group (Regeringen 2019: p. 46). Other researchers have indicated young people entering the labor market (Nielsen & Laursen 2020). The only existing study investigating specifically how/if platform work can help vulnerable groups to enter the labor market was commissioned by the Danish Sharing Economy Council and was completed in 2021 by a consultancy group. It found only a few concrete examples where vulnerable unemployed people took up platform work (Cabi 2021: p. 41). The stepping stone hypothesis has lately come under scrutiny from a large research project (The digital economy at work – integration and segmentation in hybrid labor markets 2020–2023) at Copenhagen University, whose findings are expected to be published soon.

8.3 Platform housecleaners' labor market backgrounds, experiences, and aspirations

In the fourth chapter of this thesis, I revealed how most platform housecleaners in Denmark are migrant, female, and young, and that the vast majority of them consider platform housecleaning as a transitory stage. Applying criteria based on 'ambiguous liminality', which is a concept defining the contingent middle ground between achieving one's goals and getting trapped in limbo (Scott et al. 2022), I broadly categorized migrant platform housecleaners in three groups: a) Migrants – usually high-skilled – who came to Denmark following their spouses, b) migrants precariously employed in their country of origin who came to Denmark to work, and c) young migrants studying or traveling in Europe and partly sustaining their residence through working.

A common denominator enabling these broad groups of workers to try out platform housecleaning is that entry barriers are very low. Having a CPR (identity number), a Danish bank account and a Danish mobile phone number usually suffice, as in most cases having a residence permit, clean criminal record, and work permit are confirmed by the worker ticking a box and accepting terms and conditions[38]. As elaborated upon in the fourth chapter, Scott et al.'s (2022) framework facilitates the analysis of migrant workers' employment trajectories according to the workers' backgrounds and the potential fulfillment of their objectives and aspirations after enduring precarious employment. In the following section, I present my empirical findings on platform housecleaners' backgrounds and aspirations, but also their own evaluations of the stepping stone hypothesis.

8.3.1 Educational and occupational backgrounds

Out of the twenty-three cleaners in my sample, six were studying at Danish universities at the time of the interview and three more had graduated from Danish academic institutions. Another six had obtained higher education in their countries of origin. Finally, eight respondents had no university degrees. It is, however, not safe to deduct that this proportion of academic degree holders is the norm, since four of the students and graduates agreed to being interviewed also based on feeling solidarity with me; my project reminded them of their own difficulties with conducting fieldwork for

[38] This was the case with the platform I signed up with as a worker and was also confirmed by the platform's former customer support employee (E4).

their own theses. Nevertheless, these numbers indicate that platform housecleaners in Denmark should not be considered a homogeneous group of low-skilled workers. On the contrary, their educational backgrounds suggest that their participation in this labor market is also motivated by reasons other than their skills. This is additionally supported by the occupational backgrounds of several of the participants in this research. Prior to coming to Denmark and engaging in platform work, many of them had jobs requiring specific skills: journalists, graphic designers, accountants, to name only a few (e.g., C1; C2; C3; C17).

Language barriers are the main factor hindering access to more typical job opportunities for non-Danish-speaking workers. However, this does not mean that these workers are struggling "to gain a foothold in the labour market" (Danish Government 2019: p. 43) as the Disruption Council's report and various other references to the stepping stone hypothesis suggest. My empirical findings suggest that platform work is not their only solution for finding a job. Only five out of twenty interviewed cleaners first worked in Denmark through a platform. Three more cleaners interviewed were Danish citizens who had just graduated from school and had not had a regular full-time job before. The remaining fifteen cleaners entered the labor market though alternative routes, some of which also have low entry barriers. Jobs in restaurants, hotels and cleaning companies are the most common options for migrants (e.g., C3; C10; C13). However, other working life trajectories were also reported, such as working as cashiers in retail shops, in supermarket jobs, as office clerks etc. (e.g., C5; C7; C14).

Six of my interlocutors had backgrounds in cleaning. Two had worked informally as housecleaners contracting work through Facebook, two had quit working at cleaning companies and two more had long experience in formal cleaning and caretaking jobs, after landing in Denmark through au-pair working schemes (C3; C5; C9; C15; C20; C21). Although different types of cleaning jobs are an entry point to both the formal and informal labor market, they are just one of many low-paid options for non-Danish speaking workers.

> I worked at the beginning with cleaning but like privately and then I switched to a restaurant for one year and a half […] I had an internship with a company here in

> Copenhagen working for the Film Festival and this is the company with which I had a contract, but then came corona times and I switched to cleaning. (C5 female migrants)
>
> I worked in architectural offices and as a waiter in Copenhagen, meaning that these jobs had no relation to cleaning, but I ended up here because of the coronavirus… (C7 female migrant)

Both these quotes from young migrant women reveal that there are various precarious jobs available, especially when it comes to part-time options. All these jobs appear to provide a foothold in the labor market but are not officially promoted as solutions by policymakers. Young people choosing platform work seem to have more employment options, but they do not prefer them. As quoted in chapter four, Danish teenager C12 shared how finding a job at a supermarket is relatively easy for her but she feels like it is a depressing undertaking. Likewise, non-ethnic Danes, migrants, and non-Danish-speaking workers also have alternative employment options, especially in the hotel and restaurant sector. As a male Latin-American platform cleaner stated:

> I met people who used to work in Aalborg in restaurants and they were telling me how awful experiences… they were either (only) underpaid or (both) underpaid and very badly treated by the owners, and all that, so when I heard about this cleaning service […] it seemed pretty solid, both the platform itself and the people behind it. (C14 male migrant)

The above quote affirms the existence of precarious job opportunities even in smaller Danish cities. C14 challenges the narrative of migrants as vulnerable subjects who benefit from the existence of these novel business models to get a foothold in the labor market. On the contrary, his experience highlights the agency of migrants when choosing among various precarious jobs, according to the expected income, flexibility of scheduling, intensity of tasks and temporality of employment. For him, platforms are just one more way to earn complementary income for his subsistence, rather than a stepping stone. He already has a part-time job in a medical company and is trying to find a more stable job. The employment trajectory of C14 showcases how a quantitative study investigating the

stepping stone hypothesis for platform housecleaners in Denmark would fail to grasp that his later transition to stable employment was not a positive effect of his engagement with platform labor.

8.3.2 Objectives and aspirations of platform housecleaners

An overview of the findings in the previous chapters suggests that almost all cleaners have chosen this type of work because it offers a quick path to potential income. Additionally, it promises a certain degree of flexibility regarding working hours. Except for one migrant worker who views platform work as a way to establish a clientele that could serve as a basis for creating a cleaning company, the rest of the cleaners see this work as a temporary compromise (cf. van Doorn 2023). These findings echo the words of the Eastern European food delivery courier interviewed by Newlands: "This isn't forever for me. I have my own goals and purpose in life that doesn't involve Foodora in any way, shape, or form" (2022: p. 9). A comparable assertion was made by a young migrant cleaner in Copenhagen.

> For me, this was good, because it was something that worked for me, because I was able to pay the rent. But again, it is something that I also knew from the beginning that I would leave at some certain point, when I wouldn't need that anymore. (C5 female migrant)

The platform workers that I interviewed had no specific aspirations from platform housecleaning other than earning income, either their exclusive income or complementary to income from other part-time jobs. Cleaners whose complementary part-time jobs were less contingent than platform work were inclined to pursue more stable employment through these jobs.

> If I'm in the schedule in the hotel, I choose the hotel, so that I have my lunch there for free and also because the time to stay working is longer. […] My contract is a zero-hour contract, […] but there is a good thing about the hotel, because I can have a contract there in the future, and this could be soon, […] I could go on a proper contract like 30 or 35 hours. But also, I have the priority of studying Danish because I know that this is a big step for (anyone) who wants to live here and who wants to work in the first area of

> work, because as an architect it is very important for me to know Danish. (C13 female migrant)

This quote shows that cleaners consider platform work as a side-hustle. Many do. However, only a few of them combine work with learning Danish, which is crucial for people planning on lengthy stays in the country and aspire to work "in the first area of work" as C13 categorizes full-time, well-paid jobs requiring specific skills. Platform housecleaning is not helpful towards acquiring or improving language skills, since communication is mainly carried out in English and workers are usually left alone in the houses that they are cleaning. It is only helpful to the extent that it offers some flexibility in combining work with time for studying.

Most cleaners view their work as temporary, as a good match for their flexible schedules or as a necessary evil for earning money while pursuing another future. At the same time, as is also evident in the Facebook group discussions, very few workers embrace their freelance careers as cleaners and create sole proprietorships, aiming at staying in this business for as long as it is profitable for them. These cleaners charge higher hourly rates and usually benefit from multiple good ratings from customers, which act as a form of guarantee for clients who are browsing the platforms. Nevertheless, some cleaners get trapped into platform work, while their quest for a better job takes time.

> I think it is because you get used to the things that are good and that is that you are a bit on your own and you get to decide about your hours, but also at the same time it is a very bad cycle, because I have been getting social anxiety lately, because I have been working alone for so long, so it is hard to think that I will go and work for people now again you know… But yes, I convinced myself to stay in this because I saw it was easy, and the time it took me to learn Danish for example it took me so long… It is just a habit, I think. […] Even though I don't like it, it is addictive, yeah, I have to admit. (C6 female migrant)

C6 decided to quit platform work a few days before the interview due to suffering from tendonitis in both wrists, as I elaborated in the fifth chapter. She had an almost fully booked schedule, good ratings

and a higher fee than most other cleaners. This full-time engagement took its toll since she did not have the time or will to start looking for another job. Here, we see that an assumption made both by the platform manager (E1) and investigated in the Cabi (2021) report; namely that platform work can help people who are facing psychological challenges to enter the labor market, can easily be the opposite of what is actually the case. Cleaning houses alone, intensively, and behind closed doors created the opposite outcome. It challenged this worker's ability to pursue employment where she would need to coexist with other people. The trajectory of C6 in the Danish labor market is an example of ambiguous liminality (Scott et al. 2022). She expected that precarious platform work would accommodate her needs and create opportunities, but this trajectory ended in an unexpected way. Summing up, the fieldwork indicates that most cleaners see platform work as a stopgap and a quick way of securing some income. They have minimum aspirations in relation to long-term commitment with this type of work. However, as the story of C6 suggests, platform work sometimes acts as a precarity trap rather than a springboard to a better future.

8.3.3 Platform housecleaners' explicit opinions on the stepping stone hypothesis

After my desktop encounter with the stepping stone hypothesis, I added some questions to my interview guides for the platform housecleaners, which could help me interrogate the likelihood of such a claim. Beyond these questions, which informed my above analysis, I also asked some of my interviewees to comment explicitly on the stepping stone hypothesis, as expressed by Danish institutional stakeholders. Most of the cleaners denied that this work is in any way helpful in relation to their prospects.

> No, I totally disagree with that. These people (who support the stepping stone hypothesis) should probably try (laughs). I mean, these platforms they are very, what do you call that, task specific, right? So, unless I am applying for a cleaning job in a company, this is not going to give me anything, you know, opportunities or whatever. (C1 female migrant)

Here, we see how this cleaner disagrees on the usefulness of platform housecleaning for her future employment prospects. She had already worked in Denmark as a waiter, before joining the platform.

She has also searched for a long time for an office position without the requirement to speak Danish, yet her engagement with housecleaning has nothing to offer in that direction. The same opinion on the uselessness of this type of work in searching for permanent employment – unless with a cleaning company – was shared by other platform housecleaners.

> It is a great way for people to get by sometimes. I am not sure though if this will lead to something better, I don't know what is the end of that… Just like get a job in a real cleaning company? (C5 female migrant)

> Maybe not to a better employment, maybe to be let's say employed by a cleaning company, […] but it definitely helps those who just came to the country or who lost their job, and they want to have some extra income or finding like flexible work. It does help and as I have mentioned before, I think it is better to have people work through platforms rather than selling drugs in a corner… (C3 female migrant)

The extremity of this platform housecleaner's argument about selling drugs is telling of the despair that many migrants face in Denmark when trying to find a job with proper pay. Here, C3 in no way equates platform work to illegal ways of making money, however her discontent is obvious in her choice of words. Many cleaners are critical towards platform work, due to their everyday experience of multiple insecurities related to their work, as I demonstrated in the fifth chapter. Regardless of that, many of them acknowledge that it provides opportunities for raising income, which are in no way related to increasing their probability of securing better future employment. In a nutshell, platform workers reject the assumption that platforms act as stepping stones to better or more typical employment, however they highlight that platforms provide a much-needed lifeline, especially for unemployed migrants in need of flexible employment.

8.4 Knowing, imagining or speculating? Stakeholder approaches to the stepping stone argument

In the previous sections, I demonstrated that knowledge of how the platform housecleaning labor market is composed is essential when claiming how workers can benefit from gig work in the future. In the case of platform housecleaning in Denmark, cleaners are either unwilling to contract typical

full-time employment (the case for – migrant – students and working travelers) or unable to reap specific benefits from this undertaking, which would help them towards contracting enhanced future employment. The argumentation supporting platform work – the stepping stone hypothesis in the Danish context – implies the existence of a vulnerable group within the labor market that benefits from the existence of platforms. As elaborated above, sources invoking this hypothesis have diverse readings of who the vulnerable group might be. The housecleaning platform manager mentioned workers facing stress and anxiety (E1) and a union representative (E5) mentioned workers with chronic diseases and immigrants as the vulnerable groups who might benefit from platform housecleaning. When, later in the interview, I challenged this narrative, the union representative went on to revise the argument:

> We did not encounter people who used the digital work platforms as a stepping stone and we didn't encounter workers who were using it to re-enter the labor market. It is a theory; we can see that this could be used in that way, but we haven't actually encountered this. (E5 union representative)

Regardless of whether this could relate to young people, social benefit receivers, non-ethnic Danes, long-term unemployed, sufferers from chronic diseases or newly arrived non-Danish speaking migrants, no data on the Danish platform economy exists that supports the stepping stone claim. The union representative's eagerness to repeat this argument early in the interview is one more indication that the stepping stone hypothesis has been normalized as a narrative among Danish institutional stakeholders. This hypothesis provides a positive argument regarding the existence of the platform business model, a model that has caused controversy in both Danish and international contexts. I presented how previous literature on temporary work agencies and platform work has failed to provide coherent argumentation as to the effects of such business models on workers' future employment prospects (e.g., Filomena and Picchio 2021; Van Doorn 2020). My argument here is that if Danish policymakers had pursued evidence-based policymaking considering the workers' perspectives, they would reject the stepping stone hypothesis. The only attempt to investigate the stepping stone hypothesis found only a "few concrete examples where vulnerable unemployed

perform work via labor platforms" (Cabi 2021: p. 41, own translation), but no example of these unemployed people transiting into typical employment. The Cabi report features only three interviews with platform housecleaners and four more with workers on other platforms, in contrast to eight interviews with platform managers. This demonstrates how, in Denmark, limited research has been conducted to date on the plausibility of the stepping stone hypothesis, and this research has been premised primarily on platform companies' argumentation, rather than workers' perspectives. Yet, this hypothesis has continuously been favored by an array of stakeholders.

Persistence in the positive narrative framing platforms as stepping stones is part of what Schiølin (2020) depicts as the Danish sociotechnical imaginary of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which promotes innovation, disruption and seamlessness as core values of the Danish future. Schiølin goes on to warn about the dangers lurking for Danish democracy, when a technology-driven future is imagined (cf. Jasanoff 2015) as both desired and inevitable, based on the assessments of the people selling the solutions and technologies on which this future will be built (Schiølin 2020: p. 559). Indeed, the composition of the Disruption Council and the Sharing Economy Council justifies Schiølin's argument: Labor platform CEO's, venture capital investors, entrepreneurs, consumers' advocates and politicians already promoting the Fourth Industrial Revolution were joined by a minority of social partner representatives and academics. The two Councils were chaired by the Prime Minister and the CEO of an insurance company selling products to digital platform users, respectively. Even though the Councils only had a consulting role, they framed and shaped public discourse on the digitalized future of work. They portrayed gig work as a socially responsible option for the employment of vulnerable groups of workers, while simultaneously presenting it as inevitable and institutionally stabilizing it (cf. Jasanoff 2015).

8.5 Conclusion

The assumption that digital labor platforms act as a stepping stone for vulnerable groups into more permanent employment has been expressed repeatedly in Denmark since 2017 by policymakers and stakeholders. It has been reproduced in policy documents (e.g., Regeringen 2017), research papers (e.g., Ilsøe & Madsen 2018), publicly commissioned reports (e.g., Cabi 2021) and the press (e.g.,

Hesseldahl 2017). Supporting this assumption requires both a detailed definition of what constitutes a vulnerable group and an explanation of how this type of work helps to secure more permanent employment. The findings from my interviews with workers, and the rest of my fieldwork, do not demonstrate any positive correlation between working for a housecleaning platform and securing a transition to more regular employment. Even if such a transition might be the case for some of the cleaners, it is doubtful that any relation of causality between this transition and housecleaning platform work can be inferred.

Moreover, there is no indication that a specific vulnerable group benefits from platform housecleaning in relation to future employment prospects. According to my research, the only plausible claim is to define non-Danish-speaking migrant newcomers as a vulnerable group and support that platforms facilitate easy labor-market entry and contingent work for them. But that would be more of a self-fulfilling prophecy for this business model, since signing up easily with a platform and contracting some gigs is exactly what most of these platforms offer: Low entry barriers to the labor market and contingent income, either for a specific temporality that suits workers' schedules prior to opting for another employment relation or until the newcomers find a regular job of their preference. Translating such a timing of events into a positive effect of platform work, which supposedly leads to "regular employment" (cf. Huws et al. 2018) constitutes a perversion of reality, since the same can be said for all alternative, part-time solutions at hand for non-Danish speaking migrants in Denmark, such as zero-hour contracts in the hospitality sector.

When discussing this hypothesis, it is equally important to define the ultimate goal for which platform work serves as a stepping stone. In existing literature, this goal constitutes mainly some sort of full-time or more stable employment with guaranteed income; typically juxtaposed with atypical forms of employment. However, as demonstrated in the analysis, this does not mean that all typical employment positions are more favorable for workers. Moreover, typical in Denmark – a country with very high levels of labor market mobility – does not mean guaranteed, since labor protection is very limited. That is a consequence of the flexicurity system, which is premised on a safety net of high unemployment and social benefits and a set of active labor market policies (Andersen 2012).

Nevertheless, the cleaners interviewed fall short on the security end of the flexicurity model. As newcomers to the Danish labor market, they must contribute to unemployment insurance funds for more than a year before being able to claim unemployment benefits. Even when these cleaners enter what is typical or regular employment within a Danish context, they therefore still lack eligibility for some means of protection if they are fired, since their employment spell in platform work is a period when they are excluded from the safety net of the Danish labor market (Mailand and Larsen 2018).

Obviously, this paper draws only on research conducted on housecleaning platform work and therefore research outcomes cannot be generalized for the whole of the Danish platform economy. However, one would expect to encounter what has been classified above as vulnerable groups, concentrated mainly on platforms offering tasks such as housecleaning and food delivery (e.g., Scheer 2019a). As I have repeatedly underlined in this thesis, my analysis does not imply that migrant workers, when described as a vulnerable group, are mere victims of exploitation by platforms, which drive them into dead ends. On the contrary, migrants are largely aware of the disadvantages and the multiple insecurities deriving from working through platforms, yet still use them as part of their everyday strategies for generating an income. Employing non-fatalistic accounts of precarity helps me to avoid their victimization and ascribe them the agency they deserve in planning their livelihood strategies.

Finally, this chapter described how the Danish state assumed an active role in shaping the Danish environment of platform work by supporting a normatively positive representation of its function. Not least by promoting the stepping stone hypothesis through its policy reports. Contrary to a widespread understanding of states as weak or hesitant regulators who are overwhelmed by technological innovation, I argue that the Danish state is an active supporter and developer of the sociotechnical imaginary underpinning the platform labor market. Despite the exceptionalism of the Danish industrial relations system, which regulates the labor market with minimum or no state intervention, as I demonstrated in the short historiographical chapter and further analyze in the next chapter, there are several public agency decisions, migration-related legislation and welfare policies that co-construct the platform economy environment (cf. van Doorn and Vijay 2021). Therefore, I

argue that research on labor platforms should stress the central role of contemporary states in promoting and shaping the platform economy in local and global contexts.

CHAPTER 9

Governing platform housecleaning in Denmark

9.1 Introduction

Despite platform labor studies being a rapidly growing field, research investigating the role of states in engaging with policymaking and regulation of local platform labor markets is relatively limited (e.g., Bisom-Rapp & Coiquaud 2017; Collier et al. 2017; van Doorn et al. 2021; Inversi et al. 2022; Marenco 2023). Although (mis)classification of employment for gig workers figures prominently in literature as a par excellence topic highlighting the need for state intervention and regulation (Lata et al. 2023), it is mainly tackled from a labor law perspective focusing on local classification criteria for the employment relationship and workers' rights protection (e.g., Aloisi 2016; De Stefano 2016; Adams-Prassl 2019). States and public institutions are frequently portrayed as unable to cope with the pace of technological progress and disruptive business models, ceding space to digital labor platforms, which take advantage of regulatory gaps and loopholes (Kirchner & Schüßler 2020). Vallas and Schor (2020) refer to platform companies as institutional chameleons, due to their ability to adapt to the institutional environments of the countries in which they operate. Case studies of ridehailing and food delivery platforms have provided empirical examples of how such adapting takes place (e.g., Allegretti et al. 2021; van Doorn et al. 2021), leading to the creation of localized varieties of the gig economy (cf. Thelen 2018; Leonardi & Pirina 2020). In this final chapter of my thesis, having analyzed the experiences and perceptions of the workers and presented the traits, strategies and objectives of housecleaning platforms, I spotlight the role of the state.

Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve deep into political sociology and state theories, some explanatory remarks about what the state is and does in relation to platform labor are indispensable. Here, I do not refer to the state in monolithic terms, or in the tradition of general state theory (cf. Jessop 2015). Instead, I abstain from treating the state as a unitary entity and prefer to

analyze it as a combination of different institutions constituting the system of the state, which are in constant interplay with the state as an idea (Abrams 1988). According to Abrams, social scientists should "try to unmask and demystify the existence of 'the state' as an already existing and evident reality […] by analyzing the messy, contradictory and disjunctured nature of the state-system in its actual operations and in its wider political and social contexts" (Pertsas 2023: p. 49)[39]. This approach prioritizes empirically grounded research on the role of the state. In line with Abrams' reasoning, in this chapter I treat the Danish state as a messy amalgam of diverse institutions and agencies that actively – and sometimes in contradictory ways – co-construct the sociopolitical and sociotechnical environment within which platform work unfolds in the context of Denmark. Inferring conclusions on the role of the state based on a marginal phenomenon such as platform housecleaning may seem unconvincing. However, as academic researchers of state institutions have pointed out, the roles of contemporary states can best be captured and analyzed at the margins, in terms of policies and populations; namely, in the ways states treat their poor, unemployed or migrant subjects (Fassin 2015: p. 3).

In the previous chapters, I demonstrated how precarity, flexibility, algorithmic management and workers' resistance are also affected by (migrant) workers' sociolegal status and their level of dependence on platform work. Adopting a non-fatalistic account of precarity, I referred to precarization as a process taking place simultaneously in and out of the platform (cf. van Doorn 2023). As the 'out of the platform' component is heavily influenced by the role of the state, in this chapter, I analyze four instances of governance of housecleaning platform work in Denmark, by combining the concepts of *governmental precarization*, *sociotechnical imaginaries* and *Autonomy of Migration* (AoM). As elaborated upon in my introductory chapter, governmental precarization "emphasizes how the conduct of state governance and individualized self-governing are intertwined in a mode of governing that uses insecurity as its main tool" (Lorey 2017: p. 200). Sociotechnical imaginaries are part of contemporary politics, simultaneously "descriptive of attainable futures and prescriptive of the kinds of futures that ought to be attained" (Jasanoff et al. 2007). They therefore heavily influence

[39] In this quote, Pertsas elaborates on Jessop's (2015) reading of Abrams' work.

which subjects are included or excluded from potential technological futures and their benefits. Finally, AoM acts as a constant reminder of the constitutional role of migrants' agency in the shaping of national border regimes, labor and migration policies (Casas-Cortés et al. 2015).

The four instances of state governance relating to the operation of housecleaning platforms, which are analyzed in the next sections are: a) The creation of the sharing economy imaginary, b) the decisions of the Danish Competition and Consumer Authority (DCCA) on the removal of minimum prices from housecleaning platforms, c) the restriction of holiday working visas from Latin America, and d) the failed attempt at establishing a presumption of employment rule in Denmark. Before proceeding with instances of state governance, though, there is a need for clarification of how the Danish labor market is regulated by the Danish industrial relations system, with minimum – or ideally no – state intervention, and what this means for platform work.

9.2 Employers, unions, and collective agreements

For over a hundred years now, the Danish labor market has been governed and regulated primarily by an industrial relations system based on collective bargaining between employer organizations and labor unions. Wages and working conditions are decided between the social partners, both at sectoral and industrial level. The success of the system is premised upon a widespread consensus culture and strong cooperation between unions and employers' organizations. Another success factor is high labor union density, which, though declining, is still among the highest worldwide (Høgedahl et al. 2022). In Denmark, there is no statutory minimum wage, and the role of the state in regulating the labor market through legislation is limited. Only in exceptional cases does the state step in to help resolve stalled conflicts, and tripartite agreements between the state and the social partners occur only occasionally (Andersen et al. 2014).

The primacy of collective agreements over state legislation also entails that there is no universal legal definition of what constitutes an "employee" in Denmark (Munkholm & Højer Schjøler 2018). This means that if a union decided on pursuing recourse in the Danish Labor Court to achieve a legal precedent on platform workers' classification, the outcome would be unsure and decided upon the circumstances of the specific case (E3; E8). As this could lead to an opposite outcome than the

intended precedent, labor unions refrain from following a legal path and have concentrated their efforts on concluding collective agreements with specific labor platforms (Marenco 2023). Moreover, the unions lobby both at national and European level in favor of presumption of employment, which would prove their valid legal interest in initiating negotiations with employers' organizations towards a collective agreement (E5; Marenco 2023: p. 215). At the same time, labor platforms largely abstain from entering negotiations, given that they do not wish to jeopardize their business model. The impasse that has been created affords little optimism as to a swift regulation of the platform labor market through the Danish model of collective bargaining. The impending EU directive on improving working conditions in platform work (European Commission 2021) – which has been under negotiation for over two years now – is also playing into the equation, as its outcome will influence future developments. Summing up, the traditional role of the state in the Danish industrial relations system does not allow for straightforward intervention in the platform labor market in terms of wages and working conditions. Nevertheless, as I demonstrate in the following sections, the Danish cabinets and public agencies are far from being considered as neutral bystanders regarding platform work more broadly, and platform housecleaning more specifically.

9.3 "Making everyone the winners of the future?"[40] Creating the Sharing Economy imaginary

In this section, I analyze how the national "Strategy for Growth through the Sharing Economy" (Regeringen 2017) and the work of the Danish Disruption Council (2017–2019) jointly promoted the imaginary of the sharing economy. In the third chapter of my thesis, I briefly presented how the newly formed governmental coalition in 2016 decided to create the Danish Disruption Council – Partnership for Denmark's future. This Council was composed of eight ministers and thirty-two permanent members, including, among others, labor union and employer organization representatives, a large majority of corporate stakeholders, such as CEOs of big Danish and international multinational companies, managers and analysts from the private sector, and two academics. The Council had an advisory role to the government and was chaired by the prime minister. Its goal was to discuss how

[40] "We must make everyone the winners of the future", is one of the two explicitly stated overarching ambitions that the Danish Disruption Council had for Denmark (Danish Government 2019: p. 6).

Danish companies and Danes would exploit the opportunities presented by rapid technological changes and come up with policymaking proposals. The Council had eight two-day meetings at several locations all over Denmark, where local stakeholders and international guests joined to participate in thematic discussions.

Digital labor platforms were part of the Council's agenda from its onset. A few months after the inauguration of the Council, the government launched the national "Strategy for Growth through the Sharing Economy" (Regeringen 2017). The Strategy is a policy document which portrays the platform economy as an indispensable component of future growth, sustainability, and prosperity for the Danish society. In its sixty pages, it only briefly refers to labor issues; what is truly at stake according to the Strategy is how setting up clear regulatory frameworks can guarantee the unleashing of the sharing economy's potential. A meticulous reading of the document reveals that the authors are concerned mainly with platforms for renting out assets. Labor platforms are a complementary sector of the sharing economy for them, in the sense that they are not so preoccupied with the challenges related to its regulation. The Strategy is replete with aims such as taxation, innovation, growth and trust between customers and platforms. Denmark must take advantage of the new opportunities,

> and ensure that inappropriate regulation does not stand in the way of the sharing economy, thereby preventing the Danes from gaining access to all the new options that the sharing economy contains. (Regeringen 2017: p. 11, own translation)

The Strategy features some points on providers of services -the words employee or worker never show up in the text- and assigns the important work of discussing the sharing economy against the labor market and the Danish industrial relations model to the Disruption Council (ibid.: p. 16). Another comment on the text is that the term migrant or foreign worker is never used, despite the commonsensical understanding that, at the time, many of the jobs/tasks offered by platforms were carried out by migrants in the respective sectors (e.g., housecleaning, taxi, waiters etc.). Although migrants, foreign students or non-ethnic Danes are not referred to in the text, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Strategy acknowledges that the sharing economy:

> can also be a stepping stone to the labor market for people with looser connections to the labor market and thus increase their chances of getting regular employment. (ibid.: p. 16, own translation)

Here, ambiguous wording, such as "people with looser connections", implies various categories. Adopting an AoM approach to analyze the Strategy suggests that policymakers are responding to an undergoing phenomenon, which they aim to address. This text was composed shortly after the influx of migrants and asylum seekers to Europe in 2015–16 and shortly before the imposition of the ghetto laws in Denmark[41]. This means that the absorption of migrants into the labor market was at the top of the state's agenda and discourse at the time. My argument here is that low-skilled location-based platform work was seen by policymakers as part of a future solution to draw more migrants into the labor market. The workfarist[42] approach to discrimination contained in the criteria of the ghetto laws (Fallov & Birk 2022) and the Danish asylum regime (Lindberg 2020), required that the state – and the market – promote employment alternatives for these migrant subjects. Although Danish long-term unemployed, young workers and Danes living on welfare benefits could also be implied to have looser connections to the labor market, migrants and non-ethnic Danes seem more likely to be part of the policymakers' imagined candidates for using platforms as stepping stones.

Overall, the Strategy displays the explicit intention of the Danish government to frame digital labor platforms as part of a desired, sustainable, and future-oriented sharing economy. Promoting platform housecleaning as equivalent to sharing tools or carpooling for environmental reasons was an attempt at establishing a sociotechnical imaginary of the sharing economy, where Danes would consider the totality of these platforms as a beneficial innovation. One the one hand, renting out assets through capital platforms was portrayed as a future source of income, which should therefore be regulated and adequately taxed, to the benefit of both citizen-owners and the (welfare) state. On the other

[41] In 2018, the Danish government introduced its National Strategy to Fight Parallel Societies, which has been colloquially referred to as the ghetto laws. The strategy is discriminatory and represses ethnic minorities and their neighborhoods, which are targeted for state intervention. The first criterion adding towards including an area to the scope of the strategy is that over 40% of inhabitants between 18–64 years of age are unemployed – or outside education (for more details on ghetto laws, see also Fallov & Birk 2022).

[42] Workfare policies require that the unemployed and underemployed actively seek employment or undertake minimum work tasks in order to be eligible for social and unemployment benefits.

hand, the fact that citizen-consumers can take advantage of flexible (and indeed cheap) labor, was presented both as an opportunity for consumers and for people with looser connections to the labor market. The Strategy explicitly categorizes them as providers, thus foreshadowing the government's position on their future classification.

The Disruption Council followed the same reasoning as the Strategy, framing the sharing economy as part of an indisputable plan to reap the benefits of technological progress (cf. Schiølin 2020). Here, we see how Jasanoff's (2015) concept of *sociotechnical imaginaries* was fleshed out in the initiatives of the Danish government. The government not only planned the desired future through the Strategy, but also publicly performed it, in a Council chaired by the prime minister, who had the assistance of the elite of Danish companies. To attract publicity, the government hired private communication firms to handle a Facebook and YouTube video campaign, designed to position the work of the Council at the center of the public debate (Møller 2019). Following Jasanoff's definition, beyond being publicly performed, the sociotechnical imaginary must also be institutionally stabilized. The proposals formulated by the Council and the initiatives in the Strategy were tailored to provide such institutionalization. First, the Council proposed that digital labor platforms form partnerships with Danish job centers to provide job opportunities to the unemployed (Danish Government 2019: p. 43). Second, it proposed that legislation should facilitate sharing economy platforms to try out new business models and technologies (ibid.: p. 30). Third, the Strategy announced the creation of a digital portal by the public sector, where sharing economy platform companies could have all their challenges regarding legislation, taxation etc. addressed promptly through a one-stop-shop solution, a single entry of communication with all public agencies. The vision of the sharing economy was further stabilized by the creation of the Sharing Economy Council, which guaranteed the state's prolonged engagement with the vision for another two years.

The title of this section highlights how promoting the sociotechnical imaginary of the sharing economy is built on the narrative that everyone benefits from this novel business model. The analysis in the previous chapters demonstrated that this is not the case for platform housecleaners – or at least for the majority of them. Jasanoff claims that "shared understandings of forms of social life and

social order" (2015: p. 6) are crucial for establishing sociotechnical imaginaries. The fact that predominantly female migrant workers provide the reproductive labor for cleaning Danish homes, while their residence in the country is constrained by their sociolegal status, is widely accepted socially. As the union representative suggested, housecleaning in Denmark is subject to "systemic discrimination" (E5), meaning that Danish society – like most societies – traditionally delegates toilsome and underpaid work to the weak in the labor market. In this sense, a projected social life and social order, where such "sharing economy" labor is assumed by migrants is widely shared and majoritarian in Danish society (cf. Myong & Andersen 2015). This reinforces the sociotechnical imaginary of the sharing economy.

9.4 "It is quite startling that social dumping has made a friend in a Danish authority"[43]

In this section, I employ the concept of governmental precarization (Lorey 2015) to analyze the decisions issued by the DCCA (Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020a; 2020b) against the existence of a minimum hourly fee on the Danish housecleaning platforms Hilfr and Happyhelper. The issuing authority is an independent agency under the Danish Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs. More concretely, the decisions were composed by the Center for Digital Platforms unit of the DCCA, the unit responsible for enforcing competition rules on digital platforms and analyzing big data, artificial intelligence, and use of algorithms for all kind of platforms operating in Denmark, in relation to customer protection. The decisions practically eliminated the opportunity of setting a minimum hourly rate for housecleaners and by proxy for anyone working through digital platforms. As 'decisions', these are not binding legal documents. Nevertheless, in the fifty-nine and sixty-three pages, respectively, that comprise the documents, a detailed assessment of the DCCA concludes that platform housecleaners are independent companies that use the platforms simply to communicate with customers (Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020a; 2020b). Therefore, it is against competition rules to sustain a minimum price floor for cleaning services provided through platforms. The two housecleaning platform companies that simultaneously came under investigation,

[43] This quote was tweeted by housecleaning platform Hilfr's Twitter account on the day the DCCA publicly announced the decision on minimum wages (Junker 2020).

Happyhelper and Hilfr, pledged to remove minimum prices and align both their Terms and Conditions as well as the contracts signed with platform workers with the decisions. On the one hand, by conforming with the decisions, the two companies avoided legal procedures and penalties for infringement of Danish competition law. On the other hand, the DCCA grasped the opportunity to deliberate on an issue that had not been previously clarified through legal procedures; namely the classification of platform workers as independent companies (self-employed persons). Especially in the case of Hilfr, the DCCA challenged the collective agreement with 3F, by assessing that Superhilfrs are not genuine employees (Jacqueson 2021). Despite detailed legal analysis from the DCCA on why the existing employment relation between platforms and cleaners lacks the legally identifiable characteristics that might define it as an employer-employee relation, this analysis builds on interpretations of ambiguous terms and makes contradictory arguments.

The DCCA decisions are legal documents building on existing Danish and European laws, regulations, directives, and court decisions as well as the two companies' Terms and Conditions for using the platform and the Freelancer Agreement signed between the companies and the cleaners. Official meetings and correspondence with managers of the platforms have also been used to clarify issues leading to the assessment that cleaners are not to be regarded as employees. The assessments were termed as immediate and not final because the companies agreed early in the process to meet the final requirements of the DCCA (Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020a; p. 6). If the platforms would refuse to remove the minimum rates, they would have to engage in a costly and time-consuming legal struggle and pay fines in the – very probable – case that the court would accept the DCCA's assessment. Only then would the assessment be final and legally binding. However, it is very unlikely that any platform company founding its business model on mediating gigs between freelancers and customers would undertake a costly legal struggle to be able to reclassify its freelancers as workers. This assessment therefore effectively removed minimum pricing from all platforms operating in Denmark. As the platform manager I interviewed stated "we find (the removal of minimum fees) sad, but this is the nature of the platforms and we have to follow rules and regulations" (E1).

Analyzing the decisions point by point, it is inevitable not to challenge the methodological underpinning of the DCCA's assessment. Several arguments in the decision are open to diverse interpretations according to the standpoint of the actors involved. The DCCA's justification of a breach of European and Danish Competition Law is based on specific assumptions: The cleaners are not being managed, there is no hierarchical relationship between platforms and cleaners, the cleaners are not an integral part of the platform's undertaking, and platforms "do not have the full right to sanction and cannot fire a cleaner with a notice of termination and rights deriving from that" (Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020a: p. 34, own translation). One could claim that the DCCA totally disregarded the point of view and the voice of the subjects directly affected by the decision, who were excluded from consultation. Had the DCCA included them while investigating the case, they would have gained insight into how platform cleaners are subject to what I termed as minor algorithmic management and how e.g., their accounts are deactivated when they reject customers' bookings, as a temporary or definitive sanctioning measure. Moreover, when defining the employment relation (ibid.: pp. 34-35), the DCCA contradicts itself when stating first that e.g., Happyhelper has no full right to sanction cleaners, and then a few pages later when documenting the infringement of competition law, the DCCA reverses that argumentation and claims that Happyhelper threatened to permanently exclude (aka fully sanction) any cleaner trying to circumvent the set minimum price (ibid.: p. 45). Finally, the DCCA largely ignored other relevant agencies' points of view ("we were not consulted, we were not heard, and I don't know how this decision was actually made," said E6) and disregarded the labor unions' positions.

> I spoke with an undersecretary of some sort for an hour or so in the lobby of the ministry and then we went away again, and they got some points. But, basically, it was the legal department of the ministry that made the decision, out from the analysis. All our… we have a huge legal department here, much bigger than the ministry's understandably… (E3 union representative)

Here, the choice of words from the union representative (e.g., undersecretary) displays their contempt of the decisions, of the knowledge upon which these were founded, and of the way the union representatives were disrespected.

The direct outcome of these decisions and the commitments that followed was that platform cleaners could not count on the minimum hourly fee of DKK 120 with Happyhelper and DKK 130 with Hilfr but were nudged to compete for lower prices in their quest to book cleaning gigs. As Hilfr tweeted, "it is quite startling that social dumping has made a friend in a Danish authority" (Junker 2020). Thinking with the concept of governmental precarization highlights the negative effects of these decisions in augmenting insecurity for the livelihoods of platform housecleaners. The decisions are concerned with the right of independent companies (aka housecleaners) to engage in pricing competition, which will lower prices to the benefit of the Danish consumers of the services.

These legal DCCA documents are seemingly irrelevant to the demographics of platform housecleaners. However, in essence, the DCCA classifies migrant workers at the lower end of the labor market as independent companies, many of whom accept very low wages out of necessity (e.g., C3; C5; C10; C23). It therefore urges them to further compete with each other in devaluating their labor, without the existence of a safety net. The ruling reduces the hourly wages of workers but also directs them to accept more cleaning gigs at lower rates, to compensate for their loss of income (e.g., C10). This not only creates insecurity in terms of income and working conditions but also establishes a belief among migrant workers that public authorities are not supportive of more vulnerable participants in the labor market (e.g., C1; C6; C14). Even the platform manager, when discussing the decisions, cynically suggested that there is no lobbying done in support of this "border group" and therefore there are no initiatives for improving housecleaners' working conditions. "It is a power issue," they said (E1).

One more precariousness generating effect of this decision is the official ratification of platform workers' obligation to self-regulate all their administrative encounters with Danish state

bureaucracy[44]. Housecleaners assume full responsibility for properly addressing several complex issues regarding self-employment and are often required to do so in a language that is not their native tongue. More precisely, the workers must navigate through a labyrinth of tax regulations, bimonthly income declarations and predictions about their contingent income to assess if they need to acquire a CVR (Central Business Register) number, not to mention complexity if they wish to contribute to a pension fund. Other welfare provisions such as sick leave benefits or parental leave benefits are widely inaccessible to them, but even in a few cases where a very successful platform worker registered with a CVR number might be eligible for these benefits, the procedure for attempting to attain them would be toilsome, premised on technicalities and highly uncertain (Munkholm 2020). Consequently, the assessment by the DCCA that cleaners are self-employed removes the cost of a lot of administrative tasks that the platforms would need to assume as employers and redirects them towards platform workers. One should bear in mind that the amount of time needed to deal with all these complex self-service tasks is also a form of unpaid labor for housecleaners (e.g., C1; C3; C4; C16). Consequently, as I demonstrated in previous chapters, platform housecleaners who plan to exit the Danish labor market soon, usually refrain from dealing with tax matters and leave the country without paying out tax. Others try to take customers off the platform and evade paying taxes. The normalization of insecurity through such decisions induces cleaners to self-regulate their precariousness and, as the concept of governmental precarization suggests, this also leads subjects to seek their own ways of resisting the system that they consider is exploiting them.

So, who benefits from the reasoning behind removing minimum fees for platform work? The Danish Competition and Consumer Authority's vision refers to "strong and sustainable growth and high consumer welfare in Denmark" (Konkurrence- og Forbrugerstyrelsen 2020c). The decision on platform fees does not benefit workers, since it narrows income expectations – especially for cleaners not established on the platform – and produces financial and existential precariousness. Moreover, it adds administrative tasks to their working life and limits possibilities for acquiring employee-related welfare provisions and benefits. At the same time, such a decision is harmful for the Danish welfare

[44] In Denmark, employers inform tax authorities on the income of their employees and provide pay slips, etc. The self-employed are obliged to provide this information on their own, through self-service solutions.

state. Tax evasion is being sponsored, whereas an established employment relation would guarantee fair and timely taxation. The continuous questions, directed to public services by platform workers trying to figure out e.g., how to deal with VAT or tax issues, setting up companies or combining platform work with student benefits, adds to the workload of public services disproportionately, in relation to taxation received.

Meanwhile, digital labor platforms are benefiting from the fact that their business model is being solidified, and the permissive legal framework is gradually transforming to concretely favor their business model. However, housecleaning platforms forfeit the social responsibility facade of allegedly facilitating work paid more fairly in a sector characterized by low wages and informality. The housecleaning platforms also lose income, since their earnings are commission based. Lower fees mean lower income for cleaning platforms. Shortly before the announcement of the DCCA decision, one of the platforms under investigation introduced an hourly fee that is withheld from the cleaners' payments, thereby augmenting their income insecurity. Seemingly, the only direct beneficiaries of this decision are Danish consumers, who can enjoy cheaper services for cleaning their homes. This is what the DCCA refers to as "consumer welfare" (ibid.). On the other hand, it is doubtful whether "strong and sustainable growth" (ibid.) is achieved through the predatory inclusion and exploitation of vulnerable groups in a formalized labor market (cf. van Doorn et al. 2023).

Applying the lens of governmental precarization, I would argue that the neoliberal Danish state is consolidating the outsourcing of risks from platforms to cleaners, which also signals the withdrawal of the state from various obligations of socially protecting them. Housecleaners are classified as companies, and customers are urged to assume a business-to-business model of hiring cleaners, putting aside possible ethical concerns on how or why such low cleaning fees are available. According to the DCCA, wage dumping is not an issue if it abides by national and European competition law and coincides with rational choice models of customers' behavior (cf. Zafirovski 2003). After all, governmental precarization does not imply the unlimited precarization of society but the achievement of an 'acceptable equilibrium' between different normalities of poverty, precarity and wealth (Lazzarato 2009: p. 128). In this case, the equilibrium is pursued by the precarization of

migrant housecleaners in urgent need of income to the benefit of more well-off citizens who can enjoy cheaper services.

9.5 Including platforms in the Danish labor market but penalizing mobility

The Danish elections in June 2019 brought into office a new coalition led by the Social Democratic Party. This shifted the governmental discourse on digital labor platforms.

> A lot of bad cases were brought in the newspapers… So, actually it changed the discussion from how we get more of those kinds of models, business models, to the discussion on how we can get this kind of economy, if we can make it more responsible and how this can be focused on the circumstances the workers work in. And the big discussion, as you know, is whether you are an employee or self-employed. (E6 public official)

Nevertheless, in a country with institutional continuity and a consensus culture like Denmark, this could not signify a major change in ongoing processes. After all, the Social Democrats had signed the agreement on the creation of the Sharing Economy Council, which acted as a consultant to the Danish Ministry of Business from 2019 to 2021 and was commissioned with discussing how the ten initiatives for the expansion of platform business models – decided in 2018 – could better be implemented. My point here refers to the argument I supported in the introduction of this chapter about "the messy, contradictory and disjunctured nature of the state-system in its actual operations" (Pertsas 2023: p. 49). Messiness and contradiction are evident in the policymaking and decisions during the first year of the new government. Within the same year, a) there were discussions in the Sharing Economy Council on how to support and establish the Danish platform economy, b) a public portal was facilitating the creation of new platforms (also labor platforms), c) the DCCA assessed that platform housecleaners are not employees and removed minimum fees, and, as I analyze later in this section, d) the government restricted holiday working visas from Argentina and Chile and banned such visa holders from working as self-employed platform workers.

After the new cabinet was formed, labor unions started pressuring the government to act upon the fact that the number of Argentinians and Chileans coming to work in Denmark through holiday-working visas had quadrupled in the last four years (Schneider 2019). The issue was that most of these South Americans were working through housecleaning and food delivery platforms, with Happyhelper and Wolt featuring as the most popular (E1; E5; E6; Scheer 2019b; Schneider 2019; Forchhammer 2021). Labor unions, such as 3F, insisted that the participation of these migrant workers in the platform labor market signified a social dumping process (Bernsen 2021). The political affinity between 3F and the Social Democrats facilitated regulatory action being assumed very soon after the elections (Marenco 2023). And in December 2019, the Minister of Immigration and Integration announced an annual quota of only 150 Argentinian and 50 Chilean visa holders, who additionally would not be allowed to work as self-employed.

Taking an AoM approach to analyze the decision, we see how the quota responded to growing mobility of South American working holiday visa holders, who saw the opportunity of combining travelling to Europe with sustaining their stay through platform jobs with low entry barriers. The restriction responds to this type of mobility, and the legislator's intention is to ensure that if labor platforms want to find abundant workers, they will have to do it by assuming employers' responsibilities or at least assuming a hybrid employment relationship regulated by a collective agreement, like the one between Hilfr and 3F. This is also evident in the words of the minister who decided on the restriction.

> The companies must decide for themselves whether they want to change the business model, but if they want Argentinians or Chileans on the Working Holiday scheme, they must be employed as employees. [Mattias Tesfaye, in (Schneider 2019, own translation)]

Continuing with AoM, we see how the Danish ministry instrumentalizes the mobility of Argentinian and Chilean youth to encourage labor unions to put pressure on the employers' organizations to engage in collective bargaining (see also Marenco 2023: pp. 213-214). Despite the depiction of South

American visa holders as poor migrants (e.g., Schneider 2019)[45], applying and securing such a visa is a very costly procedure, far beyond what poor Argentinian workers would be able to afford without indebting themselves (cf. Orth 2023; New to Denmark n/d). Regardless, the restriction is "penalizing specific categories of migrant mobility rather than the business model which takes advantage of this mobility" (Floros & Jørgensen 2023: p. 23). We see here how a specific institution of the Danish state – the Ministry of Immigration and Integration – assumes the role of regulating the labor market by proxy. The government therefore avoids direct legislative interference in the labor market, which is something that the social partners in Denmark do not want. Yet, the "primacy of mobility" (Casas Cortes et al. 2015: p. 896) over state restrictions is evident in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. As I demonstrated in the third chapter, hundreds of South Americans are still entering Denmark with Italian or Spanish EU-passports and work through digital labor platforms (e.g., Bech-Nielsen 2022).

Before concluding this section, I want to stress that the restriction of visas was not a unanimous decision of the Danish political parties, not even those supporting the government. The Social Liberal Party, which supported the Social Democrat government, disapproved of the restriction, which was supported by the xenophobic, populist far-right Danish People's Party. The right-wing opposition (former government) expressed its opinion through its spokesperson on migration issues.

> These are platforms that many Danes are happy to use, and they help to solve tasks in Denmark that we otherwise couldn't get solved. It shows how stupid it is to impose this restriction on South Americans' job opportunities. [Mads Fuglede, in (Schneider 2019), own translation]

[45] Schneider's article in *Berlingske* has two different versions. In the printed newspaper version (which I am quoting), she starts her article by presenting her Argentinian interviewee: "She is a young woman with dreams and hopes for a better life. A life where she will never again have to live off scraps from garbage cans in Argentina." In the online version, the sentences are changed to "She is a young woman with dreams and hopes for a world open to all. A world where she doesn't get "no thanks" because the color of her passport is not correct." The article criticizes the restriction of visas and presents migrant platform work as beneficial for all parties: migrants, platforms and Danish customers. The printed version is an attempt to present Argentinian visa-holders as poor victims fleeing to Europe. The revised online version presents them as victims of contemporary border regimes. Both versions seemingly intend to create sympathy for restricted visa holders, but the underlying rationale of the article supports the platform business model. As such, it contributes to the sociotechnical imaginary of the sharing economy (Schneider 2019).

We see here how the main proponents and supporters of the sociotechnical imaginary of the sharing economy frame precarious tasks contracted through platforms as job opportunities. Platform housecleaning and food delivery are presented as tasks that would be unsolvable without the mediation of labor platforms, and the possible shortage of precarious workers is depicted as endangering the happiness of Danish consumers. Analyzed through the lens of governmental precarization, this statement highlights how a certain part of Danish politics perceives the process of governing labor through insecurity as foundational for the inevitable digitalized future of the labor market (cf. Schiølin 2019).

9.6 Presumption of employment – can Denmark do more?

In the previous sections, I elaborated upon how classification of employment for platform workers in Denmark has become a hotly contested topic. When the right-wing government started promoting the sharing economy, the focus was on taxation and competition rather than worker's rights. The 3F-Hilfr agreement created optimism that the Danish industrial relations model and the social partners would figure out a way to resolve classification of employment according to Danish labor market traditions. After coming into office and encountering the inability of the social partners to provide solutions through collective agreements, the new government restricted holiday working visas from Latin America to display its support for the labor unions (Marenco 2023). This support did not produce further results. In the autumn of 2021, the Danish government published 'Denmark Can Do More I', a policy initiative on the development of Denmark for the next ten years. Surprisingly enough, given the government's traditional non-interference in the labor market, the policy announced the intention of introducing a presumption of employment rule in Denmark (Regeringen 2021: p. 19).

The origin of this initiative can be traced back to the presentation of the findings of the Nordic Future of Work research project, which was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

> This coincided with the same discourse going on elsewhere in Europe, so when the minister heard it from the Nordic project they also heard it from other European projects […] it was actually the ministry and it was against the social partners who were saying no […] it was clearly the minister/ministry that had the political interest in trying

> to maybe facilitate this speeding up process of getting more clarity in the labor market. (E8 Academic)

The Ministry of Employment commissioned a report from academics asking for a "mapping and analysis of the key legal issues that apply to atypical employment and platform work within the area of labor law […] (and) proposals on how any challenges in the regulation and its application can be addressed and solved" (Munkholm et al. 2022: Forword, own translation).

A few days before the report was published, I interviewed both a labor union representative and a labor platform lobbyist and legal advisor. Both sides commented on the fact that the Ministry of Employment did not wait for the impending EU directive, which – at the time – was expected to soon provide an EU-wide presumption of employment rule for platform workers (E3; E7). Further than that, the discrepancy of opinion between the two sides was pronounced.

> They're looking at the rule of presumption and perhaps also looking into a more uniform definition of an employee in Denmark […] (Until now, we have had) the political discussion of whether or not to intervene. Now the Danish government has already said that we want to intervene. So far, the response from the unions is that we would like that. So, this is probably on. Now, the employers' associations, they are dead set against it. (E3 union representative)

The representative confirmed with this quote that, due to the impasse in initiating negotiations with platform companies, the unions welcomed such an intervention. The unions believed that a regulatory definition of platform workers – or at least some of them – as employees would drag some platforms to the collective bargaining table or facilitate the unions' pursuit of an optimal case to bring to the labor courts. Yet, the platform companies were very preoccupied with such a rule coming into force. My interlocutor (E7) expressed their opinion that things were going from "okay to worse" and spoke of the need for the government to "take that bullet out of the gun of presumption of employment", so that the platforms could negotiate how to improve conditions for their providers (E7).

> People are individuals and then they can decide by themselves whether or not they want to work on the platforms. It was very simple and there was no need for involving unions and discussing presumptions of employment. (E7 platform lobbyist)

The concern of the platforms about the Danish and EU attempts to establish presumption of employment rules was also expressed in the Danish media (Thomassen 2022), where their representatives presented a report commissioned and facilitated by food delivery platforms in Europe (Copenhagen Economics 2021). The report concluded that platform food-delivery couriers preferred flexibility over becoming employees.

The lengthy and detailed report by Munkholm et al. (2022) stated, for example, that it was possible for the legislators to consider a special law to establish rights, including a presumption rule that would apply exclusively to platform work. Alternatively the legislators could wait for the EU proposal and transfer it point by point into Danish law[46]. Nevertheless, a Danish presumption of employment rule did not advance beyond this report, as one of the parties supporting the government made clear that they would vote against it. A few months after this, in November 2022, a new general election was held. The new government is a wide coalition between the Social Democrats, their traditional right-wing rivals, Denmark's Liberal Party, and a center-right newly formed party, the Moderates, led by former prime minister Rasmussen, who presided over the Disruption Council in 2017–2018. The composition of the new cabinet clearly shows that for the time being, Denmark *cannot do more* regarding presumption of employment at legislative level. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the third chapter, in April 2023, the Danish Customs and Tax Administration (SKAT) issued a decision that all riders working through the platform food delivery company Wolt are employees, according to the tax authorities. This decision added one more level to the messiness and contradictory initiatives and decisions regarding (mis)classification of employment for platform workers in Denmark.

[46] When the Danish report was published, the EU proposal introduced five criteria for considering a platform worker an employee and suggested that if two or more of them were met, the platform worker would automatically be considered an employee (European Commission 2021). At the time of writing of this thesis, there was still no agreement reached on the EU directive.

9.7 Conclusion

In this last chapter, I presented four different instances of platform work governance. All four have important and diverse repercussions on the livelihoods of platform housecleaners. Investigating the role of the state in co-producing the platform labor market, I demonstrated how this role is multidimensional and contingent upon conflicting interests within the apparatus of the state; what Abrams (1988) refers to as the state-system. Each institution of the Danish state that is described acting in this chapter aims at satisfying its own interests and fulfilling its own explicit or implicit goals. The DCCA strives to promote competitiveness to the benefit of Danish consumers, SKAT is trying to secure the payment of taxes to the Danish state, the right-wing-led government tried to establish a techno-determinist market economy of individualized providers, the Social Democrat-led government continuously attempted to support the institutional role of labor unions, and the Danish Business Authority was trying to promote business and growth, regardless of ethical dilemmas. Nevertheless, nobody challenges the future essentialism (Schiølin 2019) of the sociotechnical imaginary of the sharing economy. Even today, though the sharing economy has receded as a term, sociotechnical imaginaries of Danish digitalization of the everyday life and of digital seamlessness in the provision of services (cf. Schou & Hjelholt 2018; Hockenhull & Cohn 2021; Plesner et al. 2021) still embrace labor platforms as part of a desired and imagined future.

In the case of housecleaning platforms, the present as well as the desired and imagined future is premised upon migrant labor. Out of the four instances of state governance analyzed in this chapter, one is a decision restricting migrant mobility and the other three are based on policy and legal documents lacking almost any institutional reference to migrants' role in the platform economy. More precisely, the Strategy for Growth through the Sharing Economy, the final report of the Disruption Council, the DCCA decisions on Hilfr and Happyhelper, the 'Denmark can do more I' policy and the commissioned report on the concept of wage earner/employee in Danish labor law, which focused on platform work are documents promoting, regulating, imagining or criticizing a business model without referring to the identities of the workers that render its existence feasible (E1; E3; E4; E5; E6; E7).

One can justifiably claim that legal documents and universal policies cannot discriminate between migrant and Danish workers. Nevertheless, the fact that the – predominantly – migrant identity of platform workers[47] is systematically ignored, overlooked or extremely downplayed in all legal and policy documents relating to platform work in Denmark is in itself a revealing finding. According to my research, the rhetoric of digital technologies supporting a Danish labor market where no-one is left behind (Danish Government 2019: p. 44) in the future of work is speculative, if not intentionally misleading. Most people depending on platform housecleaning to make a living have already been left behind in a precarious loop or never had a long future in Denmark to begin with. Cleaners who started their own small cleaning companies are the few exceptions to the rule.

The long process of governmental precarization based on the discrimination of migrant others and the historical transformation of governance in the global North is supported in the Danish case by the prevalence of sociotechnical imaginaries that tend to obscure who performs precarious work in the labor market. Danish policymaking, social partners' inertia, and public agencies' decisions contribute to the fact that platform housecleaning, food delivery, and other types of gig work are welcomed by Danish customers, despite the precarity-generating model of migrant labor upon which they are premised. Any discussion on improvement of wages, working conditions or employment classification of housecleaning platform work is nonsensical if it does not take into account the primacy of migrant labor. Abrams, in his conceptualization of the state claims that "the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is" (1988: p. 82). Undertaking a direct analogy of Abrams claim, I would conclude that the overall outcome of the conflicting policies, decisions and regulations on platform work, which constitute the Danish state, simply work towards obfuscating the underlying xenophobic practices of governmental precarization of platform housecleaners.

[47] Regarding housecleaning platforms, I have demonstrated this in the fourth chapter of this thesis. Despite the inexistence of official, non-curated data on the demographics of platform food delivery, my expert informants (e.g., E2; E3; E5) and the food couriers and labor union representatives that joined the roundtable discussion I organized at the ITU in 2022 (Floros 2023) affirmed that platform couriers, especially in Copenhagen, are primarily migrants. The two companies that are almost always referred to as the most popular in news articles and scholarly work are the largest food delivery platform and the largest housecleaning platform.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusions

10.1 Summary of thesis findings

In this concluding chapter, I summarize the most important empirical findings of my research and connect them to the theoretical framework underpinning it. Moreover, I discuss my overall findings to provide a concluding account and several analytical comments about platform housecleaning in Denmark, to date. Finally, I situate the findings of this thesis in the current debate about platform housecleaning internationally and propose possible avenues for future research in the context of Denmark. My thesis investigates housecleaning platform labor in Denmark as a phenomenon co-constructed by – primarily migrant – housecleaners' strategies, platform affordances and the Danish legal and regulatory framework. First, I provide a brief outline of the emergence and evolution of the Danish gig economy as part of the state-supported sociotechnical imaginary of the sharing economy.

My empirical-analytical chapters commence with bottom-up accounts stemming from platform housecleaners' interviews and conclude with the role of the state, as I prioritize platform workers' experiences and understandings of the phenomenon due to my positionality and epistemological choices. In chapter four, I demonstrated how platform housecleaning is predominantly a migrant undertaking, a fact that signifies specific implications and restrictions for the migrant participants of the platform labor market. I chose this as my first analytical chapter, since I consider the migrant identity of cleaners to be the most defining trait of platform housecleaning in Denmark. In chapter five, I continued to 'see from below' (Haraway 1988) and brought to the fore platform housecleaners' situated knowledge and experiences. I analyzed the two intersecting popularized narratives portraying gig work either positively for workers, through the narrative of work-life flexibility; or negatively, through recourse to the framework of labor precarity and overall livelihood insecurity. In this chapter, I highlighted how precarity has a relational aspect and is not simply created by platform

work *per se*. Precarity for platform workers is augmented by their sociolegal status or the level of their dependence on platform income. I also argued that the combination of Danish welfare, migration and labor policies is crucial in creating further insecurity for migrant housecleaners. Here, I also introduced my own sets of indicators for assessing flexibility and precarity for platform housecleaners. The novelty in both sets of indicators lies with including wider socioeconomical and sociopolitical criteria in what impedes flexibility (e.g., local labor market regulations) or intensifies uncertainty (e.g., welfare exclusions). I argued that including these factors provides a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon, beyond assessing flexibility and precarity only in terms of algorithmically managed labor processes or (mis)classification of employment relations.

In chapter six, I built upon platform housecleaners' practices to highlight their everyday forms of resistance. Through presenting the cleaners' online communities of solidarity and discerning resistance in their everyday mundane practices, I challenged assumptions that the individualized character of platform housecleaning signifies the subjection of cleaners to platforms' algorithmic management and customers' arbitrary wishes. In the ensuing chapter, I elaborated on how platform housecleaners are expected to behave according to the values inscribed in the platforms' algorithmic management. Challenging the portrayal of algorithmic management as omnipotent and deterministic, I conceptualized minor algorithmic management to describe the human/nonhuman assemblage governing housecleaning platforms, and the tensions between insubordination and the anticipatory compliance of housecleaners (cf. Bucher et al. 2021). In the last two chapters, I gradually shifted my view from below to scrutinize the role of the state and its entanglements in constructing the imaginaries and underpinning the political economy of gig work more broadly and platform housecleaning more specifically in Denmark.

The empirical chapters of this thesis constitute a contribution to the limited qualitative research that includes the voices of platform housecleaners in Denmark. To date, most scholarly work referring to Danish housecleaning platforms – either exclusively or as part of the wider Danish gig economy – has given voice to and engaged with primarily platform managers, stakeholders, union representatives and public sector officials and only to a lesser extent with platform housecleaners (e.g., Ilsøe &

Madsen 2018; Ilsøe & Larsen 2023). In that sense, this thesis aligns with the international bottom-up research on housecleaning and domestic work platforms, also because it is one of the few studies in Europe (e.g., van Doorn 2020) featuring such a volume of interviews with platform housecleaners.

10.2 A thin red line connecting interdisciplinary theoretical concepts

To construct the analytical framework for the thesis, and in an attempt to fruitfully combine micro and macro-sociological perspectives on platform housecleaning in Denmark, I chose theoretical concepts that cut through the binary of structure and agency. The essence of this framework lies with what I have referred to multiple times in this thesis as retooling "precarity as a non-fatalistic analytic" for platform work (Raval 2020, quoted in van Doorn 2023: p.162). The housecleaning platform business model – with its (mis)classification of employment and its hybrid human/algorithmic management – coupled with restrictive Danish migration, welfare and labor policies promotes the precarization process of the (migrant) labor force. However, this process of precarization does not mean that all platform housecleaners in Denmark are precarious workers. Vallas and Schor (2020) argue against oversimplified theorizations of platform work that fail to account for the heterogeneity of the labor force. The platform housecleaners I interviewed fall short of constituting a homogeneous group of precarious workers, due to their different positionalities in the labor market, their various degrees of dependence on platform work and their different sociolegal statuses, which all enact different behaviors. Adopting an intersectional approach, I demonstrated how gender, race, class, age and legal status co-construct the complex social inequalities that these cleaners are navigating. Nevertheless, my findings contradict Vallas and Schor's depiction of gig work as usually generating supplementary income that alleviates workers' financial uncertainty (2020: p. 280). Eleven of the seventeen non-student platform housecleaners I interviewed were working exclusively through platforms or supplemented their income with undocumented housecleaning.

However, this process of precarization does not produce a paralyzing effect leading migrant housecleaners to succumb to platform management and customer whims. Rather than representing migrant housecleaners as victims of social and corporate structures, the theoretical framework of the thesis allows my analysis to foreground workers' agency, while highlighting their resistance practices,

coping mechanisms and collective organizing. On the same note, the use of 'governmental precarization' (Lorey 2015) serves a double objective. On the one hand, it demonstrates the structural role of neoliberal states (even allegedly universal welfare states such as Denmark) in governing through uncertainty, aiming primarily at the migrant Other. Such othering becomes evident in the multiple welfare exclusions of various categories of migrants, and also in the way Danish policymakers disregard or downplay the migrant identity of location-based platform workers and the implications stemming thereof. On the other hand, it calls attention to the emancipatory effects emanating from the need of workers to self-govern their own uncertain livelihoods. A prime example of this is the WhatsApp group, I presented in chapter six, as a self-organized solidarity tool. Scrutinizing the tensions between platform housecleaning as a highly uncertain, individualistic, algorithmically controlled undertaking and platform housecleaning as potentially containing an emancipatory perspective was an explicit goal from the onset of the project culminating in this thesis. A non-fatalistic analysis of precarity affords diverse readings concerning the digital mediation of flexible, low-skilled work through housecleaning platforms in Denmark.

10.3 What could the future entail for housecleaning platform work in Denmark?

Before the proliferation of digital platforms, and to a large extent even today, housecleaning in Denmark was usually undeclared work performed mainly by female migrants (Mailand & Larsen 2020). Not surprisingly, the argument of providing "easy, safe, affordable and legal" (E1) cleaning was invoked by housecleaning platforms, when establishing their business in Denmark. Location-based platform work is often seen as a prolongation of previous forms of low-skilled precarious employment for (migrant) workers (e.g., MacDonald & Giazitzoglou 2019). However, describing platform housecleaning in such terms can be misleading. This becomes more obvious when observing what Danish politicians and stakeholders have framed as a problem when promoting policymaking initiatives on platform work. Combating tax evasion was one of the first aims in the Strategy for the Sharing Economy, together with providing easy labor market access to vulnerable workers (Regeringen 2017). However, what is constructed as a problem in public discourse (cf. Bacchi 2009) creates "truths" with significant impact – both material and immaterial – in "constructing social

phenomena as problems" (Kvist et al 2009: p. 3). Ensuring taxation and integrating vulnerable (migrants) in the labor market dominated the political debate on housecleaning platforms in the early stages of the "sharing economy". The concurrent signing of the 3F-Hilfr agreement created the illusion of a labor market about to be regulated according to the Danish industrial relations system. That partially appeased concerns regarding the so-called challenges (self-employment, welfare exclusions) of the new business model (cf. Danish Government 2019).

What makes platform housecleaning in Denmark novel, rather than a prolongation of the past models, is the inscription of the developers' visions and values of desired worker's behavior into the housecleaning platform application. What I conceptually treated in this thesis as *minor algorithmic management* is the entanglement of novel algorithmic and traditional in person management practices, which aims at optimizing the extraction of profit from migrant workers, whose employment opportunities are constrained by their socio-legal status. What is also new is the concentration of many workers on a platform, which creates price competition, driving the prices for housecleaning even lower. This is especially true if we consider that customers are charged an extra 10 to 35% of the total price in commission fees. In this thesis, I also demonstrated how the Danish Competition and Consumers Authority (DCCA) puts further pressure on the fees, curtailing the – already low – minimum fees that were imposed by the platform companies. These are completely novel traits introduced in the housecleaning labor market through platform work. Nevertheless, algorithmic management and wage dumping surfaced late in the public debate.

Even after the change in government, in 2019, the first move was the restriction of holiday working visas for Latin American workers, who had been fueling the platform labor market in recent years. This move did not improve working conditions for the rest of the labor force. It mainly forced Latin Americans to look for alternative routes into Denmark and impelled platforms to focus on different target groups of workers to recreate a large pool of cleaners available on-demand. The latest initiative by the former government to establish a presumption of employment rule, which could push housecleaning platforms towards signing collective agreements, was an initiative doomed to fail, as most Danish political parties are against such a development. As long as platform housecleaners are

primarily migrants, the duration of their participation in the Danish labor market is limited, and as Danish customers are content with seamless ways of contracting cheap housecleaners, I strongly doubt that any presumption of employment initiative will advance. The most promising finding in my research is that many platform workers resist this type of exploitation, albeit through less organized or conflictual forms of resistance. Cleaners adopt less explicit and pronounced forms of resistance, such as false compliance and feigned ignorance, which I conceptualized in this thesis as everyday forms of resistance, drawing inspiration from Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* (1985). Focusing on everyday forms of resistance shows that the lack of institutional representation of platform housecleaners in traditional labor unions in Denmark, does not signify that cleaners are content and abide with this way of working. On the contrary, these everyday forms of resistance can be seen as potential precursors of future grass roots organizing efforts.

What could the future entail for housecleaning platform work in Denmark? Platforms display no tendency to assume an employer's role. As the manager I interviewed stressed, even if generous tax deductions led to the skyrocketing of demand for platform housecleaning, they will retain their business model, which combines "the best from communism and neoliberalism in the way that the guys and girls performing the work earn the money, and at the same time we reduce all the administrative fees" (E1). However, even in cases where politicians and academics argue for reclassification of platform housecleaners as employees, they seem not to take into account the lived realities of the labor force. Migrants without residence permits, foreign students with visa restrictions, and workers supplementing other sources of income may not be able to work altogether and definitely not with a predefined schedule offered by platforms, due to their restrictions in working hours per week, other engagements etc. This means that migrant workers who *par excellence* use these platforms as a lifeline would probably not benefit from reclassification (cf. van Doorn 2023).

This is not to suggest that the business model should remain the same (ibid.), but merely to highlight that reclassification is insufficient in itself as a political claim. Demanding better employment conditions in housecleaning platform work cannot be achieved without abolition of restrictive migration laws, termination of migrants' exclusion from Danish welfare benefits, and without the

participation of the platform labor force in the negotiations. The Hilfr-3F agreement underlined the futility of collective agreements without the involvement of workers, since minor algorithmic management continued to be applied on Hilfr and workers did not unionize. Clearly, portrayals of this problematic agreement all over Europe as the future of sustainable platform labor markets were exaggerated.

As mentioned above, self-regulation of precariousness potentially offers possibilities to post-Fordist workers to explore new objectives of protest and struggle, by moving away from traditional nostalgic claims for a full-time waged job. Precarity has historically been the norm for labor relations, while post-World War II, Global North, full-time male employment supported by welfare benefits, is merely a historical exception (Munck 2013). Therefore, uncritically maintaining the ideal of full-time dependent employment and decent jobs as a blanket claim for all workers' struggles around the globe is an example of what Wendy Brown (1999), drawing on Walter Benjamin's writings, has termed as *left melancholy*. Here, I side with Brown's and other contemporary scholars' reasoning, claiming that a progressive contemporary social and economic requirement is to question waged work as an overall system of exploitation (e.g., Millar 2017).

Thinking out of the box could be more helpful for improving the working conditions of migrant platform housecleaners in Denmark. Workers' councils negotiating with platforms' managements could be a solution regarding collective organization[48], when juxtaposed to institutional forms of labor organizing, that have a more top-down approach and their structure discourages platform workers to join them. Should platform work indeed be the future of work, modifications to its regulation are crucial. However, these modifications should be articulated by workers themselves and debated within their own grass root structures[49]. If platform work in Denmark remains minoritarian,

[48] In a nutshell, in its historical form a workers' council is formed at a specific workplace (platform) and comprises revocable delegates (housecleaners), who negotiate working conditions directly with bosses (platform managers). Despite the long political tradition behind workers' councils (Pannekoek 1950), I first heard this alternative being proposed for platform work by Alex Wood, in his presentation "The politics of platforms: power, precarity and protest", in the seminars organized by the Sociology of Work and Professions research group at Lund University, on November 9th, 2023.

[49] Here, I would like to comment upon the claim for algorithmic transparency, which figures prominently in the agenda of various stakeholders. My analysis warns against simplified policymaking proposals that portray algorithmic transparency

with the main reason for its existence being badly paid housecleaning, food-delivery and online grocery shopping that cannot be regulated by the social partners, and the state for its part declines to provide solutions, perhaps the model should be abolished altogether. In the long run, as the situation stands, platform housecleaning – beyond very few exceptions – appeals only to students receiving the state's educational grant (SU) (E1) and migrants unwilling to pay taxes on their earnings. Moreover, in my analysis, I exposed this business model as a strategy of controlling and cashing in on migrant labor, rather than a socially responsible endeavor to combine profitmaking with alleviating labor market inequalities, as platform managers and relevant stakeholders claim. Though it provides a lifeline for migrants in urgent need of income, platform housecleaning in Denmark exacerbates inequalities and augments insecurities for its workforce.

10.4 Future avenues for research and final comments

Writing the last section of this thesis and in retrospect, I am thinking of all the extra questions I could have added to the interview guides to further explore the topic, and all leads and ramifications in the fieldwork data that remained unutilized. In this thesis, I tried to provide an overall picture of platform housecleaning work in Denmark, to the extent that this is possible within the tight limits of a three-year PhD project. As mentioned in the methodological chapter, platform labor markets change drastically over short periods of time. This became obvious in Europe, where, e.g., irregularly residing migrants in France bore the risk of food and grocery delivery platform work during the pandemic, only to see their accounts massively deactivated when the crisis was over (Floros & Jørgensen 2023). Likewise, the labor market composition of platform housecleaning in Denmark underwent an

as a holy grail for workers, who will thus attain knowledge and be able to circumvent the pressure exerted by the algorithms (e.g., European Commission 2021). On the contrary *minor algorithmic management* highlights that such management is only efficient and productive when it operates in parallel to restrictive migration, labor and welfare policies, which make platform housecleaning a desired undertaking for categories of migrants. European and Danish labor union representatives (E5) discuss a potential future delegative role for unions, whereby they explain to workers how algorithms work and how workers can be protected. This is a somewhat paternalistic understanding, which – according to representatives – ascribes unions with a specific role in the digital future. However, it is not ignorance of the software's configuration that singlehandedly sustains minor algorithmic management, but all the other 'institutional devices' working *in tandem*. Presenting in detail the algorithmic configuration can be overwhelming rather than informative. Moreover, small adjustments can easily change the algorithmic outcome in favor of the platform's interest. As Lee at al. (2015: p. 1610) argue, "fully disclosing the algorithm is not a viable solution."

important change during the beginning of this PhD project, when Latin American holiday working visas were restricted, and these workers were banned from legally working through digital labor platforms. Platform housecleaning is a dynamic phenomenon (in Denmark), which cannot sufficiently be analyzed without the participation of cleaners themselves in the research process. This calls for more projects with nuanced, qualitative approaches, that will delve even deeper than this thesis into a field that affords only limited access.

This thesis opens up several new research avenues and poses potential questions. First, it foregrounds new (online) forms of collective self-organization of platform housecleaners and questions their potential for augmenting solidarity and provoking change, both in Denmark and internationally. Second, it accentuates the migrant identities of platform housecleaners and relates this to the overall reluctance of Danish stakeholders and policymakers to engage with the regulation of this business model. Interdisciplinary projects mapping labor market composition in combination with migration, labor and welfare policies could advance knowledge on this entanglement. Third, the thesis provides a set of indicators for assessing flexibility and precarity in platform work, that take into account the combination of structural traits of platform work, the agency of the apps and their software, and the agency of platform workers. Moreover, the indicators draw attention to the intersecting identities of platform workers and how this impacts such assessments. Thus, they can potentially be utilized to scrutinize gig work in other contexts. Finally, this thesis indicates the important role of gig economy customers in sustaining sociotechnical imaginaries and the precarious forms of labor stemming from them.

The specific aim of this thesis was to critically investigate platform housecleaning in Denmark and bring to the forefront the voices of platform housecleaners, who are rendered invisible in the public debate and public discourse. I hope it will help stimulate various debates, both academic and – primarily – political. Finally, knowing that every representation of “reality” bears with it the biases and background of its author, I hope that the platform housecleaners who entrusted me with their insight and found the valuable time to participate in this research will identify their narratives, points of view and the important role they played in the results of this project.

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