More than a glitch in the platforms
Precarious migratory status and other structural anomalies in app-based food delivery

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Abstract: Practices of subleasing and borrowing delivery app accounts are spreading among platform-based food couriers in Spain. This article engages the significance of these seemingly neglectable practices among couriers in deportable situations. Both celebratory and critical portraits of the platform revolution have tended to ignore the question of migration in the digital gig economy. Based on interviews to unregistered couriers, accompanied by media analysis on Glovo, the main delivery company in Spain, this article calls for engaging migration beyond the exception in platform research agendas. The overall argument points to the primacy of migration in the reconfiguration of delivery platform logics of labor recruitment.

Keywords: autonomy of migration, couriers, food delivery, migration status, platform economy, practices of survival, riders, surveillance

Glovo, with headquarters in Barcelona and currently owned by Delivery Hero, a German-based platform company, has been brought to court multiple times since its beginnings in 2015. Still, it is the most popular food delivery company in Spain. Accusations about "false self-employment" and "opaque uses of algorithmic management" were placed against this delivery company well before and after the 2021 Rider Law, one of the pioneer national attempts at regulating digital platform labor in the European Union (Burcu 2022).[1] Given Glovo's atypical contractual arrangement, the litigations unveiled conditions of "bogus self-employment." This is a situation in which somebody registered as self-employed or an independent contractor, is de facto an employee carrying out

professional activity under the authority of a company. It is a salaried work relation hidden behind a false pretense of self-employment. Such false self-employment is often a way to circumvent social welfare and employment legislation, for example by avoiding employer's social security and income tax contributions. This is prevalent in many delivery platforms across countries, according to ongoing critiques raised by scholars engaging platform employment relationships (Aloisi and De Stefano 2020; Niebler et al. 2023; Todolí-Signes 2017). Nonetheless, fines against Glovo during 2023 and 2024 addressed something other than the recurrent topic of employment status. For the first time, Spain's Labor Inspection addressed the migratory status of couriers making Glovo's deliver-

ies. While Glovo's reliance upon undocumented migrants has made the news since at least 2018, the food delivery sector in Spain has been politically and academically engaged primarily as a conflict between two labor and contractual models: self-employment vs. salaried employment (Balaguer 2018). The irony of this national debate, replicated at the EU level, about the wonders and limits of independent contractor versus wage earner is how it completely ignores that many couriers are not able to reach either of those statuses. The requirement to be an independent contractor or a waged employee is to have citizenship status or at least, specific migratory paperwork in order. Reclassification of gig work as a form of standard employment has been claimed as the main solution for regulating platform labor (De Stefano 2016). However, a research intervention on migrant labor in the gig economy states how demands for reclassification, that is, changing the labor status of gig work from self-employment to salaried work, disregards current migration policies (Doorn, Ferrari and Graham 2022). The worker-citizen paradigm is assumed in a sector that has been described to rely on undocumented migrant labor due to platforms' need for a contingent workforce, not able to demand for better incomes and conditions (Altenried 2021).

Both celebratory and critical portraits of the platform revolution have tended to ignore the question of migration in the digital gig economy (Casas-Cortés et al. 2023a). Fortunately, this trend in platform research is changing with key scholarly contributions engaging migration (Altenried 2021; Doorn and Vijay 2021; Doorn, Ferrari and Graham 2022; Lata et al. 2023; Schaupp 2022); including resistance strategies among couriers coming from so-called minorities (Gebrial 2022; Iazzolino and Varesio 2023). According to these authors, the presence of couriers with migratory projects in the delivery sector is largely due to permissive requirements during the initial recruitment phase, in terms of language skills and migratory status. That is, when couriers register as "platform users" in the company's application for opening their individual accounts, concrete must-haves are at a minimum. Then, the delivery process is managed by algorithmic systems geared to expedite the delivery logistical process, without supervising other aspects of delivery (Griesbach et al. 2019; Kellogg et al. 2020).

Building upon this trend of research, this article focuses on a specific use of platform delivery accounts, namely the subleasing and borrowing of accounts among food couriers in Spain. What companies claim as "rare" and "illicit" practices seem to be more than exceptional short-circuits in platform applications. Still, this phenomenon and its implications has not received significant scholarly attention nor has it become a priority among policy-makers. Nonetheless, the spread of informal account usage enables the movement of deportable couriers to deliver prepared meals in urban territories. According to results from my national research project in Spain, the practice of subleasing and/or sharing accounts among couriers with diverse migratory statuses is more than exceptional.[2] What is at stake when registered single food delivery accounts are being accessed and worked by multiple users without explicit permission? What insights may be extracted from paying attention to this apparently insignificant yet common practice among migrant riders in Spain after the implementation of the Rider Law and during the debates to design an EU platform labor directive?

Furthering the quest started by emerging analyses of migration and delivery, I support the call for bringing "migration scholarship as a contextual lens to study platform labor" (Doorn and Vijay 2021: 4). Furthermore, coming from Critical Migration and Border Studies, I posit migration not only as an object of study, but as an analytical lens to study broader processes of power and socioeconomic re-articulation. Taking migration as a point of view to analyze broader dynamics beyond migration itself is one of the main tenants of the research tradition known as Autonomy of Migration (e.g., Bojadžijev and Karakayali 2010; Mezzadra 2011; Moulier-Boutang 2006). The conceptual toolbox developed by Autonomy of Migration

(AoM) can greatly contribute to platform studies. Beyond explaining why there are migrants in this economic sector, AoM aids in further understanding what the consequences are of that influx of migrant labor in the development of platform-based delivery. The AoM premise of migration as a significant source of social change runs through the following analysis. Situated in this literature, this case offers a clear example of how studying migration in informalized economic sectors is not only helpful in terms of tracking demographic profiles and numbers, or explaining reasons why migrants end up in those niches, but also to argue how migrant labor becomes a motor of significant changes within those sectors and beyond. Thus, the use of the expression "more than a glitch," which comes from anti-bias technology advocates pointing out structural racism in tech-based settings (Broussard 2023). In this case, I use it to emphasize how migration is not an accidental error nor an additional case either, but is coded into the system, constituting a primary cause of change within algorithmic platforms.

In-depth interviews with Glovo couriers constitute the main empirical basis of this article. Specifically, semi-structured interviews with both men and women, from 20 to 40 years old, recently arrived from Venezuela, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Romania, and Equatorial Guinea, all of whom have lived in Spain for one year or less. All couriers were delivering for the Spanish company known as Glovo. This includes couriers who own a personal Glovo account and those who do not, but still deliver for this platform. As principal investigator (PI) of this research project on platform food delivery, I organized a disseminated ethnographic team among six Spanish cities for two consecutive years. The presence of migrant labor in the food delivery sector emerged as one of the transversal findings. Furthermore, my data in the city of Zaragoza on the informal subletting and sharing of accounts among migrant couriers was supported by the findings in the other cities pointing to this common thread. Interviewees in all six cities (Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza,

Pamplona, A Coruña, and Benidorm) held precarious migratory statuses including: six-month residency under international protection; asylum seeker; or simply, "undocumented." These migratory statuses imply temporary permission to reside in Spain but not necessarily permission to work, or they may simply deny permission to reside or work. Interviewees were not selected for migratory statuses; this common trait is one of the project's research findings.

The article is structured in four sections: the first deals with the topic of migration in platform literature; the second briefly presents the Autonomy of Migration, focusing on the concept of mobility as a primary motor of change; the third section comprises the empirical work. Finally, the conclusion reflects on this exemplary case of how migration holds a structural significance in the configuration of delivery platforms.

Migration in delivery platform scholarship: An ignored yet striking finding thus far?

Platform research is finally engaging one of the worldwide traits of the platform economy that is most difficult to ignore: "urban gig economy platforms are strongholds of migrant labor" (Altenried 2021: 1). In other words, "The neglect of [migration] questions in the literature on platform labor is a serious omission, given that migrants constitute a large and growing section of the urban gig economy workforce" (Doorn, Ferrari and Graham 2022: 2). Researchers are indeed alerting as to how "the intersection of citizenship, language, visa, work permit, and the gig economy has been under-researched" (Lata et al. 2023: 9).

Quantitative data on the migrant presence in platform labor is not easily accessible, as platform businesses are not required to disclose numbers (Huws et al. 2019). Still, recent quantitative studies show how large percentages of workers in digital gig settings across different geographies have an international migrant background (e.g., ILO 2021; Zwysen and Piasna 2024). Further-

more, qualitative studies are revealing the geographical scope of this interrelation between migration and platform delivery. According to incipient ethnographic research in urban centers, migrant labor in platforms is present in North America and Europe (e.g., Metawala et al. 2021; Vieira 2020); South America (Jirón et al. 2021; Tironi and Albornoz 2022); as well as Asia (Chen and Qiu 2019; Zhang 2020, 2021; Zhang and Chen 2022), Africa (Anwar and Graham 2021; Daramola and Etim 2022) and Australia (Barratt et al. 2020). While acknowledging contextual specificities, these scholarly works point out how the migratory statuses in the platform sector have evolved. While starting initially with mostly local citizens, the current generation is composed of different internal and international migrations engaging app-based gigs.

These authors search for the material reasons to explain why migrants, especially those without all the required documents, are to be found in platform labor. One of the main reasons is "the quick and unbureaucratic application process with very few formal requirements concerning qualifications, documents or skills" in contrast with standard labor markets (Altenried 2021: 5). For instance, in Berlin many recent migrants with visas and work permits are not able to access the labor market because of the requisite of providing evidence of a regular housing situation with a formal address, which is dependent on a difficult to obtain rental contract. This coincides with the description of fast online "onboarding" processes within the food delivery industry operating in several cities where companies are conducting a kind of "selective formalization" where they "dissolve the formal employment relation into a nexus of nonnegotiable commercial contracts and user agreements [. . . and] are often quite lax with their enforcement of formal requirements such as background checks" (Doorn, Ferrari and Graham 2022: 4). These authors claim that these lax practices in an apparently formal labor market generate deeply ambiguous arrangements: "Until recently, food delivery companies made little effort to check who uses their accounts, giving

those lacking a visa, work permit, or social security number, a new income opportunity" (2022: 6). As such, they conclude, platform labor simultaneously lowers working conditions and offers possibilities to enter national labor markets, ultimately allowing the improvement of immediate living conditions for many newly arrived persons without all the necessary paperwork to reside or/and labor. A concrete analysis of the interaction of the algorithmic workplace regime with the migration regime, points to how "a precarious residence status . . . can create an implicit alliance of migrant workers with their employers in the hope for permanent residence" (Schaupp 2022: 322).

The first two years of this research project concurs with those findings, identifying a similar tendency toward a "multiplication of migrant gig labor" (Altenried 2021) in the platform-based food delivery sector in Spain. Applying the Autonomy of Migration's notion of "differential inclusion" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), existing literature rightfully signals the significant role of human mobility and migration policies in the platform sector (Altenried 2021; Doorn and Vijay 2021). Simon Schaupp calls to further study the co-constitutional relationship between platform labor and migration control, as part of "a general trend towards market-oriented migration management" (2022: 322).

The technological ease of having a single account used by several couriers has given rise to practices of subletting and lending of platform accounts. International media initially reported this phenomenon in the United Kingdom (Bryan 2019), France (Alderman 2019), Italy (Allaby 2021), and more recently in Spain (Palacios and Martínez 2023). Some studies briefly mention the practice of informal subletting of accounts, explaining how those who have the national documents required to register officially with a platform in a specific country, rent out or sublet their accounts to users who lack the required documents (Altenried 2021; Doorn, Ferrari and Graham 2022; Sanz et al. 2023). Some studies also briefly acknowledge the practice of borrowing accounts when cou-

riers let others use their own accounts without charging money for it, mostly as a "practice of solidarity" (Alternried 2021; Casas-Cortés et al. 2023b; Diz et al. 2023). While these works are among the few that acknowledge the informal uses of individual accounts, they present them as incidental, and as internally resolved with measures taken by labor inspections, police raids, or companies' surveillance methods (for a more thorough engagement see Mendonça et al. 2023). The following section engages the tradition of Autonomy of Migration in order to develop an alternative reading of these seemingly anecdotic practices.

Autonomy of Migration: A conceptual toolbox for platform research

The theory of Autonomy of Migration (AoM) has a history linked to social and academic movements in Central and Southern Europe committed to freedom of movement. This tradition has grown beyond some of its original critiques toward "methodological nationalism" (Anderson 2019; De Genova 2013; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), where migration is considered a research and political problem to be explained or solved. This constrains the analytical quality and political possibilities of studies of mobility, and of society at large. Nicholas de Genova identifies a persistent "native point of view" in scholarship and politics with an underlying assumption of state territoriality and a fixed population as the norm (De Genova 2016). AoM does not assume the nation-state, or even Fortress Europe, as a taken-for-granted scenario of social happenings, including migration and borders (Osten 2016). This bounded spatial imaginary ends up reducing migration into a research object, a "problem" or "phenomenon" that simply requires explaining without necessarily considering further analytical repercussions. In contrast, the autonomous gaze (Mezzadra 2011), enables unpacking migration beyond a sociological category. AoM calls for "a post-migrant social research." which substitutes "migrantology" (Römhild 2017) for analysis of "interlinks between capitalism, racism and mobility" (Bojadžijev and Karakayali 2010). As a response, some scholars have proposed understanding the "border as method" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). This entails acknowledging migration as a structural component of social reality and as such, holding relevant epistemic power.

AoM, as an alternative way of conceiving migration, views human mobility as co-constitutive of structures such as law, the state, the market, and the polity. Moreover, mobility is not considered merely a result dependent on those structural factors. Rather, mobility unfolds "with a relative autonomy" (Moulier-Boutang and Garson 1984: 579). Therefore, migration is more than an accumulation of individual decision-making. It also goes beyond the collateral effects of center–periphery dynamics. Mobility interacts with structural dynamics transforming them in the process. Understanding migration as a recurrent reality, partially independent from other factors, the AoM observes a key historical dynamic: after attempts at controlling and channeling a given mobility, in turn, other mobilities arise in response to these management efforts. Human mobility acquires an unusual analytical centrality, becoming an explanatory factor for numerous transformations at the sociopolitical and economic levels. This key concept of the AoM comes directly from the classical yet under-studied work on mobility by Yann Moulier-Boutang, *De l'esclavage au salariat: Economie historique du salariat bridé* (From slavery to wage labor: Historical economy of bridled wage labor) (1998). Yann Moulier-Boutang argues mobility as the *primum mobile*—as in the "first mover," a key source of motion/action—is capable of generating structural changes. Boutang interprets human mobility as the prime cause that explains different historical configurations of production and accumulation: "What is the overriding principle? The control of the flight of dependent workers" (Moulier-Boutang 2006: 32). Inspired by Boutang's proposal, AoM scholars emphasize how the transformative potential of human mobility not only affects migratory

policy and labor markets, but "business models, organizational culture, linguistic environments, ultimately, social life as a whole, installing *new forms of sociality*" (Bojadžijev and Karakayali 2010: 8, my italics).

This thesis on the prominent weight of migration in the making of social worlds sheds light on the emergence and functioning of platform capitalist enterprises. The presence of un/partially documented persons in the food delivery sector speaks to the very reshaping of platforms, which segue with the institutional attempts to manage such human mobility, mainly the current frameworks of labor and migratory regulations. Given this puzzling entanglement, taking migration as a critical standpoint allows us to ascertain how Glovo's business model works and generates new forms of sociality, including emergent platform precarities. The reconstruction of Glovo's story from migration as the *primum mobile*, shows how the expansion of this platform model is facilitated by different forms of mobility. Media archival work and interview material points to how Glovo actively incorporates new comers with distinct residency/work permits into the platform labor market. By building upon the un/expected uses of delivery accounts among deportable couriers, Glovo enters into the tug of war between mobilities and attempts to manage them. Silently consenting to these "illicit" uses at first, Glovo then accepts the spread of this practice without taking any measures initially. However, later on, Glovo started to conduct biometric surveillance-based identification and cancellations of multiple-user accounts. Finally, Glovo ends up appropriating, and fully incorporating, what previously was dismissed as fraudulent. As such, the following narrative hopes to convey the co-constitutive role of migration in delivery platform developments.

The co-constitutive role of migration in the main food delivery platform in Spain

Glovo was founded in 2015 as a start-up with three employees in Barcelona, Spain. In 2023,

this delivery tech platform is now operating in 25 countries across Europe, as well as several national markets on the African continent and the Middle East. According to *Business Insider* magazine, Glovo's CEO Óscar Pierre, co-founded this home delivery company with a clear image of the courier prototype: the standard "collaborator" will be a young person, in search of spare cash or to complement another source of income, someone excited to travel and have "fun" (Alcalde 2022). Discursively, the case of Glovo has become a hallmark of the "platform revolution," where anyone is a potential business actor and in which free time becomes an asset to make money. Still, there are certain keys to Glovo's success, which while absent from public debate, scholarly attention, and media coverage, are traceable by following the opening of a delivery account.

Acquiring a Glovo account is as "fast and easy" as the step-by-step process of opening a Google account. According to Glovo's online registration website, "you just need to introduce basic ID information and you will be delivering in less than 24h." Once the delivery account is open, it is even easier that the same account is passed around to other users. A user name plus a password is all you need to connect to the application, regardless of the person introducing those codes. Given this high level of exchangeability, the same account can de facto be used by several couriers, though not officially. While Glovo claimed this to be a "rare" occurrence, the practice of one or more third-users accessing single accounts making deliveries simultaneously is spreading. According to media and academic articles as well as our own interviews, multiple users access other couriers' profiles by subleasing or borrowing them directly from the individual owner of the account. There is no quantitative data to measure the scope of this practice. Still, ads selling and searching for delivery accounts are common on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

Most interviewees consulted for this article deliver without being registered as a delivery account holder. Sharing and subleasing accounts

Figure 1. Ad for subletting a Glovo delivery account during New Year's Eve. Source: Anonymized Facebook feed, 31 December 2021. Public Domain.

among family and friends allows for extended delivery periods and can increment the overall income of a single account. Given the "piece-rate system" of platform labor (Altenried 2021: 7), when several couriers are making deliveries, non-stop and simultaneously, under the same account, that account makes more money. As such, this use of delivery accounts becomes more profitable: both for the account holder as well as for the delivery company. Nonetheless, the main reason behind the phenomenon of both shared and subleased accounts is that most of the couriers are missing residency status or valid work permits required by national labor

legislation, and thus are not allowed to work either for themselves or as wage earners. The incipient literature on migration and platforms speaks in terms of undocumented migrants. Still, there is a large spectrum of administrative statuses between documented and undocumented, including those with permission to reside but not to labor (Anderson 2013; Chauvin y Garcés-Mascareñas 2012). Interviewed Glovo couriers fall into this gray zone of having some, but not all, of the required administrative papers to legally labor in Spain: those in the midst of asylum process resolutions; those under temporary international protection; and those overstaying their initial visa periods. Regardless of differential stages in migratory status, these couriers sooner or later have a chance of becoming deportable. For these couriers, delivery becomes a feasible option to enter the labor market and turns out to be a main source of income. While journalists have been unveiling how this "subterfuge for illegal migrants started a long time ago," CEO Óscar Pierre declared complete unawareness (Gutierrez 2019).

This growing situation had remained under the radar until 27 May 2019, when a 22-year-old bike courier in the midst of a delivery with a Glovo backpack was mortally wounded in a collision with a garbage truck late at night in one of the central avenues of Barcelona. A debate followed, in terms of an unfortunate "traffic accident" according to the company versus "injury on the job" as denounced by pro-labor rights organizations, claiming the platform's model as the source of risky working conditions (Monge 2019). Only a few newspapers focused on how the courier was originally from Nepal, arriving in Spain six months before his death and was residing under a precarious migratory status. This attention to the administrative migration status of the dead courier, while Glovo was claiming how he was not officially registered as a collaborator, went beyond the usual debate about self-employed versus wage-earner models of work. Instead, the strictly labor-centered debate on reclassification of couriers was placed temporarily on pause. A thus far ignored

reality came to light: that many deliveries under Glovo accounts were made by couriers without work and/nor residency permits. Still, while Glovo claimed subcontracting as fraudulent, the misuse of Glovo accounts kept growing exponentially from 2017 onward according to official national union's report (Diez et al. 2020). Given the circumstances of the courier's death, this apparent rarity within the delivery sector, was suddenly under public scrutiny. Glovo responded via national media announcing blunt measures: offering to pay funeral costs, calling all couriers to register to access the security safety manual, and finally threatening to close all accounts in use by those caught unregistered via the installation of verification devices in the application for customers and restaurants. According to national media outlets, and despite the seemingly vehement response, Glovo temporarily de-activated only a limited number of accounts as a response to the courier's death. According to our research, the temporary closing of accounts continues to happen but only sporadically. Since this incident, Glovo, together with other key delivery companies such as Deliveroo and UberEats, were accused of relying massively on the clandestine employment of un- or partially documented migrants. According to our interviews and the sole union report on this issue, registered couriers subleased their own delivery accounts to people in precarious administrative status for a percentage, usually 30 percent, of the profits from their deliveries (Diez et al. 2020: 19).

This report made the news, questioning how this reality could have taken on such a magnitude, without security forces responding with the usual police raids on the presence of undocumented migrants in public spaces, or legal actions against companies committing serious offense by employing migrants without residency permits. While the national press reported how home delivery platforms preferred "geo-localizable undocumented migrants" as ideal couriers (Escalante 2019) and "the dark business of delivery account scams" (De la Fuente 2021), a similar lethal accident of a motorcycle

courier took place in downtown Madrid the night of 8 February 2021. This time it was an asylum seeker from Venezuela in the midst of a delivery with a Glovo backpack, yet without a Glovo account under his name. While there is no mention of the irregular employment situation nor the migratory status of the courier by government authorities, the press started to report again on the illegal subleasing happening in delivery platforms with migrant couriers. All of this was happening during heated negotiations around the need for regulatory frameworks for platform labor. The attempts at reaching a consensus regulating this sector still revolved around hiring couriers as independent contractors. In fact, in September 2020, the National Supreme Court ruled that Glovo distributors, delivery couriers known as *riders* in Spain, are legally considered as "false self-employed." The Ministry of Labor announced further regulation of digital delivery platforms through the Rider Law, with the intention of guaranteeing a standard employment relationship between the parties (Burcu 2022).

Biometric surveillance among food delivery couriers?

While the question of undocumented migration in delivery platforms was absent in legislative corridors during the negotiations of the Rider Law, Glovo and other delivery companies began taking measures to protect their reputation especially given the news coverage. Glovo and UberEats promised security to their restaurant collaborators and costumers by implementing an ID verification system based on algorithmic biometric technology. Existing research about algorithmic management in the food delivery sector has focused on the assignment of orders, and how such automated decisions affect labor conditions, but not migratory situations. However, companies in this sector also rely on algorithmic calculations for other functions such as incidents of "identity fraud." Glovo and UberEats in particular have implemented Fa-

cial Recognition Systems (FRS) in their applications, looking for those couriers using others' application profiles.

This is the case of Patricia, born and raised in Colombia and now an asylum-applicant living in Zaragoza, Spain.[3] After only a few months residence, she had already worked for two delivery companies as a courier, since this is "my only option" as she puts it. Patricia delivers by subleasing an account for which she pays 30 percent of what she makes each day, thus the amount varies according to the number of deliveries. While delivering under her subleased Glovo account, she complains how the FRS regularly and randomly popped up on her cellphone. The automatic request for Patricia's facial traits could and did appear at any restaurant while picking up her order, at a client's door, on her multiple trips, that is, at any given point of her itineraries, day or night, raining or pedaling uphill. In order for the application to keep operating, she was requested to STOP and take a specific kind of selfie in the midst of a delivery. Her facial architecture was supposed to match the archived photo of the registered account in order for the account to remain valid. Passing these mobile check-ins ensured staying connected to the application. "After many failed attempts, I kept working until Glovo blocked the account I was using." When further explaining this disconnection, she mumbled that after all, "the situation was too much to handle for the owner of the account, who decided to close it since it was not profitable." This is how Patricia started to deliver with a subleased UberEats account, in which passing the FRS was easier. This company only requested a selfie when opening the application. Patricia, following the routine of many couriers with similar arrangements, meets with the owner of the account each time she starts her delivery journey. Another issue is how clients might look at Patricia, a female courier, given the contrast with the picture and name of the account profile, a male courier, that they see. Clients might comment it to her directly, and sometimes report it to the company through an application gadget, to which she re-

Figure 2. Glovo Facial Recognition System (FRS). Source: *GlovoApp.* Public Domain.

sponds she is covering her brother (or father or husband), who was very sick that day (Interview in Zaragoza 2023).

Facial recognition algorithms perform automatic verification claiming to be faster and more accurate than any manual verification of documents and matching of facial features. Facial recognition technologies are based on "machine-learning algorithms," that is, automated algorithms that modify themselves to continue

improving their levels of efficient recognition, being aware of aging, changes in light, pose, or clothes. These facial verification systems have been applied in security related sectors, such as borders and banks, and in certain service platforms, such as passenger transport and food delivery. The Spanish Rider Law requires "algorithmic transparency" from the platforms (Law 9/2021). This requirement has led to this 2021 legislation being considered a pioneer in regulating the use of artificial intelligence in platform work. However, said requirement does not mention the identity verification algorithmic operations, ignoring their implications, in terms of work situations, and above all, in relation to migratory situations. This deployment of algorithmic-based surveillance raises immediate questions such as: why is biometric technology against identity fraud used in a sector not associated with crime such as food delivery? What consequences do these just-in-time checkpoints have on couriers? According to our research, despite biometric technology's supposed efficacy, its potential effect of disconnecting large numbers of accounts is not happening. On the contrary, the practice of delivery accounts in use by unregistered couriers remains and has become increasingly mainstream. Platform companies are not taking action when made aware of deliveries made in isothermal backpacks with Glovo and UberEats logos by couriers who are not Glovo nor UberEats account holders (Casas-Cortés et al. 2023b). According to Idrissa, a courier from Senegal who overstayed his visa while living in Barcelona, "delivery companies have the technology to track everything we do, how come they are not aware of this? They know very well that there are many of us working with other people's accounts, and no action is taken" (Interview in Barcelona 2022).

Is FRS, this biometric tool against identity fraud, leading to the immediate and permanent closure of rented or shared accounts, the formalization of complaints to the labor inspectorate, or the confidential communication with immigration authorities? According to our informants, consequences are not usually so drastic because the blocking decision is fixable: "the owner of the account has to insist by mail . . . , the companies are going to block you first, and then unblock you because they have an interest in keeping you working" said Emilio, a Glovo rider from Colombia living in Madrid after legalizing his status (Interview in Madrid, 2023). Our interviews describe fast and easy ways to fix blocked accounts by the account holders they collaborate with, suggesting that surveillance measures act as perfunctory charades. Behind the apparent goal of prohibition, the actual result is a smooth process of re-incorporation into delivery labor.

Both for policing migration and banking crimes, facial recognition is applauded for its high degree of reliability. These levels of efficiency contrast with the situation of widespread identity fraud in the food delivery sector in Spain. Every time the FRS pops up on couriers using subleased or borrowed accounts, multiple human interventions take place, altering the consequences of algorithmic surveillance: "If you want to unblock your account, email us. Remember you can question the blocking decision by reaching out to our Help Center" (Glovo Application).

Ultimately, the platforms do not strictly monitor failed facial recognition, nor do they report irregular situations due to identity fraud or laboring without a residence and/or work permit. This lack of interest in putting an end to the mis/use of accounts by third parties is corroborated by the latest step taken by Glovo, which not only ignores and thus consents to the situation, but promotes it to the full.

Do you want to subcontract your Glovo account?

Back in 2019, around the time of the first mortal accident of an unregistered courier, Glovo vehemently prohibited any attempt at delivering without holding a personal Glovo account. On 2 November 2023, Glovo announced new terms and conditions, where it included the possibility of subcontracting, by downloading the same

account owned by one Glovo account holder on several cellphones. This measure somehow re-appropriates and institutionalizes the previous practice of third-party users delivering under the same account. As such, the initial fears about the FRS are not even a minor inconvenience. In other words, the platform adapts their infrastructure to an apparent simultaneous interest between platforms and couriers, at least temporarily, in the practice of subleased and shared accounts. This recent Glovo policy allows outsourcing accounts, and it is described in the following way in its official portal: "You have complete freedom to subcontract your account."

Glovo accepts and encourages the subcontracting of delivery accounts! This striking move by the main delivery company in Spain points to the influence of the large presence of couriers with precarious migratory status, and their uses of delivery accounts, into readjustment of platform business strategies. Somehow, by offering the option of subcontracting accounts, Glovo re-appropriates those same illicit practices and frames them as permissible, even legal, possibilities held by any self-employed person to contract their own labor force. As such, this re-configuration enables Glovo to keep counting with that readily available labor force at its disposal, while outsourcing all the responsibilities, including the breaking of migratory laws, to those registered self-employees holding Glovo accounts. Leticia—an ex-Glovo rider with temporary international protections—points to how her husband, after obtaining the required paperwork to become a self-contractor, is now an owner of a Glovo account that he subcontracts to recently arrived riders to Spain (regardless of their specific migratory status). The subleasing of his account is often arranged prior to the international move/migration of the lessee (Interview in Zaragoza, 2023).

Research shows how platform companies and migrant couriers—at different points in their trajectories – somehow overlap in sharing interests, in this case, in maintaining a highly unregulated labor market in delivery. On the one hand, companies exponentially multiply their labor force ensuring 24/7 availability to respond to delivery orders across urban landscapes, and thus, increasing their profit-making margins. On the other hand, those with uncertain administrative migratory status are able to enter rigid and exclusive labor markets, usually entitled to those with citizenship or long-term residence permits, allowing a sector of the population with few labor options, to make a living while avoiding controls by migratory enforcement agencies. This is a narrative of how the uses of delivery accounts in the hands of deportable couriers interacts with platform companies who react by permitting, encouraging, persecuting, and re-appropriating those same practices.

Conclusion: Migration beyond the exception

While migration has remained an afterthought in political as well as scholarly debates on platforms until recently, migrant platform couriers as well as the measures taken around their presence and actions, kept popping up as recursive anomalies reconfiguring the very inner workings of platforms. The apparent, yet structural, glitch of migration within platform-based delivery materialized with the spread of un/expected uses of individual accounts. The glitch became visible when reported by the mainstream media after several couriers suffered mortal accidents while delivering as unregistered riders, using another Glovo username and photo ID. The company responded by installing biometric surveillance technology to catch illicit users of accounts, implicitly focusing precisely on those without the necessary documents to work or reside. This is the very same surveillance technology also used for border control purposes, although not so thoroughly implemented in this case. The latest move from Glovo has been to grant formal permission and necessary app infrastructure to subcontract multiple riders under the same account, breaking their own stipulation that initially forbade multiple users under the same account. This empirical work

points to the structural role of newly arrived persons under current migration regulations in reshaping the developments of a particular delivery company.

The premise of "mobility as primum mobile" (Moulier-Boutang 2006) has been fueling critical analysis in the Autonomy of Migration tradition. Taking migration, writ large, as the primary cause entails acknowledging human mobility as a primordial component of social reality and as such, holding relevant analytical weight. Under the autonomous gaze, migration becomes a point of departure for any research endeavor to shed further light into socioeconomic transformations, in this case, the arrival and unfolding of a delivery platform company. Until now, most readings of platform-driven changes have been in terms of labor practices, organizational management styles, consumption patterns, business models, data treatment, etc. Migration as a research topic in platform studies is emerging in specific sectors with enough migrant presence such that it becomes impossible to ignore, mainly domestic-labor matching platforms and food delivery. Still, platform studies at large would greatly benefit from adopting a multilevel stance, which implies ontological, epistemological, methodological, and even political changes. This approach does not see migration as an additional factor or an exception that interferes with other dynamics. As such, migration becomes rather central to understand platform capitalism in this case. I summarize this centrality with the expression "migration beyond the exception." In adopting this approach, otherwise imperceptible entanglements of platform capitalism with different legislative frameworks (including migration, labor, and welfare regulations), become apparent. The insights of Autonomy of Migration come alive in this puzzling case showing how deportable couriers constitute more than a glitch in the current unfolding of delivery platform capitalism. Thus, couriers' practices of sharing and subleasing accounts are not read in terms of acts of resistance or instances of individual agency. Rather, they are taken as co-constitutive factors in the current interplay among the platform economy, migration regimes, and national labor legislations. This critical standpoint enables appreciating how migration constitutes a central axis of current platform predicaments, while entangling within existing regulatory frameworks. This analysis can also be applied to other labor settings where employment and migration legislations overlap, shifting between enforcement and un-enforcement, such as in agricultural or domestic work. Rather than an accidental and circumscribed occurrence, migration constitutes a *primum mobile* in the reconfiguration of delivery platform capitalism and beyond. Further insights on those rather irregular entanglements would require further research from the analytical standpoint of "migration beyond the exception."

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Notes

1. The Rider Law was signed on 11 May 2021 and came into force on 12 August 2021 in Spain.
2. The findings of the project titled "Emerging Cultures of Mobile Precarity in the Digital Gig Economy: A Case-Study on the Food Delivery Sector in Spain" (PID2020-115170RB-100) are available at http://riders.unizar.es/.
3. All names have been changed for the sake of anonymity.

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