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# Conceptualizing labor agency through resilience: Practices of reassembling work on domestic services platforms

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, I attempt to contribute to understanding labor agency in the context of platform-mediated labor, or gig work, in the domestic cleaning sector in Geneva through the category of resilience. First, I briefly summarize different accounts of platform-mediated work to highlight issues around temporariness and flexibility. Then, I present the theoretical framework of the paper, which interweaves literature on workers' agency that focuses on micro-level and livelihood practices. The second part of the paper is based on empirical fieldwork I conducted in Geneva with workers who engage in platform-mediated labor. I present the findings by juxtaposing vignettes that frame resilience through multiple voices and experiences. The vignettes present specific everyday practices of resilience that I introduce through the lexicon of reassembling work. The vignettes further highlight the relational, spatial, and ambiguous characteristics of resilience in mediating conditions of precarization in the labor market.

## 1. Introduction

*I met Suzana at the beginning of my fieldwork with workers engaged in platform-mediated labor in the domestic cleaning sector in Geneva. It was a hot summer afternoon, and we agreed to meet outside in a park. I arrived early and waited on a bench for Suzana to join me after her shift. She greeted me with a big smile, but she hesitated before telling me she was unsure how she could help because she had no problems to share with me. The beginnings of interviews and first encounters can be bumpy. This one took me by surprise. Our conversation took various turns, and it was only later that I understood Suzana's statement. Suzana did not have problems; she anticipated them before they could manifest themselves. She also did not frame certain things as problems once they belonged to the past. After all, problems were so common that they ceased to be problems. For her, perhaps, only the big ones were named problems; other troubles just belonged to the everyday. Similar to my exchange with Suzana, the beginnings of conversations with other workers were hesitant. Sometimes we sat in a hidden meeting room in a library or the corner of a café, with stories too big to be fitted into such a small word as "problem." Problems implied a denouement, some solution to be worked out. And some problems just lasted longer than expected.*

Drawing on this and other vignettes of domestic cleaning workers who acquire work on digital platforms, the paper aims to approach labor agency from the perspective of those who navigate rather than decisively overcome their problems. I do not dismiss accounts of workers'

agency and resistance, which focus on collective organizing and action. But my intent here is to raise questions about what other forms of agency workers can marshal against conditions of precarization. And how to place the everyday at the center of the narrative to tell workers' agency in the context of accelerated flexibility, the temporariness of work, and the uncertainty linked to platform-mediated work in the cleaning economy in Geneva. By investigating how workers mediate conditions of precarization in the labor market through what I introduce as reassembling practices, I hope to reinforce an understanding of resilience beyond the act or attitude of merely coping and adapting.

In the following, I briefly summarize the different issues and conditions of precarization related to platform-mediated work. Then I develop the conceptual framework of the paper by interweaving contributions from labor geography on labor agency and placing them in dialogue with other conceptualizations of resilience. In the second part of the paper, I introduce the research context and methods, along with a reflection on translation and working with different languages. Then, I combine empirical vignettes, each of which sketches fragmented views of how resilience is enacted at the everyday level to mediate against the different conditions of precarization in the labor market. The final section offers a discussion on the category of resilience in the context of platform-mediated work before I conclude.

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## 2. Temporariness and flexibility of platform-mediated work

Over the past few years, platform-mediated work, or gig work, has exhibited galloping growth across different economies. For clients who employ gig workers, digital platforms have ushered in new ways of managing busy urban life. Daily needs, including primary care needs, may simply be splintered into individualized services that can be conveniently booked on demand. For the workers involved in such work, despite promises of independence and financial freedom, the story runs differently.

At its core, platform-mediated work is based on “digital technology to mediate the process of commissioning, supervising, delivery and compensating work performed by workers on a contingent, piece-work basis” (Flanagan 2017:2). For Kalleberg and Dunn (2016:11), one of the key characteristics defining work on platforms is the “short-term engagements among employers, workers, and customers.” In other words, digital labor platforms represent a form of “technology-enabled temporary employment” (Hilgers, 2023). In addition to the temporariness of work associated with digital platforms, researchers have shown how many workers caught in platform-mediated labor are classified as independent contractors (Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020). Likewise, for some scholars, the platform-mediated model distorts workers’ classification and is considerably hostile to workers’ rights (De Stefano, 2016; Shapiro, 2018). Workers engaged in platform work are further at risk of income insecurity and limited access to work protection (Dunn, 2020; Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020). Moreover, Van Doorn (2017) asserts that digital labor platforms run on workers’ fungibility and frequent turnover, which is especially true of migrant workers, who approach gig work as a “temporary fix” for earning income through an easy recruitment process (Myhill et al. 2021). However, despite describing gig work as a “temporary fix,” authors note that many migrant workers, lacking better employment possibilities and faced with different discriminatory processes, remain dependent on platforms in the long term (Newlands 2022:13).

In contrast, some authors point out that not all platforms are equal. For Myhill, Richards, and Sang (2021), platforms exhibit differences when it comes to workers’ classification and rights, workers’ control, and precarious wages, which other researchers have raised as significant issues (Newlands, 2022; Schor and Attwood-Charles, 2017; Wood et al., 2019). Nonetheless, some argue that even platforms where workers are granted an employment relationship or are covered by a collective bargaining agreement are still insufficient to protect workers from the precarity and uncertainty associated with work managed on platforms (Newlands 2022:14).

While a considerable body of literature on ride-hailing, delivery, and crowdwork platforms already exists, more research is still needed to reinforce our understanding of the peculiarities of work through platforms in the cleaning and care economies. Existing accounts argue that domestic services platforms promote workers’ flexibility (Ticona and Mateescu, 2018). At the same time, they mark a “shift in the governance of home-based service work” replacing the dyadic relationship between the workers and their employers with a new system of “structural domination” (Flanagan, 2019).

One thing is certain: digital labor platforms across different economies have fostered a “philosophy of flexibility” (Hilgers, 2023). Besides, work across gig economies is tied to different conditions of precarization disproportionately affecting specific segments of workers, notably migrant workers. In the late nineties, Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of precarity to distinguish casual workers from permanent ones (Waite, 2009). Since the early 2000s, in the European context, discussions of precarity have risen at the forefront of the May Day mobilizations and anti-austerity protests (Paret and Gleeson, 2016). Scholars have further stretched the borders of the concept to underscore a general feeling of uncertainty and “a condition of vulnerability relative to contingency and the inability to predict” (Butler, 2006; Ettlinger, 2007:320). However, in the context of platform-mediated labor, I follow

Waite (2009), in understanding conditions of precarization as tied to how people are positioned in the labor market. Accordingly, workers across different gig economies encounter different intersectional barriers on the labor market that persist even upon entry to work on platforms and therefore “may be at the forefront of those experiencing precarious lives as a consequence of their labour market position” (Waite, 2009:422). Taking this as a starting point, I explore how workers struggle and push against already entrenched and new conditions of precarization in the labor market associated with work on digital platforms. For this, I will engage with the category of “resilience” sketched through practices of reassembling work.

## 3. Labor agency and the category resilience

In this paper, I draw on literature on workers’ agency that calls for a focus beyond the workplace, collective organizing, and the grand narrative of resistance to capitalism (Carswell, 2016; Carswell and De Neve, 2013; Lier, 2007). Within this vein of scholarship, authors offer a view of agency that encompasses workers’ micro-level livelihood practices. Agency is further maneuvered within a range of social, political, and cultural processes that can either constrain or enable possibilities for action (Carswell, 2016; Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011; Datta et al., 2007; Dutta, 2020; Raj-Reichert, 2022; Rogaly, 2009; Tufts and Savage, 2009; Williams et al., 2017). In an influential account, Katz (2004) conceptualizes agency as “overlapping” and “fluid” acts of resilience, reworking, and resistance. Practices of resilience are defined as the coping strategies people use to get by and feel secure in their everyday lives without disrupting existing social relations. Resilience is also understood as strategies of endurance executed to provide for daily needs without necessarily calling into question or challenging dominant structures of power (MacLeavy et al., 2021). Such definitions of resilience, however, attract critiques about the apolitical character of resilience and raise doubts about the role of resilience in sustaining the functioning of the current hegemonic system (Joseph, 2013; MacKinnon and Derickson, 2013). For MacKinnon and Derickson (2013), for instance, the reproduction of capitalism is maintained by offloading responsibility onto individuals in crises who are called upon to adapt.

In contrast, scholars like Deverteuil and Golubchikov (2016:143) defend a co-optation of resilience. First, defining resilience as merely the capability to adapt and bounce back negates the “transformative potentials” of resilience. For MacLeavy, Fannin, and Larner (2021:1569), “resilient subjects are not simply new versions of the individualized subjects imagined by neoliberalism.” That is, resilient subjects engage in different transversal practices that involve an “adaptive capacity” and a “potential for learning” and carry other imaginaries that cannot be framed as solely “inertial persistence” (DeVerteuil, 2015; DeVerteuil and Golubchikov, 2016; MacLeavy et al., 2021). Second, resilience is spatial, political, and relational, i.e. shaped by everyday relationships with others. Bourbeau and Ryan (2018) argue that resilient subjects are situated in a context conditioned by different power relations. A focus on resilience brings to the fore the everyday as the site where dominant structures of power not only unravel but can also be pushed against, contested, and renegotiated. Resilience practices can lay the groundwork for a “different status quo” after a crisis as well as spark calls for social justice (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov, 2016; MacLeavy et al., 2021). Such accounts challenge critiques of the apolitical character of resilience and call attention to its spatial and relational nature. For DeVerteuil and Golubchikov (2016:148), resilience, or “produced resilience,” can be defined as “the proactive renegotiation of everyday practices and relationships.” Third, scholars argue that resilience can occur when overt resistance actions are not an option (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov, 2016; MacLeavy et al., 2021). Resilience is understood as constitutive of resistance, whereby different coping strategies enacted by different actors are not just a way of weathering a crisis but are signs of the “transformative change” to come (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov, 2016). Similarly, for Sou (2022), practices of resilience enable resistance

movements to endure in the face of different forms of oppression and crises. Resilience is not the “in-between”; it can be the “social and spatial foundation” for resistance (Deverteuil and Golubchikov 2016:149).

Building on this scholarship, I aim to draw an account of workers’ agency in the context of work on domestic services platforms by engaging with the category of resilience. Existing accounts of how workers respond to different conditions of precarization linked to work on digital labor platforms have highlighted collective agency and mobilization, especially among food couriers and ride-hailing drivers (Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2017, 2020; Wells et al., 2021). On the other hand, burgeoning research is examining everyday practices of resilience through the lens of entrepreneurial agency. For example, authors report strategies of multi-apping, picking orders simultaneously on more than one app, upgrading vehicles and assets needed for work, and subverting the navigation software of the app through the use of third-party programs as acts of resilience by food couriers to boost earnings (Badger, 2022; Barratt et al., 2020; Heiland, 2021; Popan, 2023). In another account, Anwar and Graham (2020) demonstrate resilience practices among African remote workers in the gig economy by resorting to buying feedback and reviews online or sharing accounts. However, for Popan, (2023) practices of resilience in the face of exploitative working conditions and low earnings on digital labor platforms should be critically examined, as they may accelerate work intensification among workers.

Although there is a developing body of research on labor agency and practices of resilience on digital labor platforms, the literature on the domestic gig economy and work on domestic services platforms remains sparse. This paper seeks to address this gap by examining everyday resilience practices in the domestic gig economy, a sector that is primarily fueled by migrant and feminized labor. I present resilience through a series of reassembling practices from the perspective of migrant women. By reading labor agency through the framework of resilience, I further highlight what conditions make specific experiences on the labor market precarious.

### 3.1. Research context and method

The paper’s findings are based on 24 semi-structured qualitative interviews that I conducted with 19 workers who use different digital labor platforms to find work in the domestic service sector in and around Geneva. I also conducted follow-up interviews with selected interviewees at various times and sporadically followed others over social media. As in other cities in Europe and across the world, all the workers interviewed, with few exceptions, had a migrant background (Altenried, 2021; Barratt et al., 2020; Qi and Li, 2020; van Doorn, 2022). They had immigrated predominantly from countries in South America but also from European countries like Bulgaria, France, Portugal, and Italy, as well as from African countries. The workers had different migratory trajectories, but most were already established in Switzerland for an extended period. All interviewed workers included in the study were women. As in findings from other studies (Schor et al., 2020; van Doorn, 2022), workers had diverse educational backgrounds and different levels of financial dependency on domestic services platforms.

I selected Geneva, as it represents an example of what Sassen (2005) calls a Global City. On the one hand, Geneva has many high-level professionals working in international organizations and big economic and business hubs. On the other hand, there is also a large share of migrants from non-EU countries who are more concentrated in the service economy and the low-end fringes of the labor market. As elsewhere, a feminized and migrant labor force carries out work in Geneva’s domestic economy. Migrant women in Switzerland generally have more difficulties integrating into the labor market. They have higher unemployment levels and are more likely to be employed through short-term contracts (Wanner 2019)

The paper also studies different platforms that mediate domestic cleaning rather than focusing on a particular one to emphasize the

complexities of my interviewees’ everyday working lives and center the experiences and practices of those who work through platforms. This approach aligns with Schor et al. (2020:252), who argue against a “monolithic” view of platforms and instead understand a “vertical hierarchy in which some platforms are better to work on because they yield higher earnings and have better conditions.” In Geneva, domestic services platforms are present on the market either as multi-sided online marketplaces or as on-demand platforms. Multi-sided online marketplaces provide clients with direct access to workers’ profiles and tools to contact them (e.g., Homeservices24). On-demand platforms only give clients limited information about the workers. On such platforms, the platform manages the matching between the clients and the workers (e.g., Batmaid).

In what follows, I weave together several vignettes, reworking selected workers’ narratives into prosaic snapshots. Staying attuned to the prosaic is an attempt to write resilience, echoing Lancione and Simone (2021:970) on the importance of staying with “the minor storyline, the apparently insignificant detail of how things are reworked and adjusted rather than solved.” All the interviews were conducted in French, which was not always an easy choice for some of my interlocutors. Therefore, I am aware of the limitations and the struggle of telling another’s story in all its richness and messiness in a foreign tongue. I also acknowledge the violence of voicing experiences of vulnerability in a language that is a source of distress and that casts one’s voice outside of the dominant register, only to have these experiences rendered into yet another foreign language, English, in an account that must construct meaning and a coherent storyline. To avoid losing meaning in translation, I transcribed the interviews in French, the language in which the interviews were conducted. I then performed a thematic text analysis on the original transcripts according to Kuckartz (2014). In writing the vignettes, I reviewed the interviews, fieldnotes, and written memos multiple times. Writing thus became a “reflective process” where I tried to stay as close as possible to the participants’ narratives (see DeLyser, 2010). To include the original voices of the interviewees, I translated small excerpts without much modification to the original text, preserving any language errors. The selected excerpts were placed in quotation marks to make them more visible. To contextualise the quotes, I relied on a storytelling approach and created vignettes in a form of “explanatory narratives.” The vignettes offer a space to present the participants’ narratives in a concise, accessible, and compelling manner (see DeLyser, 2010; Wilson, 2022).

## 4. Everyday rehearsals of resilience in the on-demand cleaning market

### 4.1. Reassembling work beyond working on-call

*After moving from Brazil to Geneva, Suzana immediately started working in the cleaning economy offline. It was only later that she began working through platforms. On the day I met with Suzana, she had started working at 7:30, at a two-hour cleaning shift she got through a platform. At 10:30, she began a second, four-hour shift for another client found through another platform. She then met with me, after which she hurried to catch the bus for a long commute for her next shift, which started at 18:00 and ended around 20:30, cleaning offices. “Between each work shift, I try to look for more cleaning work,” she told me. Suzana first learned about platforms through her daughter, who also registered her for work on one of the platforms she is currently using. In the past, Suzana only relied on her clients and word of mouth to find more cleaning work. “Talking to people, I am like this, if I find a client afterward, they will get me more. Because for example, for the platform I work for, every day, they call me asking me if I have time for them. And I say, ‘no, I’m sorry’ all the time. The people, the others, the clients I work for in this area, I started with one person, and they gave me two more. One was their colleague. But I don’t have time for everyone. But sometimes, I schedule someone for Saturday every fifteen days, [in order not to] lose them. Sometimes I do like that. Even on Saturdays, I sometimes work to have more*

pocket money. Now it's good. I have a lot of work. I'm not sure how much, but maybe more than 22 clients." Suzana also worked cleaning offices through another company in the evenings. I met with Suzana right before the summer holidays period, which for her meant anticipating and already planning how to compensate for the clients who would leave the city for their summer break. "For example, next month, a lot of people will go on holidays, the clients tell you, 'I'm not here for two weeks,' so we don't make money if they're not here. It's only the night shifts cleaning offices that have paid holidays. But with the Platform and the others, you work, you earn, you don't work, you don't earn."

With this first vignette, I aim to illustrate resilience through work on domestic services platforms by introducing the language of reassembling work. As described by Suzana, cleaning work on domestic services platforms is fragmented work. In other words, work on domestic services platforms involves performing domestic work for different clients, only some of which are regulars. Therefore, the working day becomes a series of imbricated work shifts where workers can have one work shift with a limited amount of time for one client before responding to another client's request for domestic work. And since not all work shifts are regular and depend upon clients' schedules, workers are constantly on the lookout for new shifts and work arrangements. Hence, Suzana relied on different platforms to amass as many shifts as possible to have a fully booked week. Additionally, commuting between clients is often unremunerated and limits the number of shifts workers can afford to assemble. Hence, some interviewees tried to have clients close to each other when the platform allowed it to minimize their commute, even at the risk of losing good clients.

Before joining domestic services platforms, Suzana relied on word of mouth and her employers to connect her with new clients. Drawing on my other interviews, finding work through traditional networks has become more challenging in recent years. Thus, domestic services platforms allow my interviewees, who were already employed in the domestic economy, to work more shifts and widen their networks. Moreover, for interviewees who used to work mainly in the informal domestic economy, working on domestic services platforms, especially platforms that grant an employment contract, allow for a formal work arrangement and better visibility on the job market. However, workers still struggle with the fragmentation of work, the fragmentation of social benefits, and earnings that vary across platforms and are insufficient to meet all their daily needs. Furthermore, not all workers can secure regular work shifts to guarantee a steady income. This results in the need to reassemble provisional work arrangements outside of the platforms; in the case of Suzana, cleaning offices in addition to her work on the platforms was essential to increase her earnings, and access to benefits.

Back in Peru, Arlette struggled to return to work in her field as an administrative assistant. Since she had previously been to Geneva in the past as an au pair and knew French, she decided to give it a try and have a new start. "I said to myself, well, I haven't stopped learning French, I know the language, I already know the system. I've already been here, and with my knowledge and all that, it may be a lot easier to find a job. But no, I was wrong!" For Arlette, it became clear that "there is a certain age limit to finding a job. For example, if I'm 45, it's pretty much the same as here. There is not much difference. At 45, for example, there is less demand for people my age to find a job." Arlette struggled to find a quick entry into the labor market and felt that the market differed from the one she experienced 20 years earlier when she worked in Geneva. But she decided to come up with new plans and started taking a course to advance her French writing skills, then took another five-month training course to be a health care assistant, after which she found work for a family through a small company. While she had no problems working for this family, the company through which she was hired did not pay all her wages. Arlette had to reach out to the union and returned to a state of unemployment, waiting for the case to be resolved. During the initial search for work, Arlette had made sure to be as present online as possible, struggling to understand why she could not get hired. "I've been looking for a job since the end of March. It's complicated because I don't have a normal network. After all, you have to have a network, right? You have to have a network, you

have to get out there, it's not easy to find a place that says go here, go there, you're going to find people who are going to be able to help you find something. Because it's not just the internet." Struggling to make her way out of unemployment, Arlette stumbled upon an ad on Instagram for a cleaning platform and reached out to them. Soon she began working cleaning shifts two days per week. But reflecting on her experience, she said, "Getting a cleaning job once won't lead to a work contract. And for me, I don't want to be hired as a domestic worker for a year. I've already been offered a position for childcare for a year, but I cannot do that. Why? Because the goal is to find something else. So, I cannot commit to one thing if I want to do something else!"

For female interviewees from non-OECD countries, working on domestic services platforms was a solution to their struggles with entering the labor market. Already, authors highlighted how migrant women in Switzerland, similar to other European countries, face the double penalty of migration status and gender (Goguikian Ratchiff et al., 2014). Migrant women from non-OECD countries often face intersectional stereotyping that restricts their access to the labor market, leading to more deskilling than migrant men (Riaño and Baghdadi, 2007). For Arlette, resilience through reassembling work on domestic services platforms is a renegotiation of one's position in the labor market that is nevertheless an ancillary and a temporary solution to a larger problem. Although initially, Arlette was planning on finding work as an administrative assistant, over time, she had to adapt her strategies to find a way to earn money, even if the work arrangements were only provisional and more focused on work in the domestic and care economy. Working on domestic platforms was also an opportunity for some interviewees who still lacked confidence in their language skills and were looking for a quick way to gather work experience in Switzerland. In addition, entry into the labor market is often predicated on a web of social relations that newcomers to the city, disadvantaged groups, or women who have been out of the workforce for extended periods may not have. In such cases, work on domestic services platforms and a more straightforward recruitment process can help speed up entry into the labor market so that individuals can earn an income.

Moreover, the vignette highlights not only the double penalty facing migrant women, but also the difficulty re-entering the labor market at an age that is deemed *old* in the case of Arlette. This may force workers to reassemble work in other contingent and feminized economies to stay resilient. For instance, employment in care work, as in the case of Arlette, led to exposure to new vulnerabilities and a lack of adequate worker protections, resulting in a new phase of unemployment. However, since Arlette is still confident that she will find the work she wants, she refuses to take long-term work in cleaning when it is offered, as it will hinder her chances of finding employment outside of the cleaning and care market. The temporariness of work in the domestic gig economy then becomes an opportunity for workers like Arlette to earn an income while they establish the career that they initially intended to pursue. Therefore, refusing long-term cleaning or caring jobs becomes a means to contest one's position in the labor market and seek out other opportunities that more closely resemble the work one had imagined for oneself.

Valentina started working through platforms in 2020, immediately after she moved to Switzerland. Back in Italy, she had also used platforms for work. "So I'm looking from time to time because I have a fixed job. But occasionally, I need to do some extra work to have a little money on the side." When we first met, Valentina worked in an entry position as an intern in a small legal office; her income was insufficient to cover all the expenses involved in supporting her family. "I don't have a big salary. And since I have a family to support, I have two small children and my husband; we are four people. I still need a little money. So I need this for now! I hope in the future I can stop, but for now, I'm okay because I'm still young. I can handle it. But afterward, with age, I don't know!" Valentina patched together labor hours mainly by cleaning and ironing, which were easier to find than other clerical jobs to which she also applied. She managed to find five regular clients for whom she performed ironing. This meant that she had between one or two

baskets of clothes to iron each week. For Valentina, one of the advantages of the platform she is currently using is that she can quickly get work, even within a week. "It's like a job on call. It's not like you're looking for a job and then waiting for answers for weeks and weeks. It's clients who need someone immediately." On the day before our meeting, Valentina had just got a new cleaning shift that she found through a platform. The job seemed worth it, as the client needed someone for six months. However, Valentina was still unsure if she could take it. Even if she got lucky getting the new job, she still had to negotiate for the time to do it. The platform client wanted her to come on Fridays, which was when she was working at her primary job.

With this vignette, I would like to shift attention to how reassembling work on domestic services platforms becomes a resilience practice and a means to generate a side income for women in unstable employment or entry-level positions. Rather than renegotiating one's position in the labor market, for Valentina, resilience through reassembling work on domestic services platforms is a temporary measure she uses to support herself and her family until the end of an internship that may lead to better employment. In such cases, the transversal and short-term or one-time nature of some work arrangements on domestic services platforms offers workers the possibility of assembling work when needed.

The vignette also highlights how some workers may be unable to face unexpected or extra expenses simply based on their primary income. Therefore, in the absence of savings or other support alternatives, the on-call nature of work on domestic platforms can provide a quick fix to plug gaps in employment and sustain unanticipated vulnerabilities. However, the specific nature of on-call work means that the number of working hours Valentina can assemble on short notice is still uncertain. It is also unclear whether the work she will manage to access fits next to her primary job and the unpaid care work she does for her family.

Resilience through work on domestic services platforms can remain uncertain and unpredictable. As the vignette highlights, the duration of engaging in such work also remains unclear. At the same time, domestic services platforms are constantly adjusting and transforming with changes in employment relationships and the working conditions they offer. This implies changes in compliance with existing and new requirements and laws of the cities where they operate. Therefore, not only is work on platforms uncertain, but the platform is also characterized by uncertainty. For example, other scholars have highlighted that platforms can quickly exit a city, leaving workers stranded (Altenried, 2021; Lee, 2023). Yet, despite their uncertainty, platforms are becoming, for some workers, more than just an arrival infrastructure (Altenried, 2021; van Doorn, 2022); instead, they are becoming an everyday support infrastructure. Unsurprisingly, some of my interviewees kept their accounts on domestic services platforms as a just-in-case possibility even when they managed to find work outside of domestic services platforms.

## 5. Discussion

Through the vignettes, I attempted to sketch an account of how agency through resilience to different conditions of precarization is mobilized differently according to how people are situated in the labor market and at different moments of their work trajectories. The vignettes frame resilience through multiple voices and fragments of migrant women pushing against adverse conditions through what I call reassembling work. Rather than a coherent narrative, conditions of precarization involve different levels of intensity and disruption to the everyday. Furthermore, the vignettes account for the work experiences of those who encounter platform-mediated work at various moments in their working trajectories. Hence, the practice of staying resilient through platform-mediated work for many migrant women translates into staying resilient in the labor market.

Migrant women have differential access to the labor market as a result of migration policies, labor market regulations, and their complex intersection with gender, which can lead them into low-paying and precarious employment situations (see Bolzman, 2007; Fluckiger and

Ramirez, 2003). Against this backdrop, and similar to existing accounts pointing at the role of migrant labor as the backbone for the expansion of digital platforms across different sectors of the economy (Altenried 2021; Barratt, Goods, and Veen 2020; van Doorn and Vijay 2021), domestic services platforms serve as a buffer for migrant women, offering a partial means to mediate the different exclusionary forces and stay afloat. And with that, platforms become both an immediate and a long-term solution so that workers can remain resilient while they struggle on the labor market.

However, resilience practices such as engaging in reassembling work in the domestic gig economy, echoing MacLeavy et al. (2021), are a series of "processual achievements" under conditions that are not of one's choosing. The vignettes highlight how resilience practices such as taking work on domestic services platforms do not mitigate uncertainty, nor are they the final solution to exclusion from the labor market. Instead, resilience calls upon workers' ability to deal with uncertainty and adapt to the working conditions associated with work on platforms in the domestic economy, such as low pay, lack of adequate social protections, and ever-changing and short-term work arrangements. For workers who are solely dependent on their own work and who are not supported by other partners or family members, resilience through work on domestic services platforms is accompanied by an intensification of work that bears similarities to work in other gig economies. The findings show that to reap the most out of work on domestic services platforms as one's primary occupation, workers have to constantly reassemble as many shifts as possible, sometimes relying on different platforms. Workers also pick up work outside the platform, formally or informally, to boost earnings and social contributions. In addition, workers' experiences are often associated with their ability to find suitable employers or access platforms that granted an employment contract instead of platforms where workers contract directly with private households. On domestic services platforms that grant an employment contract, however, workers have to already have a residential permit in Switzerland. Thus, access to work opportunities to stay resilient in the gig domestic economy depends on one's residential status and financial dependency on work. In addition, resilience is displayed in a sector characterized by invisibility, which is a double-edged sword as, on the one hand, it allows workers to engage in more transversal practices by accessing work inside the hidden and private space of the household. On the other hand, it also means that workers are at risk of becoming invisible in the public debate about work on digital labor platforms.

Moreover, aspects of resilience rely on the adaptive power not only to find work through platforms but also the capacity to adapt to work that is on-demand and cater to the needs of different employers and platform clients. And that also means that even when work on domestic services platforms is taken as an opportunity to earn a side income, workers are not spared from the risk of work intensification.

But at the same time, for others, resilience practices such as working on domestic services platforms allow workers to develop a side income or earn some form of income while they look for other work or training opportunities. Besides, reassembling work through platforms in a labor context characterized by exclusionary and discriminatory structures can serve as an immediate fix to plug gaps in employment or enable a quick entry into the labor market. Thus, workers can subtly push against conditions of exclusion from the labor market to earn an income and build resilience at the everyday level not only for themselves but also for their dependent relatives.

Finally, as expressed through the story of Arlette, practices of resilience by taking work on domestic services platforms embody a form of refusal. For some workers, the short-term employment afforded by platforms implies that they are not *fixed* permanently into positions in the labor market that are not of their own choosing. Therefore, work on platforms becomes a refusal to accept conditions of exclusion and a refusal to accept jobs other than the one one had imagined for oneself. Instead, it allows workers to sustain themselves until the larger issue of unemployment or exclusion from the labor market is resolved.

Therefore, in such cases, resilience could be the foundation for strategies leading to more possibilities for transformative action. Nevertheless, the question remains whether platform-mediated work is only a temporary fix or whether workers can graduate into more fixed and long-term work arrangements outside of domestic services platforms (see Newlands, 2022).

## 6. Conclusion

Through the paper, I engaged with the category of resilience in order to contribute to the debate on platform-mediated work, as located in specific work trajectory moments. Labor agency, through resilience, involves everyday renegotiations rather than challenges to dominant power structures, as workers slowly negotiate spaces in a transversal way from within these structures. I engaged with resilience through reassembling work and showed how workers such as migrant women mediate conditions that make particular work experiences more precarious than others. My findings are an attempt to offer an inclusive account of the plurality of voices and practices of resilience. Concurrently, they highlight that an account of precarization must also carry different voices and narratives. This reading resonates with scholarship on workers' agency and is attuned to the micro-level and under-the-radar practices. In addition, refocusing on resilience in discussions of workers' agency can further inform scholarship on precarity as it engages with everyday relations beyond those of employment.

The paper focuses on everyday resilience practices of migrant women, whose perspectives remain unexplored in research on platform-mediated labor. First, the findings demonstrate how the temporariness and flexibility associated with work in gig economies are pushed against through practices of reassembling different work arrangements. In order to counter the fragmented and short-term nature of the work arrangements, low earnings, and lack of adequate protection and benefits, workers rely on reassembling as many work arrangements as possible, especially when it is their primary occupation. Resilience in such cases is concomitant with an intensification of work and resembles findings from other studies on platform-mediated work (see Popan, 2023). However, in the context of domestic services platforms, relying on multi-apping or reassembling work arrangements outside of platforms is not subversive, unlike in other gig economies such as ride-hailing or food delivery, but is in fact integral to the way work is organized in the domestic economy and thus to the way workers operate within it.

Second, for workers struggling in the labor market, resilience through reassembling work on domestic services platforms can be interpreted as a "proactive renegotiation" of everyday relations rather than a means of coping or getting by. For migrant women struggling to find employment or working on the periphery of the labor market, open acts of resistance are not always possible, especially with a vulnerable residential status and the need to start earning an income. Rather, they engage in temporary work such as work on domestic services platforms, which is more accessible to those without work experience or pre-existing networks in the city. For some workers, the temporary nature of such jobs allows them to earn an income that is decoupled from any sort of work-related identity and that does not require them to remain in a sector or a role that they did not choose for themselves. Even though it is uncertain, work on domestic services platforms can still enable workers' attempts to make ends meet and can even lead some into other work. In fact, carrying imaginaries of moving forward despite uncertainty is transformative and serves as its own act of refusal to be fixed in a work situation that is not of one's choosing.

To conclude the paper, I would like to end by raising the concern of what the expansion of platform-mediated work entails in sectors like cleaning that are already marked by entrenched precarity, informality, and few opportunities for collective organizing. Work on domestic services platforms despite its challenges, is becoming an important everyday support infrastructure for some workers. However, in Geneva and like other European cities, domestic services platforms are not

homogeneous. And nor do they offer the same working conditions or compliance with domestic regulations. And some are even under the collective bargaining agreement of the cleaning sector. Therefore, workers are divided in terms of the work and the working conditions that they can access. In addition, mediated cleaning work is often conducted by isolated workers—primarily female and migrant labor force—inside invisible spaces, which are private households. Therefore, not only are workers and their struggles invisible to each other and the public eye, but their work is also conducted inside spaces that are hard to regulate.

Moreover, many workers see their time on domestic services platforms as temporary and inadequate with their skills or work expectations. This also creates a cleavage between workers who are only engaged in mediated cleaning as a temporary solution and those who have already been involved in the cleaning economy in the long term. Consequently, the question remains how resilience practices can also overlap with more collective and confrontational practices that respond to different conditions of exploitation, especially in the context of the domestic economy.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Khaoula Ettarfi:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Software, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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