

# Errand Runners of Digital Platform Capitalism: The Errand Economy as a Contribution to the Discussion on the Gig Economy

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**Abstract:** This article describes a new concept called the errand economy. It examines the dark side of the platform economy and the gig economy and makes a valuable contribution to the field. The concepts, especially for liberal scholars, hide the negative impact of platform capitalism on production relationships and the working class by emphasising digital technologies and piecework. The errand economy, however, especially highlights the degradation of labour, regardless of its qualifications, alongside processes such as flexibilisation, precarisation, and informalisation. That is because, under the conditions of the errand economy, platforms treat all types of work as cheap, worthless and degraded errands. The main mission of the platform economy is to end employment by using the discourse of flexibility and entrepreneurship and to transform all employees into errand workers by classifying them as self-employed. For this reason, the article proposes to use the concept of the errand economy together with the platform economy, which refers to digital infrastructures, and the gig economy, which emphasises the piecework.

**Keywords:** gig economy, platform economy, platform capitalism, gig worker, platform worker

## 1. Introduction

Platform capitalism is the process of transforming individuals with different qualifications and skills into independent contractors, self-employed or micro-entrepreneurs, instead of being employed as salaried workers with basic rights (Rauscher 2021, 90; Rani and Gobel 2023; Zipperer et al. 2022; Taylor et al. 2017). This economic model reduces the value of labour no matter what qualifications the worker has, increases the surplus value captured by the ruling class, spreads an unsalaried working form, and turns the worker-employer relationship into a self-employed-platform owner relationship (Srnicek 2017, 24). The main objective of platform capitalism is to increase capital accumulation by reducing all jobs to errands.

The main question that this article aims to answer is whether the new working relationships created by platform-based capitalism can be expressed with a more critical concept, the 'errand economy', together with the gig economy and the platform economy. The concepts of the gig economy and the platform economy are presented by the liberal party as flexible, free, autonomous, high-earning, entrepreneurial ways of working that make individuals the bosses of their own businesses. However, platform capitalism increases inequalities, precarity, instability, and informality and reduces labour incomes. Every line of work involved in platform capitalism experiences the aforementioned disadvantages and is degraded to cheap errands. The other reason to use the concept of the 'errand economy' is that the platform economy refers to digital technologies and the gig economy as piecework. The 'errand economy', however, refers to the degradation of labour (Braverman, 1998), no matter the qualification, and emphasises the relationality in production. It also highlights how labour turns into degraded labour for surplus-value exploitation in conditions of platform capitalism.

Marxist scholars have approached the gig economy and the platform economy critically due to their precarious, insecure, and low-income working conditions. (Rauscher 2021, 4; Duggan et al., 2022). The concept of the errand economy agrees with all of these critiques but argues that the platform-based economy devalues work and reduces it to an errand. It also transcends the 'platform' as digital technologies and the 'gig' as piecework. Our aim is to both profit from these views and contribute to these discussions with a new concept.

The gig economy, regardless of workers' competence, undermines workers' rights, and makes every job cheap and precarious. Thus, an errand economy can be defined as the process of transforming all workers, regardless of skill level, into people who do the footwork, gruntwork, legwork, and odd jobs under a newly formed working regime. This reflects the political economy of platform capitalism. In a world where platforms and customers determine work procedures, and where risks are placed on employees' shoulders, we can talk about errand workers who only do odd jobs, are only used when necessary, and are readily sacrificed when not needed (De Stefano 2016).

This article first explains the nature and characteristics of the gig economy. Then, the variables that lead us to define a gig economy as an errand economy are explained. Finally, using both theoretical research and tangible data by other researchers, we attempt to demonstrate how an errand economy is built inside platform-based working.

## 2. The New Name of Neoliberal Labour Regime: The Gig Economy

A gig economy is a working relationship and economic model centred on an individual completing a specific task assigned by digital platforms without being employed (Heeks 2017; Lehdonvirta 2018; Vallas 2019; Oppong 2019; Ness 2023, 1-2; Rani and Gobel 15). This model is based on producers (workers or employees) and consumers (customers or clients) using digital infrastructures to exchange products and services (Parker et. al., 2016, 3). Thus, it is called an on-demand economy or platform economy. (De Stefano 2016). In a gig economy, the client (demand) and employee-served services (supply) connect with each other through a digital platform (Graham and Woodcock 2018, 242; Rani and Gobel, 15; Duggan et al. 2022, 2-3). Platform owners connect demand and supply, so they appropriate some of the value. Therefore, in this work relationship the customer (as a buyer, client, requester, corporate), employee (as a worker, platform worker, independent contractor, self-employed, professional, click-worker, cloudworker, crowdworker), and platform owner are all involved (Woodcock and Graham 2020).

Heeks (2017) showed a gig economy with two dimensions that included the physical and the digital. These dimensions are separated by physical and intellectual tasks, but the common aspect between the two is that all tasks are distributed via platforms. A digital gig economy includes online microwork, crowdsourcing, and freelance labour. A physical gig economy encompasses location-based services, which include delivery workers, ride-hailing, care workers, and household employees (Heeks 2017, 3: ILO 2021a). While digital gig workers complete tasks in the digital realm, physical gig workers labour in the physical realm. As Campbell (2022, 115-116) highlighted, platform labour involves various attributes and skills and hence causes job separation. For example, clickwork, as web-based work, does not require a highly skilled worker, but a freelance job requires superior work traits spread over a long period of time. Whereas location-based work mainly consists of low-skilled jobs.

The platform economy, as Vallas and Schor (2020) state, includes five types. The architects and technologists of the platforms, cloud-based consultants or freelancers, offline workers (ride-hail, food delivery, home repair, and care work), online microtask

crowdworkers (Amazon Mechanical Turk and Crowdfunder), and content producers and influencers on social media are components of the platform economy. While Sandurajan (2016, 27) welcomes crowd-based capitalism and the “sharing economy” as a promising system that brings about the end of employment (or even solves the employment problem), creates a network society of micro-entrepreneurs, brings idle resources into the economy and eliminates centralised institutions and hierarchies, Vallas and Schor (2020, 278) are more sceptical than Sandurajan because platforms can dominate markets and gain monopoly power. What Sandurajan called the “end of employment”, is actually what Vallas and Schor called externalising risks for corporations and compelling responsibilities on workers’ shoulders.

The gig economy, according to Woodcock and Graham (2020), has two dimensions: (a) geographically tethered work and (b) cloudwork (freelancing, crowdwork, microwork). For the former, delivery workers, ride-hailing, app drivers, home cleaners, care workers, and construction workers are examples. Designers, translators, data analysts, programmers, and click workers are examples of the latter (Kaine and Jossierand, 2019). While the former is constrained by space and performs physical activities, the latter does more abstract and space-independent tasks (Scholz 2017; Stewart and Stenford 2017).

Offering flexible work, a gig allows any employee to decide how, where, when, how much and with whom they work, as well as adjust their earnings, or at least claim it (Schor 2021; Graham and Woodcock, 2018; Horowitz 2011). Furthermore, it has the potential to increase employment and offer new job options for individuals by removing geographical constraints and standard working hours (Valenduc and Vendramin 2016, 32). For customers, outsourcing companies, and platform owners, gig work is viewed favourably as it allows hiring a worker whenever they want, offers a cheap labour supply, minimises operating expenses, and provides quick and easy access to all kinds of services (Duggan et al. 2022, 8).

For workers, however, the available data depicts a bleak picture. Gig work is defined by low pay, insecurity, precarisation, stressful and dangerous working conditions, one-sided contracts, temporary employment, subcontracting, a lack of social protection, and risk exposure (Wood et al. 2019a; ILO 2016, 39; Kittur et al. 2013, 24; Huws et al. 2018; Hauben et al. 2020, 30-34; Campbell 2022, 118; Duggan et al. 2022, 9; Kalleberg 2009, 6-8). According to Huws and Joyce’s research (2016), 42% of all gig workers earn less than £2,000 per month before taxes and deductions, while only 7% earn more than £5,000 in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, as the platform economy expands, the elements that lend standard employment relationships stability such as organization, resistance, unionization, and collective bargaining disappear. Dukes pointed out (2022, 133) that this situation is reminiscent of widespread labour relationships in the early capitalist period. In addition to ending fixed employment, platform work destroys temporary employment relationships and eliminates paid work by defining workers as “partners”, “independent contractors”, “micro-entrepreneurs”, or “self-employed”.

According to the new way of platform work, each individual will start their own business, pay their own insurance premiums, and be paid per piece; companies will not be responsible for work accidents, paid/unpaid vacation will disappear, companies will not pay severance, states will not be responsible for unemployment salary, the employment contract will be removed, the road and food allowance that businesses are required to provide will no longer be a cost, the trade unions that have already been minimised and pacified will not tie employers down, and, as previously said, companies will not be liable for paying salaries. So, gig work heralds to employers that they can

have employees without employment, businesses without workers, shadow businesses, and firms without a physical location (Friedman 2014). Similarly, a platform economy, as Farinella and Arcidiacono (2023, 116) argued, emerges as “a response to the need to maintain profitability and to contain costs”. As a result of this production model, workers have costs dumped onto them, are subjected to poor wages, have little or no possibility of career advancement, instability, are socially marginalised, over-worked, work irregular hours, feel sleep deprived, and suffer from exhaustion (Wood et al. 2019b; Ropponen et al. 2019; İlyas 2022; Kalleberg 2009).

### 3. What is the Errand Economy?

Converting all types of work into errands by lowering their value via digital platforms does not result in a decrease in the value that workers create, but rather results in workers receiving a much smaller portion of this value. This is accomplished in three ways. First, workers are made responsible for operating costs. Second, wages, especially for high-skilled labour, are reduced by bids that make possible on-demand work, crowdwork, and cloudwork. Third, work is both deskilled and cheapened by the “unbundling of tasks” and individuals are made to work more by becoming self-employed or independent contractors. (Pulignano 2019, 630; Christiaens 2023, 25, 28). These three pathways, as van Doorn states (2017, 902-904), are accompanied by the immunity of platforms and their requesters, the expansion of managerial control over platform workers, and a sense of fungibility and superfluity in this workforce.

The gig economy, as a fundamental component of platform capitalism, has not only altered working methods, conditions, and relationships, but it has also decreased the value of highly skilled labour. It has reduced skilled labour to errand level (Stanford 2017). Zanoni and Pitts (2023, 34) claim that platform work legalises informal labour, converts paid jobs into self-employment, and enhances labour exploitation by renting it out. Informal labour, like laundering dirty money, is laundered by the gig economy thanks to “regulatory displacement” (Vargas et al. 2022, 4). For these reasons, we claim that it transforms all types of work into legwork for a gig economy, so the concept of an errand economy is appropriate.

The term “errand” refers to footwork, legwork, scutwork, gruntwork, or a runner. It is defined as “a job that you do for somebody that involves going somewhere to take a message, to buy something, deliver goods” (Oxford Dictionary 2001, 392). It also has the definition of: “a person in a company or an organization whose job is to take messages, documents, etc. from one place to another” (2001, 1034). Similarly, “errand boy” (or girl and worker) is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.) as “a person whose job is to run errands for important people”. These kinds of jobs are regarded as being trivial, not requiring any skills, producing little added value, and being worthless. An errand is a term used to describe a one-time job, like a gig, among English-speaking countries. The distinction from a gig, however, makes it easy to highlight the insecurity, informality, poor pay, and low reputation of this work. The near-synonymous concepts of errand are “legwork,” “gruntwork,” and “odd-job”. While “legwork” is defined by The Oxford Dictionary (2001, 677) as “difficult or boring work that takes a lot of time and effort, but that is thought to be less important”, gruntwork refers to “a worker who does boring tasks for low pay” (Oxford Dictionary 2001, 526), “work that is repetitious, often physically exhausting, and boring” (dictionary.com), “the basic, hard work, often physical or boring work” (dictionary.cambridge.org) and thankless or menial work. An “Odd-job” is defined as “small jobs of various types” by the Oxford Dictionary (2001, 808).

The employees who run errands are paid money for the work that is done but they do not get a salary. The payment is minimal, and there is no work arrangement including mutual obligations with errand workers. The money made is equal to pocket change. These individuals do not have the status of employees or independent contractors, nor do they have social protections, and they work informally.

Platform workers are neither employed as employees nor have the autonomy of self-employed or independent contractors. They are in the invisible area of the working relationships. Leighton (2016) names them as sham self-employed. Platforms, therefore, treat them as errand workers. Thus, it can be used to the concept of errand economy to explain this phenomenon. De Stefano (2016) described them as “invisible workers”.

Errand runners are informal workers, too weak to start their own businesses, too worthless to be employed, deemed worthy of informal work, and working for pocket money. Although gig workers are legally classified as self-employed or independent contractors, they de facto become errand runners or “legwork labourers” under these conditions. Thus, they are not even self-employed or independent constructors. In a traditional employment relationship, most of the self-employed or independent constructors have work autonomy, earn more than minimum wage, and are not subject to surveillance processes. They, however, have been weakened in a gig economy. Transferring control over work to platforms and the degradation of work (Braverman 1998) make platform workers obliged to perform whatever they are instructed to do. They are used and thrown away by platforms. For this reason, they are viewed as disposable labour or errand workers. Furthermore, according to Duggan et al. (2022, 69), “most gig workers are at the mercy of digital intermediaries, algorithmic mechanisms, and end-user customers”. Especially those who have no alternatives except for gig jobs settle for contracts that cause disadvantages and create additional challenges (Schor 2021; Lehdonvirta 2018).

Platforms distribute and conduct a wide range of jobs, from building digital apps to cleaning, dog walking to product design, and university staff (Kezar et al. 2019) to delivery workers. In an errand economy, all these jobs mean a cheaper service opportunity, reduction of production costs, and freedom from moral and legal responsibilities for customers and businesses; while for workers, who are considered self-employed or independent contractors, it is equivalent to poor wages, non-salaried and non-contracted work, precarisation, insecurity, and rising costs (Rani and Gobel 2023, 18; Campbell 2022). As Zanoni and Pitts (2023) pointed out, a gig economy makes all this possible by luring the surplus labour population to platform jobs in order to decrease wages. One element of gig work, namely crowdsourcing, adds to the global reserve labour market by using digital technology and diminishing labour costs. In this way, skilled labour loses its privileges, becomes informalised, and is reduced to the same level as gruntwork. Moreover, while it may be legally possible to classify them as self-employed, in practice they often are errand workers or legwork labourers.

According to liberal scholars, the gig economy or the platform economy is a form of work that allows individuals to decide where, how, with whom, for how long they will work, and for how much money they will make. Gig works free individuals from the boredom of fixed-term jobs and low wages. Entrepreneurship and being their own boss make each person the owner of their own micro-enterprise and each gig worker dominates their own working process. Contrary to popular belief, however, gig workers cannot choose their own wages, working hours, or working conditions. Platforms’ deductions from workers, algorithmic surveillance systems, and ratings based on cus-

customer satisfaction all operate against autonomy and free labour. Moreover, the exclusion of skilled labour by the unbundling of tasks which leads to a reduction in wages through a piece rate, makes outsourcing possible and replaces skilled labour with unskilled one (Cheng et al. 2015). In developing economies, skilled labour is employed in professions (such as click work and delivery services) below their qualifications (Rani and Furrer 2019; Rani and Furrer 2021). Although high-end services make more money than low-end services, this income does not cover the cost of living in the United States (Rauscher 2021, 16).

For these reasons, we propose the ‘errand economy’ as a critical concept instead of (but together with) the platform economy and the gig economy, which attribute several positive features to platform capitalism. While the ‘platform’ economy emphasises the digital technologies that establish relations of production, the ‘gig’ economy refers to the piecework or one-time job. The concept of the errand economy, however, highlights the degradation of labour, surplus-value exploitation, precariousness and informality. All that, as Gregory (2021, 318) states, is made possible with the destabilisation of employment, the rise of entrepreneurial culture, and the technological rationalisation of the work process, which individualizes risks. Although digital labour markets have populist appeal generated by various instruments, this appeal serves to hide risks and supply temporary staffing. Furthermore, the political and moral economy of platform capitalism breaks the link between labour and livelihood by benefiting inequalities, poverty and competitiveness (van Doorn 2017, 900). As a result, the long-term destination of the platform economy seems to be creating an errand economy, where all employees become errand workers.

According to Schor (2021), research conducted in the United States and the European Union showed that people who use platform work as a source of basic income are unable to afford their basic needs and are not satisfied with their jobs. Except for workers with supplemental income, independent contractors are exposed to a lot of bad conditions in gig work (Rauscher 2021, 94). The lack of income is the first of these. Those who are dependent on platforms for income always make less money. Tasks are typically uncertain and time-consuming. Digital labour markets present nine-to-five jobs as an outdated way of working, claiming that most gig workers can establish their work schedules freely. However, these workers often work 12 hours a day, six days a week but earn less than those who work 8 hours a day, five days a week (Schor 2021).

According to another report published by the Economic Policy Institute (Zipperer et al. 2022, 2), about one in seven gig workers (14%) earned less than the federal minimum wage on an hourly basis, three out of every five gig workers (62%) lost earnings because of technical difficulties clocking in or out, one in five gig workers (19%) go hungry because they cannot afford enough to eat, and one-third (31%) of gig workers cannot pay the full amount of their utility bills.

Consequently, the errand economy is a critical concept that encompasses both digital technologies (platforms) and piecework (gigs) but also refers to precarity, long working hours, low income, surplus-value exploitation, informality, and the degradation of labour. Under the errand economy conditions, precarity presents as flexibility and freedom, surplus-value exploitation increases with unpaid labour, and informality launders with the status of self-employed. Moreover, as Gregory (2021, 317) shows, “physical risk and bodily harm, financial risk, and epistemic risks” add to all these conditions. Given the look at the different areas of platform-based work, it is seen why the errand economy is improved.

### 3.1. Freelancers

Online freelance platforms include the most skilled labour, have longer working relationships than other gig jobs and offer dynamic communications inside the gig economy. Most professionals nowadays believe that freelance work is appealing because it allows them to maintain control over their time and work. Furthermore, it is their belief that it will provide flexibility, a variety of opportunities, freedom from the rigid obligations of institutions, and a high income (Gandini 2016). According to Sutherland et al. (2020, 3), freelancers have a unique status inside the gig economy because of their high skills and autonomy. This form of labour, however, brings along its own disadvantages. Unstable and unpredictable employment, irregular paychecks, falling earnings due to increased labour supply, and obstacles, in the case of company interruption, harm freelancers and transform outsourcing into a strategy to cut operational costs by passing labour costs on to employees (Farinella and Arcidiacono 2023, 118-119). Sutherland et al. (2020) attempted to demonstrate how freelancers would deal with uncertain, precarious, and ambiguous working situations by boosting gig literacy.

Jäger et al. (2019) reveal that the distribution and compensation of tasks are determined in different ways on platforms based on crowdsourcing. In the first variant, “the employer gives specific information about the tasks, and crowdworkers can bid on it” (2019, 764). It operates on the premise that those who make the lowest offer get the job, resulting in a race to the bottom. The lowest-skilled freelancers acquire these types of assignments, but they quit the platforms quickly since they do not earn enough to meet their living expenses. In the second variant, there are bids from workers, but companies prioritise worker ratings because they require specific qualifications, or they subject workers to online exams. In another variant “all workers are allowed to bid for all the offered tasks, and the person best qualified gets the contract” (2019, 764). Workers, of course, keep prices to a bare minimum for taking a job in this variant. Only the last variant provides job security and high-income levels to the most skilled workers; in other variants, gig workers can hardly get a job and suffer from insecurity and poor wages. Platforms such as Freelancer, Upwork, and Topcoder work with all these variants.

According to Jäger et al. (2019, 764-765), the above-mentioned variants have significant risks to platform workers in terms of income security, working conditions, and hourly compensation. Crowdsourcing, which does not provide security for even highly competent labour but can satisfy a tiny group of professionals, is a crucial component of an errand economy. Far from paying living wages, crowdsourcing only includes low earnings. Therefore, it creates labour exploitation, self-exploitation, cheap labour, and impoverished workers (Jäger et al. 2019, 776). The typical features of freelance work are that employers arbitrarily determine prices, have no base wages, and do not offer secure income (Pulignano 2019, 632).

According to data compiled by Rani and Gobel (2023, 20) from ILO global surveys, the average income for freelancers is around 7.2 dollars per hour. They, however, have limited bargaining power, are subjected to drudgery work, and payments are occasionally late. Companies that shake off employment costs and liabilities thanks to Upwork, Freelancer, and Topcoder, reach an infinite workforce pool and exploit competent experts (Ilyas 2022; ILO 2018).

According to an employment report published by ILO in 2021, online workers worked an average of 27 hours a week not including refreshing profiles, searching tasks, filling out qualification tests, communicating with clients, researching to find dependable clients, and preparing various texts. The average weekly hours for delivery

workers who worked at a certain location was fifty-nine hours, and for app drivers, it was 65 hours (ILO 2021b).

An errand economy enables companies that use outsourcing to acquire high-quality services at a low cost. In business relationships, outsourcing known as crowdsourcing, tasks tendered through an open call are completed inexpensively through bargaining with freelancers. The highly skilled labour force of the Global South both improves the profitability of capitalists in the Global North and is swallowed up by an errand economy in that field (Woodcock and Graham 2020, 79; Sutherland, Jarrahi and Nelson 2020; Rani and Gobel 2013). Highly skilled jobs, such as programming, software, design, and translating are eventually reduced to levels of legwork through crowdsourcing (Howe 2006; ILO 2018; Rani and Gobel 2023, 17). Freelancers are not legally classified as self-employed or employees but are accepted as independent contractors or self-employed. Most of them work informally and individually and do not have any rights. Especially freelancers from Kenya, Nigeria, the Philippines, India, Turkey, and Vietnam have earned supplemental income and overcome the constraints of the local labour force market by taking advantage of the exchange rate. However, the presence of thousands of freelancers in the labour market means getting lower wages, weakens negotiating strength, and reduces the number of people who can find work (Wood et al. 2018; Graham and Anwar 2019).

### 3.2. Food Delivery Workers

In an errand economy, the most affected employees are food delivery couriers who are in high demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Ness 2023, 1). These employees are responsible for delivering orders assigned to them by platforms to customers. Couriers are paid as much as the order they deliver or by the hour, do not have a fixed salary, run a micro-business, and work as self-employed. These platforms, such as *Getir*, *Yemeksepeti*, *Deliveroo*, *Vigo*, *Gorillas*, *Trendyol Go*, and *Fiyuu* make a business arrangement with couriers based on deliveries. These agreements do not include formal rights such as workplace safety, insurance premiums, severance pay, task-related equipment charges, retirement contributions, annual vacations, unemployment insurance, or family assistance.

Couriers do an allegedly unskilled job, bringing and taking away packages, in exchange for a fee in the form of pocket money, which is equivalent to the minimum wage almost everywhere else. The ILO report (2020) on couriers working in Izmir and Istanbul and Ceylan's research (2022, 124-126) in Istanbul showed that couriers could only earn around the minimum wage (11,400 Turkish Liras/\$393) by working 12-13 hours a day. Considering that the poverty line for a person in Turkey is 18,230 Turkish liras (\$628), this really is pocket money. In addition, they usually worked 6 days a week, 10 hours a day. For this example, a courier's working hours were calculated on the average of 11.2 hours according to the research on Turkey (ILO 2022, 15). Also, Fairwork's reports (2023a, 2023b, 2023c) showed that delivery workers from many different countries around the world worked for less than the minimum wage.

Delivery work is a business line that requires high skills like other jobs. Even though it is solely package delivery, it has a variety of qualifications. It requires skills, such as driving a vehicle, engine maintenance, using GPS technology, predicting risks in traffic due to rush hours, accidents, or heavily travelled highways, protection against accidents, choosing the best routes and knowing shortcuts that ensure the shortest delivery time, customer service relationships, and organisational management, but this job is devalued by the business mentality of the gig economy. Most individuals do not pre-

fer delivery jobs because of the long working hours, low pay, unpleasant working conditions, injury and death hazards, and the physical strength required. As a result, it is a prime example of an unprotected work regime and a degraded errand.

Delivery platforms bear no responsibility for work accidents, do not pay salaries or wages, do not cover maintenance costs, and have no interaction with couriers other than to convey information about packages to be delivered (Woodcock and Graham 2020, 99). Platforms often use couriers for their own errands and do not pay any wages for that. For this reason, this is not about work or the relationship of work, but rather worthless and pointless legwork. When we look at the massive growth rates and increasing profits of delivery platforms, it is clear that the source of these riches is the unpaid component of the working classes' labour. A prime example of this kind of work regime is *Getir*, a Turkish corporation founded in 2015, which has dominated the Turkish platform market before expanding into the United Kingdom, the United States, the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain (Capital 2018; Öztürk 2021; BBC News Türkçe 2021). One can see different examples of this rapid growth in the last decade all over the world (Ahuja et al. 2021; Morgan Stanley 2023).

From the standpoint of capital, the jobs that allowed businesses to generate this tremendous surplus value are errands or odd jobs. Delivery work necessitates long working hours, physical and mental endurance, the risk of cardiological illness due to heatwaves, respiratory tract disorders caused by cold, and major life threats from heavy traffic. As a result, it involves significant dangers. It is not an unskilled job, contrary to popular belief (Narocki 2021). Gregory's research (2021) on platform couriers in Edinburgh shows how much couriers feel valueless themselves, do not feel self-employed and work in hard conditions which cause bodily risks, physical harm, stress, and anxiety. Looking at the deaths of couriers in Turkey, it is clear that delivery labour is dangerous (Evrensel 2022; Cumhuriyet 2022, Bianet 2023). According to a report by the Courier Rights Association (2023), at least 58 motor couriers lost their lives in Turkey as of 2022. These deaths are the result of time limits, severe labour conditions, poor equipment, and road and weather conditions.

An errand economy does not care about quality. When all jobs are reduced to the level of legwork, the ultimate goal is achieved. According to *BanaBiKurye's* income calculator (2023), a courier working six days a week for 10 hours a day can make roughly 400 Dollars in Turkey. These earnings are currently below the minimum wage. If you want to earn minimum wage, then you need to work six or seven days a week for twelve hours a day. Furthermore, delivery workers are responsible for all their expenses such as engine maintenance, meals, petrol, vehicle insurance, mobile phone costs, equipment (such as work attire), taking-saving-delivering tasks, health insurance and vacations. It is unnecessary to explain how this management work regime is likely to appeal to platform owners. It is not surprising that platforms have grown to this scale, are performed all over the world, and have generated such huge profits. Profits can only rise in such a regime where costs for workers and tasks can be decreased wages, or indeed be destroyed. As a result, the wage policy of an errand economy is underpaid work.

### 3.3. App Drivers or Ride-hailing

We observed the same precarisation in ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft. Uber and other transportation firms, like freelancing and delivery firms, are important actors in establishing an errand economy. Uber, which connects thousands of drivers with clients via its digital application, has grown so quickly, and so much research has been done about it, that the concept of "Uberisation" has emerged. Uber and other platforms

owe their profits to not having vehicles, employing no workers, very low operating costs, not dealing with insurance premiums, paid annual leave, severance pay, pension contributions, or liability in case of accidents (Slee 2015; Rosenblat and Stark 2016; Sholtz 2017; Rosenblat 2018; Rani and Gobel 2023).

Uber describes itself as a start-up and an intermediary player that connects customers and drivers, rather than a labour company (Dukes 2022, 137). So Uber, as Christiaens pointed out, (2023, 27), transforms into a gas. It cannot be held in your hand nor seen with the naked eye. However, like private employment agencies, Uber makes huge profits thanks to intense labour exploitation and a lack of regulations for renting the labour of drivers to clients (Scholz 2017, 44). Forty-eight percent of Uber drivers have college degrees, and most drivers work for supplemental earnings (Rauscher 2021, 96; Kuhn and Maleki 2017).

Although platforms such as Uber and Lyft describe themselves as technology companies and their employees as entrepreneurs, they determine routes and service fees, use algorithms that direct employees to work at certain hours, keep drivers under constant surveillance, and deactivate their accounts in the event of any negativity without giving the driver a say. The relationship between drivers and ride-hailing apps is not only one-time and platform-based but also involves intense labour exploitation. Moreover, this labour exploitation includes not only the performance of the task but also the waiting and vehicle maintenance processes. These platforms treat drivers not as partners but as their own errand workers. Platforms use drivers and then make them offline when they do not want to. As a matter of fact, ride-hailing platforms, like Uber, are constantly recruiting due to tiring working conditions and high staff turnover (van Doorn 2017, 904). In doing so, they ensure themselves superfluity and fungibility of labour power. In his research, van Doorn makes frequent references to Uber in particular, and describes the platforms' perspective on employees in the following terms:

The data-driven techniques of immunity and control turn labor into a captive revenue stream that secures shareholder value while rendering workers largely invisible to customers, to each other, and even to themselves. This sociotechnical obfuscation is in fact crucial to the orchestration of a fungible and superfluous workforce, to the extent that it degrades service work as an abundant, calculable, and easily substitutable commodity whose value is depreciated beyond the market sphere. Similarly, it should be stressed here that the structural degradation of on-demand service work is a central strategy for valorizing the tension between its indispensability and expendability, as it allows companies to keep hiring rates high and labor prices low, thus optimizing the exploitation of precarious workers looking to supplement their wages in order to make ends meet (2017, 904).

All these processes of degradation of labour cause platform-based work to turn into worthless errands. What should be discussed in the platform economy is not digital technologies and one-time jobs, but the protection of the value of labour and fair working conditions for workers.

### **3.4. Clickworkers, Microworkers, and Cloudworkers**

Microworkers and clickworkers face the most severe labour exploitation under platform capitalism. Platforms such as Clickworker.com and Amazon Mechanical Turk use (rather than employ) clickworkers or cloudworkers to produce data for machine learning

and artificial intelligence research. Tasks, in these platforms, consist of image and data annotation, labelling, and data processing (Rani and Gobel 2023, 15).

Cloudworkers are usually graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering, or medicine (Rani and Gobel 2023, 20; ILO 2021a). The fact that clickworkers in developed economies earn more than those in developing economies reflects the payment inequalities and stratifications in a gig economy. Moreover, clickworkers are converted into gruntwork labourers under platform capitalism.

Another element in an errand economy, crowdwork is alienating, tiresome, low-paying, and below minimum wage in the United States today (Woodcock and Graham 2020; Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft 2014). Crowdworkers have neither stable income nor any security. These platforms make enormous profits from simple tasks. Crowdwork that appears to be legwork and claims to require no qualifications reveals the secret of platform firms' wealth. Berg's research (2016) on AMT and CrowdFlower's crowdworkers demonstrated that they work for both low wages and no social protection and take on all the risks and costs. Berg et al., in another study, showed that clickworkers earn an average of \$4.43 per hour. If we include non-wage working hours, the wages drop to \$3.29 (2018, 49-50). The amount stated is less than the monthly salary of paid employees.

Microworkers are the most fragile and vulnerable component of the errand economy. Because they get the lowest wages, do the most boring tasks, and are the most invisible workers. Even though they use digital infrastructures and carry out piecework, they create a big surplus value for AI corporations and are exposed to labour exploitation by platforms and these corporations. However, microtask platforms consider them independent contractors (not employees), assign them an ID (not name), do not offer them any assurance, do not allow them to encounter requesters, and treat them as errand workers. In this way, as Kassem (2023, 140) shows, web-based platforms, dodging minimum wage regulations and benefits, can "operate outside of legal frameworks because of how work has become deterritorialized".

### 3.5. Domestic Workers, Cleaning Services, Childcare and Butler Services

Domestic work has low value since it is associated with the private sphere and women's unpaid labour. Domestic workers are not entitled to guaranteed hourly earnings, travel time, or travel payment. Domestic workers who are deprived of the right to work, work for low wages with vague job definitions, are subjected to long working hours, and are typically women who constitute the most exploited group in a gig economy (Sedacca 2022, 149-150; Fairwork 2022, 4-5).

Distributing housework through digital platforms has increased the chances of those who work in these jobs to reach more customers. However, rising insecurity, non-unionisation, low earnings, a lack of information about clients, security concerns, a lack of holidays, health insurance, sick pay, and for refugee women working in slavery-like conditions invalidate any potential benefits (Sedacca 2022, 151; BBC News Africa 2019). Housekeeping jobs usually bring in income less than minimum wage.

Platforms build asymmetric relationships with housekeepers or care workers. "Employees" are unable to communicate with platform managers both during and outside of working hours (Fairwork 2022, 21). Furthermore, domestic workers are not given information about clients, are subjected to low ratings, have issues with payment, and deactivation on most platforms. The pressure of getting a low rating compels housekeepers to accept the drudgery work (Dukes 2020). Given these circumstances, the new working relationship described in a platform or gig economy reduces domestic workers to odd-job status.

Domestic service workers, as Doorn (2017, 905) shows, are the most typical example of degraded labour and involve ethnic groups, women, and migrants from the lowest strata of society. Especially apps, like Alfred, create their own 'entrepreneur butlers' and erase the connection between subscribers and service workers. Although these butlers are now white men, this form of labour continues to be associated with a lack of value, skills, and dignity (Doorn 2017, 907). So by eliminating face-to-face contact, the gig economy also removes the burden from the exploitation embedded in the relations of production. All these processes also show us the moral dimension of platform capitalism.

#### 4. Conclusion

The fact that labour is sold or rented by digital platforms enables the marketing of informal labour. This can be defined as the platformisation of labour. Platformisation refers to "the process of elimination of forms of control, standardization, regulations of economic activities, companies, and work" (Farinella and Arcidiacono 2023, 117). It causes the precarisation and insecuritisation of labour in the name of reducing the unemployment rate. Surie and Huws (2023, 1-12) discussed platformisation together with informality. The platformisation of labour continually feeds upon the informality and unorganised economic activity. Informality also means insecurity, uninsured work, and low wages.

The errand economy is a concept that serves to describe the informalisation, precarisation and degradation of platform labour whatever its qualification. The concept also aims to contribute to the critical tradition by critiquing the optimistic approach attributed to the concepts of 'platform' and 'gig' by liberal scholars. Because the platform economy means more than the basing of production relations on digital technologies, and the gig economy means more than the singularity of tasks. Additionally, platform capitalism increases the exploitation of surplus-value through platforms and piecework while degrading workers and work. For this reason, it is necessary to use the concept of the errand economy alongside the platform economy and gig economy. The concept of the errand economy adopts Marxist scholars' approach to concepts of the gig economy and platform economy but presents a new point of view by emphasising the degradation of labour.

Although the responses of the workers against being degraded to errand workers is a subject for another study, it is possible to say a few things about their forms of struggle. The resistance of delivery workers against the platformisation, informalisation and precarisation of labour has manifested in strikes and social movements in many countries. Turkey, for example, was rocked by the resistance and work stoppages of couriers in 2022 (Özsoy 2022). Tens of thousands of couriers shut down in different provinces demanding decent work, wage increases, fair working conditions and fixed incomes. Likewise, in Berlin, after a courier was unfairly fired by Deliveroo Hero, all couriers took action (Alyanak and Karlıdağ 2023). In London and Italy, various protests of delivery workers started in August and October 2016 due to a change in payment policy from hourly wage to piecework payment (Tassinari and Maccarrone 2020, 42). In October 2021, a strike by Uber drivers in London shattered Uber's narrative of growth and innovation (Cann 2022). All these actions and many more prove gig workers' reactions to platform capitalism. These movements and protests, as Tassinari and Maccarrone show (2020, 45-46), prove that platform workers can unite around common interests by *overcoming individualisation* and *developing consciousness* even if they do not share the same physical space. Indeed, these mobilisations are the only

way to contain unregulated platform capitalism and prevent the transformation of all workers into errand workers.

As long as employees are classified as independent contractors or self-employed and do not have legal rights, minimum wage, job and income security, the gig economy and platform economy will transform into an errand economy. For this reason, existing legal classifications and protections, such as working hours, wages, working conditions, agreement obligations, unemployment benefits, and severance pay, should also be provided for platform workers. Otherwise, this precarisation will subject workers to unfair working and living conditions.

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