Solidaristic Formations among Cloud Workers in the Platform Economy: Entrepreneurial Logics with Resistant Identities

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter builds on earlier works that have explored labor organizing in the context of the global digital economy (Bryson et al., 2010; Geelan & Hodder, 2017; Heckscher & McCarthy, 2014; Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Soriano & Cabañes, 2020; Wood et al., 2018; Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2019). It expands current understandings of the characteristics of emerging solidaristic formations among platform workers by attending to the distinctive context of a postcolonial country in the global South. To do this, it looks into the particular case of the Philippines. The significance of this empirical focus is that the country is currently one of the largest suppliers of platform labor globally (Payoneer, 2020). This has to do with the increasing platformization at the heart of the country's digital work sector, one which the government's economic managers tout as a "sunshine industry."

In this piece, we shed light on how Filipino cloudworkers organize with shared agendas, exploring what forms these take. We draw from four years of digital ethnography to understand how these online workers deploy an assemblage of conditions that enable them to survive and organize within the constraints of the world's digital labor market. The key contribution of our paper is two-fold. First, it emphasizes how the distinct postcolonial conditions of a country like the Philippines matters to the kinds of platform resistance that digital workers are able to imagine and act on. We expand on our concept of "entrepreneurial solidarities" and show that although the forms of resistance of Filipino cloudworkers are diversifying, they are still well emplaced within entrepreneurial and neoliberal logics underlying labor platformization. Second, and equally important, our paper shows that these nascent kinds of collective organizing can nevertheless still be a basis for hope and dignity in worker solidarity. In the case of Filipino cloudworkers, one possible way forward appears to be in hybrid strategies of resistance.

This chapter draws inspiration from the scholarship that argues that amid the precarity of digital labor, it can also enact "simultaneously new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union" (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 3; see also Beck & Brook, 2020; Chun & Agarwala, 2016; Fantasia, 1988). Here we provide an analysis that encompasses: (1) how Filipino cloudworkers emerge as "new subjects of labor," as well as the nature of aims and

demands and ideological frames underlying their goals; (2) "new targets," or who or what is being challenged or bargained with; (3) "emerging repertoires of struggle" and how they interrupt, reinforce, and negotiate digital labor aspirational imaginaries; and (4) "material dimensions" of these organizational forms (Chun & Agarwala, 2016). Such an analysis of solidaristic formations attends to the imaginaries tied to why digital workers forge solidarities with others. It also includes the entanglement of local structural conditions as well as the dynamics of the platform labor economy that give rise to these forms of organizing.

What we have observed in the case of Filipino cloudworkers is the emergence of four modes of collective organizing, all of which fall under the ambit of what we have earlier conceptualized as "entrepreneurial solidarities." This pertains to social interactions and exchanges among digital workers "characterized by competing discourses of ambiguity, precarity, opportunity, and adaptation" (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020, p. 2). Our previous work focused primarily on "ambient socialities in social media" as an articulation of this solidarity. In this piece, we add three more such articulations: the first follows a traditional "workers' cooperative" formation; the second takes the form of a "platform co-op"; and the last one is about "platform independence." We comparatively examine how different modes respond to the logics of labor platformization and the cultural forms of relations of production that they advocate. We show that the first three formations align with trends of solidaristic formations in the platform economy found elsewhere. Meanwhile, the fourth formation highlights a direction by some elite workers to move away from platform logics by setting up tech-based 'agencies' independent from global labor platforms and which target local clients, while blending the formal and freelance nature of worker engagement.

In our analysis, we highlight the paradoxical nature of "entrepreneurial solidarities" in the platform economy. That is, that they indicate resistive potentials and alternative pathways for building solidarity among informal, "placeless," and precarious workers, but also speak to the contradictions of resistant formations in global digital capitalism.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE EMERGENCE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL SOLIDARITIES AMONG CLOUDWORKERS

To ground our approach to understanding the emergence of entrepreneurial solidarities among Filipino cloudworkers, this chapter brings into the discussion two important sets of literature. It engages with works that characterize the precarity of digital labor and complicates the idea that in a global South postcolony, such as the Philippines, what cloudworkers experience is necessarily constitutive of marginality. It also draws on the scholarship about collective organizing in the digital industries to map out the possibilities and constraints of fostering solidarities in platform work.

The Ambivalent Marginality of Filipino Cloudworkers in the Digital Industries

Western scholarship tends to depict the experiences of digital workers in global South contexts as especially precarious. Such works argue that compared to their counterparts in the global North who already face challenging conditions, they face even more difficult circumstances. Beyond the issues of "flexible exploitation" (Gandini, 2016), "self-exploitation" (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010), and "presence bleed" (Gregg, 2011), global South digital workers also have to contend with the

pernicious asymmetries of the global digital industry. With demand being concentrated in the global North and with themselves constituting the glut of labor, they often get caught up in a race to the bottom for jobs that are hyper-specialized, undervalued, and low-paying (Lehdonvirta, 2016; Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2019). Those doing platform work particularly find their bargaining power undermined by the practice of labor arbitrage. This is the process wherein employers source the cheapest labor available through underbidding, as they assume that the workers expect relatively low wages and are accustomed to commensurately low standards of living (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Wood et al., 2018).

The issue with the approach outlined above is its easy ascription of marginality to digital workers in the global South. This stems from how contemporary debates about labor in the West often characterize marginality as "precarity" (Standing, 2011). Such scholarship assumes that what the workers face is a process of "precarization," defined as the "increasing insecurity in both subjective and objective respects, which can be identified across modern capitalist economies including in ostensibly privileged strata" (Alberti et al., 2018, p. 449). In consonance with works that question this assumption (for example, Han, 2016; Pal & Buzzanell, 2013), we contend that this interpretation does not necessarily square with how the digital workers in the global South interpret their experience. Crucial to making sense of this is to understand that "precarity" has always been the norm for these workers, with poverty and exclusion being inherent features of the systems in which they are embedded (Munck, 2013). And the opportunities offered by digital labor – and platform work especially – often feel like an upgrade in the lives of the digital workers. This has become all the more the case with the Covid-19 pandemic, as the sudden need for many jobs to shift to digitalized and home-based arrangements seems to have put them ahead of the game relative to other "ordinary" workers (see Marr, 2020).

In light of the above, the experience of online workers in the Philippines can best be described as an ambivalent kind of marginality. To be sure, many forms of online work in the country are critiqued for poor career security and for the absence of any long-term career advancement (Abara & Heo, 2013). This is especially the case with jobs in business process outsourcing (BPO), such as work in call centers, transcription, and content moderation (Fabros, 2016). But at the same time, in the context of the Philippines labor market, online work is considered a relatively "good job." They are, for one, much more readily available to take on new graduates and long-time work hunters, what with the country's narrow organized sector of the economy increasingly "flexibilizing" and the relatively larger informal economy continually expanding (Ofreneo, 2013). Together with this, they are thought to provide good earnings that are within or above the local daily minimum wage (i.e. P537 or US$11), albeit still deemed low pay in the Global North.

A second dynamic that underpins the ambivalent marginality of Filipino online workers is that they occupy a contradictory position in the socio-economic hierarchy of a postcolonial country such as the Philippines. On one hand, they tend to be categorized as precarious middle class symbolically, even if their salaries make them firmly middle class economically. They are often compared less favorably to the professional, technical, and managerial workers of the so-called "new middle class" as well as to the non-professional, non-technical self-employed workers of the so-called "old middle class" (Masataka, 2003). On the other hand, online workers see themselves as

postcolonials maximizing their link to the allures of a Western society that is perceived to be more global and cosmopolitan (see Uy-Tioco, 2019). BPO workers, for example, are proud to be working in "hip places" that service well-known international clients (Fabros, 2016). They also tout that their work involves proficiently speaking English, a "prestige language" that is the lingua franca of contemporary globalization (Bolton, 2010). And they also highlight how their work affords them things like fashionable clothes and Starbucks coffees, which are markers of a global consumerist lifestyle (Santos, 2013).

Amongst the different digital laborers in the Philippines, we contend that cloudworkers are one of the most ambivalent as regards their marginality. Because these workers are primarily home-based, they feel that they avoid many of the challenging conditions associated with BPOs. These include the difficulties of the daily commute in a country with poor public transport infrastructure, the long hours in cramped cubicles, the constant night shifts and sleep deprivation, and, above all, the high levels of stress (Fabros, 2016). In light of Covid-19, cloudworkers further skewed their view towards the attractions of their jobs. The pandemic has been very disruptive to the rest of the labor market in the Philippines, as the poorly executed public health measures in the country have led to a recurrent series of lockdowns. These lockdowns, in turn, have made it cumbersome to carry on with office jobs that are not digitally oriented and that require one to commute from home to work (ILO, 2020).

Consequently, the tendency for cloudworkers in the Philippines is to continue being emplaced within the ethos of flexibility, which is entwined with the neoliberal ideologies of "individual entrepreneurial initiative" or "individual self-realization." This positioning predisposes them away from thinking of structural change that might, for instance, undermine the control of corporate institutions or address the inefficiencies of public institutions (Gandini, 2016; van Doorn, 2017, p. 900). It instead makes them think in terms of an aspirational "entrepreneurial culture" (Neff et al., 2005, p. 331) premised on outlooks that prepare them for risk and uncertainty. As we discuss in the next section, this shapes the kinds of resistance they imagine are possible to organize when pushing back against the power of platforms.

Digital Workerism and the Constraints and Possibilities for Collective Organizing in Platform Work

The second relevant field of scholarship we want to complicate concerns the forms of solidarity that online workers are able to imagine. We particularly want to think through the commonly held definition of worker solidarity as "collectively oriented action, on the side of social justice, and potentially transformative for participants and recipients alike" (Beck & Brook, 2020, p. 4). Such an imagination of collective organization emerges from a distinct version of capitalism grounded in the realities of Western societies, which have a strong social justice tradition and are also at the center of defining the rules of the game of today's neoliberal world order. There are, however, many other diverse articulations of capitalism across the global South. And in these different contexts, the resultant material conditions of the workers are also different, "produc[ing] variations in class formation and configuration which will tend to be reflected in the forms of organization effectively used by workers" (Atzeni, 2021, pp. 5–6). Consequently, we find it instructive to be attuned to "alternative cultures of

organizing" that ar emerging in global South contexts. This means being attentive to "novel approaches to holding capital and the state responsible for unjust employment relationships" (Chun & Agarwala, 2016, p. 635).

As a way to understand some of these so-called alternative cultures of organizing, we approach the emergent solidarities in cloud work through the lens of "digital workerism" (Englert et al., 2020). This means defining such collective formations not from the top-down, but from the bottom-up. This involves placing front and center the agency of workers, using their viewpoints and their experiences to define the actual kinds of collective resistance one finds in online workspaces. In the case of Filipino cloudworkers, we pay attention to those solidarities that might not necessarily conform to Western orientation towards social justice. We take into account that in the global digital economy, the position of the Philippines as a source of relatively cheap labor and backend business jobs "both integrate it into the global economy and consign it to a subordinate position in relation to cities and regions that specialise in the 'creative' industries" (Uy-Tioco, 2019, p. 158). And with the ambivalent marginality of its digital workers – torn between accepting and challenging this kind of neoliberal entanglements – we also find it imperative to consider resistance that is aimed at reconfiguring and surviving such a dominant global system (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020). This is what we attempt to do when we elaborate on the Filipino cloudworkers' four modes of "entrepreneurial solidarities."

Being attuned to the alternative cultures of organizing for online workers means taking into account not just local structures, but also existing communicative assemblages (Grohmann & Qiu, 2020; Ness, 2015). There are extant works on the possibilities of digital media in fostering formal organizing among informal workers (for example, Geelan & Hodder, 2017; Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Wood et al., 2018). They usefully highlight the affordances that technologies offer this kind of collective resistance. There is also a growing scholarship that maps out the possibilities and limits of collective organizing for gig workers, such as those in on-demand services like Uber and Deliveroo (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020) and in home-based service work like care, cleaning, and security (Flanagan, 2019). These have been helpful in pointing out important dimensions of sociality that help determine the viability of worker solidarity, like the need to counteract the tendency of platforms to individualize workers and to obstruct the development of a worker consciousness via collective action. However, in comparison to the nature of gig work under geographically tethered apps, challenges to collective identity building are perhaps more pronounced in cloudwork. This is due to acute fluctuations in work location, coupled with high levels of occupational and income diversity and mobility among workers (Lehdonvirta, 2016). The transient nature of transactions underscoring freelance and project-based digital work characterized by often small and short-term tasks (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Lehdonvirta, 2016; Wood et al., 2018) make gig workers' attachment to the job unstable. This diversity in the immersion and commitment of workers can also create diversity in workers' concerns and levels of commitment toward advancing such concerns.

Further, much of the scholarship on organizing in the platform economy still tends to focus on unionizing as the end goal. If one looks at the relatively scant literature on platform workers in the global South (Grohmann, 2020; Grohmann & Qiu, 2020; Wood et al., 2018), the kinds of worker relationships emerging among gig workers in regions

such as Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa have limited potential for such a form of collective action. This is exacerbated in the context of the Philippines, where unionizing has dwindled in recent years. Despite having the right to self-organize and to engage in collective bargaining, less than 1% of the country's total workforce are effectively unionized. This is partly due to the government's inability to effectively implement labor laws and also partly due to the country's continually high unemployment and underemployment rates (Ofreneo, 2013; Serrano & Xhafa, 2016). In light of this, it is important to go beyond the assumption that when individual Filipino cloudworkers develop "embryonic solidarity," or a sense of collective worker identity, this will necessarily lead to "active solidarity," or formal collective action (see Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; see also Atzeni, 2016). In our findings, we show that it matters as well to look at solidarities that strategically aim at hybrid forms of organizing – one positioned between the formal and the flexible – that reflect the workers' ambivalent marginality. This is something that is especially embodied by the fourth mode of "entrepreneurial solidarities" we present: that of "platform independence."

APPROACH

We worked with an ethnographic spirit to explore from the bottom-up the digital workers' creativity within constraints. Our goal was to shed light on how the complexities of these workers' social position matter to their imaginaries about the work that they do. This implied accounting for their "worker agency," which pertains not only to their act of making choices and or acts of resistance, but also to the process of their subject (re)formation (Chun & Agarwala, 2016; Englert et al., 2020). We noted that these processes are replete with conflicting logics and contradictory impulses, where workers may collude with inasmuch as challenge existing structures.

We conducted: (a) in-depth interviews and focus groups with the industry's workers and leaders as well as industry associations; (b) participant observation in worker environments, including online Facebook groups dedicated to online Filipino freelancers; and (c) a review of government pronouncements, policy issuances, and practices in relation to the Philippine labor industry. Our interviews were conducted in the regional cities of Manila, Cebu, and Iligan, which represent the three key island groups in the Philippine archipelago. We asked workers and industry leaders to identify the prominent issues of the Philippines' digital labor industry and discuss how they work around these conditions, including identifying the associational forms that they are involved in and the emerging opportunities and vulnerabilities for workers in this sector. We probed into the life stories of the participants vis-à-vis their stories of themselves as digital workers and their views of digital labor.

THE SPECTRUM OF "ENTREPRENEURIAL SOLIDARITIES" AMONG FILIPINO CLOUDWORKERS

In this section, we discuss emerging solidaristic formations among Filipino cloudworkers, which we posit as a spectrum of "entrepreneurial solidarities" (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020). This concept highlights how workers deploy local conditions to collectively survive in the platform economy and resist the controls of labor platformization. In our discussion of the relevant literature, we fleshed out how entrepreneurial solidarities are borne out of the cloudworkers' ambivalent position amid the labor conditions in the global South (and in the Philippines in particular) and

their aspirational position in the global platform economy. Although we will highlight our own findings of entrepreneurial solidarities emerging from among Filipino freelancers, we attend to similar connective relations found among platform workers in other contexts.

Ambient Socialities in Social Media

As we have argued elsewhere, one mode of "entrepreneurial solidarities" is that of "ambient socialities," where aspirants and existing cloudworkers alongside industry leaders or influencers share and exchange tactics in social media groups to mitigate the conditions of platform labor (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020). This can be considered as a manifestation of the "embryonic solidarity" (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020) that we mentioned in the literature review. Here we see how as the de facto site of work-related relationships, social media creates a connective force that caters to discussions that revolve around workers' shared experience with platform labor and serves as a site for exchanging strategies of coping and improving their work conditions.

On Facebook groups, for instance, the Filipino cloudworks share their experiences as "online freelancers" (i.e. Online Filipino Freelancers Facebook Group), according to the platforms that they subscribe to (i.e. Upwork-Filipino Freelancers Forum); geographic ties (Filipino Freelancers based in Cebu); client nationality (i.e. Filipino Freelancers with Australian clients); industry (Virtual Assistant Network Philippines); as well as those groups converging around elite industry influencers and coaches (i.e. Freelancers in the Philippines by Jason Dulay). Given the breadth of challenges and ambiguities surrounding platform labor – labor arbitrage, increased competition, low pay, isolation, portfolio building, scams, or reputation building with foreign clients – workers share strategies of coping as well as visualizations of success in these spaces, making such solidarities primarily "entrepreneurial."

Social media spaces like Facebook groups enable cloudworkers to mitigate the geographic disparity inherent in their occupation. They provide some basis for identity and social formation (see Lehdonvirta, 2016; Wood et al., 2018) through the socialities supported by social media's affordances. These are characterized by: "ambient copresence" (Madianou, 2016), where Facebook groups stand for everyday watercooler talks in regular offices and importantly play a role in facilitating a peripheral, yet intense awareness of each other; "ambient awareness" (Leonardi & Meyer, 2014) of other freelancers and of each other's communications that facilitate the sharing of knowledge and strategies to overcome platform challenges; and "ambient affiliation" (Zappavigna, 2011), where the capacity to view, search, and learn from everyday talk allows them to form a sense of shared identification critical for expressing and affirming shared values.

A key feature of these socialities is the tension between their celebration of platform labor as a viable and legitimate work option that allows them to achieve personal goals and affirm their aspiration to be recognized as "world-class workers," while fully cognizant of its challenges and exchanging strategies to thrive amid platform controls. Despite what may appear as weak ties and fleeting socialities facilitated by the connective features of social media, digital workers enact solidarities with their peers, but in ways that reflect their ambivalent precariousness as platform workers. Our

findings here align with other studies that have found evidence of the role of social media for facilitating solidarities among platform workers including those involved in geographically tethered apps (Bryson et al., 2010; Geelan & Hodder, 2017; Heckscher & McCarthy, 2014; Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Lehdonvirta, 2016; Wood et al., 2018).

National Platform Cooperatives

A second manifestation of "entrepreneurial solidarities" is that of the national platform cooperative. An exemplar of this is FOPSCO, the Filipino Online Professionals Cooperative, which is comprised of online Filipino freelance workers. FOPSCO was founded in 2016, emerging via the mobilization of industry influencers tapped by the government-led Department of Information and Communications technology (DICT) to train aspiring freelance workers under the DigitalJobs.PH project. FOPSCO was built through a network of DICT trainees from initially a few provinces, growing it into a national co-op. Their key goal was to "develop highly skilled and globally competitive online Filipino professionals," as the "preferred service provider of local MSME's and international clients" (FOPSCO, 2021). Notably, their self-categorization as "professionals" denotes their proud identity as freelancers and highlights the independent nature of their work vis-a-vis regular workers.

Any Filipino freelance worker can be a member of FOPSCO. A key benefit of membership is owning shares that makes one eligible for training courses designed by freelancers themselves, who know well about the internal challenges and ambiguities of platform work. One kind of advanced training that FOPSCO offers is on how regular freelance workers can transition into "agencies." These pertain to platform workers who have managed to secure large projects and loyal clients from the platform and then are able to outsource parcels of their projects to a team of other workers. As members of FOPSCO, these "agencies" hire other members of the cooperative into their teams. Knowing well that many Filipino freelancers get stuck in "microwork," or small and short-term tasks that command low rates, FOPSCO highlights that this strategy helps cushion new entrants from the blows of hyper-competition. This is done by working with teams of industry leaders who can help negotiate large projects for them without precluding the possibility of them seeking projects directly from the platforms.

Similar to the platform "co-ops" that we discuss in the next section, FOPSCO matches its members with clients through active "labor brokerage work" (Soriano, 2021). When these workers bring their projects into the cooperative and hire members to work for them, they can earn a "patronage fund." They also do "job pooling" where through their "ambient awareness" and "co-presence" of each other and their skills, they assemble teams under an "agency" to bid for large projects from known labor platforms such as Upwork. Although more formally organized than Facebook groups, FOPSCO leverages on the regular communication among members through their Facebook and Viber groups, but prior to the pandemic also held regular in-person events, allowing them also to form "ambient affiliation" or a sense of shared values – that is, for advancing Filipinos as competitive and "world-class" cloudworkers in the digital economy. FOPSCO members are also eligible for an "unemployment fund," which functions as forced savings as a safeguard during periods of labor seasonality.

Platform "Co-ops"

As a form of resistance towards the platform economy, we have seen the emergence of platform "co-ops." These manifest the socio-technicality involved in the development of important and provocative interruptions through the design of media that can facilitate productive discussions around issues or the formation of publics around issues (Irani & Silberman, 2016). We can consider the platform co-op model as a practical manifestation of what Dolata calls "technically advanced sociality" (2017, p. 6), which is about examining not only the social aspects of collectivities but seeing these as socio-technical processes that systematically interweave social and technical organization. Platform co-ops are formations that attempt to put "democratic ownership" and "decent labor" at the heart of platform design and ownership (Scholz, 2017, p. 155). Although much of platform co-op literature focuses on capturing the experiences of worker organizing in Europe and North America (Scholz, 2017), evidence has also been found in Asia (Platform Cooperativism Consortium, 2018) and in Latin America (Grohmann, 2020). Many of these, however, center on workers involved in geographically tethered apps.

For our Philippines case, we have the cloudwork platform cooperative WrupUp. It is a tech start-up and social enterprise that has its roots in Iligan city, located in the Mindanao region, south of the Philippines. It was founded by a group of online freelancers in 2016 with the vision of "becoming a leading and reputable community-based online job market platform." Iligan is considered as a first-class, highly urbanized city and hosts a number of universities and colleges specializing in engineering and information technology. And yet, in comparison to other key cities such as Manila, Cebu, and Davao which have embraced BPO and other IT-related investments that also facilitated an employment boom and the growth of micro-enterprises, economic investments in Iligan have somewhat stagnated. The IT-oriented state university and colleges in the city and its neighboring towns produce highly skilled talent seeking digital opportunities in the city and elsewhere. For many of the workers we interviewed in Iligan, they consider online freelancing as a way to get well-paying work without leaving the city.

WrupUp's founders experienced the many challenges facing newcomers in the industry and the uneven power relationships between platforms and workers. The platform co-op's aim is therefore to establish an alternative and locally based online work platform that "distributes gig work in ways that are fairer and kinder to workers," while allowing the platform to "sustain the local community of freelancers" (A. Libradilla & H. Andaloc, 2019, Personal communication, 6 November). As of early 2020, WrupUp had around 800 registered freelancers and 70 local and international clients, still small in scale in comparison to global platforms. In comparison to traditional labor platforms, WrupUp adds layers of intermediation to address what they believe are key sources of labor precarization in the platform economy: (1) heightened competition; (2) low rates and high-rate cuts; and (3) labor seasonality. In order to boost Iligan freelancers' competitiveness, WrupUp limits the platform to Iligan city workers so that the supply of labor could be more effectively managed, knowing well that competition drives a race to the bottom in terms of rates. Key to its distinction as a labor platform, it promotes fairer rates for workers. They also deliver initiatives beyond the platform design, such as mentoring and skills training and safeguarding workers during the "low season" and encouraging forced savings from work transactions.

As a labor intermediary, WrupUp assembles a team from WrupUp's pool of freelancers in bidding for larger projects. They verify the skills and experiences of their members, including their performances on projects obtained from WrupUp's platform. The data generated from labor matches are used to recommend freelancers who are suitable for a client's demands, while also helping them distribute opportunities to members in their network. Those members who remain unmatched with clients for a significant period are offered training to help them attract clients. WrupUp does not charge a joining fee and considers all their members as owners of the co-op. When they are able to facilitate a match, the platform charges a 5% service fee, which is considerably lower in comparison to other platforms. Another feature is the deduction of a percentage (2%) from a client's payment that is meant for a "trust fund" that a freelancer can use for future needs or in case of an emergency. WrupUp is aware of the precarity of online work and this feature is meant to act as a safety net for freelancers so that, "if they don't have a job for this month or the next, the platform can subsidize" (A. Libradilla, 2019, Personal communication, 6 November 2019).

Worker Groups Turned Start-Ups and MSMEs

The fourth category in the spectrum of "entrepreneurial solidarities" pertains to former platform workers who, with an active intention to stray away from labor platformization, have grouped together into becoming local business start-ups. Examples of these include ESTRAT 360 Marketing and Third Team Media, both located in Cebu City, nestled in the geographic center of the Philippines. Both these companies are led by former freelance workers who experienced the precariousness of platform work. While recognizing the opportunity that labor platformization presented for Filipino workers and aspirants who have no better alternative opportunities, there are key elements that encouraged these entrepreneurs to seek independence from global platforms: (1) the lack of potential for full recognition and growth of their skills and talents; (2) unfair and disadvantageous payment systems; and (3) lack of control in the nature of the work.

First, they emphasized how workers, despite clinching large and attractive project portfolios, remain as workers on the platform, not really gaining the capacity to develop their name or their brand. Successful cloudworkers are able to realize the value of their talent in the platform, and yet they are unable to "fully own these accomplishments." Even for industry leaders who formally enlist as "agencies" in platforms such as Upwork (formerly Odesk), they lamented that they are unable to establish their agencies as a "brand" that they can grow, given the platform's controls, foremost of which is the prohibition of transactions outside the platform. The entrepreneurialism that underscores platform independence is highlighted in this account:

> I eventually exited out of the platform because I had an agency already but I no longer want to use the tools inside Odesk …. I can hire people directly or make them use other tools that are not as expensive as how Odesk charges an agency…. Another reason why I pulled out of a platform is because, well, we eventually gained the reputation outside of Odesk and still building our portfolio outside the platform, which we cannot do within it. I wanted to make it a real business so I was able to do that and that was the main reason I was able to thrive outside of the platform. (F. Castro, 2020, Personal Communication, 6 March)

Second, while high-profile workers may begin commanding higher rates, they argue that platform workers are held hostage by the layers of unfair fee cuts and payment conversion processes embedded in platform design. As Ruben Licera (2020, Personal communication, 5 March), the founder of ESTRAT 360 Marketing explained:

> In Upwork, they really charge expensive cuts like 20%. And then before you can send a proposal you pay another fee (Connects), so literally what's left for you is only around 60% of your hard earned money. In a project of 1000 USD, that means you are left with 600 USD. And then the platform requires transactions to go through payment systems such as Paypal. Ok, Paypal does not charge a transaction cost but you still see deductions when the money reaches you. And their conversion rate is one of the worst.

Meanwhile, Fleire Castro, founder of Third Team Media, which actively targets a local clientele, highlighted the ambiguous nature of client–contractor relationships on the platform that lead to severe payment irregularities – an experience also shared with us by many other workers we interviewed. Although Upwork now has institutionalized mechanisms for redress as regards scams and missed payments, these processes can be tedious, and many other platforms do not have such mechanisms to help workers who are unpaid for their labor. Licera explained that although some savvy workers are able to strategically navigate platforms with better payment mechanisms or negotiate for better rates with their foreign clients, many workers are "short changed" and abused, particularly because "there's no law protecting them."

Another issue concerns the nature of tasks that clients ask workers to perform in these platforms, to which many have no control over. As "dispensable workers" given the heightened competition in labor platforms, many workers are just happy to clinch projects, but may realize later on that these entail tasks that disagree with their personal values. In her field of digital marketing, Castro describes that clients may post jobs of a "digital marketing nature," but can involve "dirty, spammy tasks, and black hat strategies" which are "not aligned with how I want to work." In a bid to get beyond this, Castro and her team initially relied on a few initial foreign client networks from the platform and then quickly transitioned into tapping increasingly off-platform local clientele. The company now handles digital marketing services for well-known local companies in the transport and shipping industries, real estate, and other fields such as tourism and food. EStrat Marketing, on the other hand, caters to large local companies based in the Cebu province, but has also begun establishing partnerships with affiliates globally.
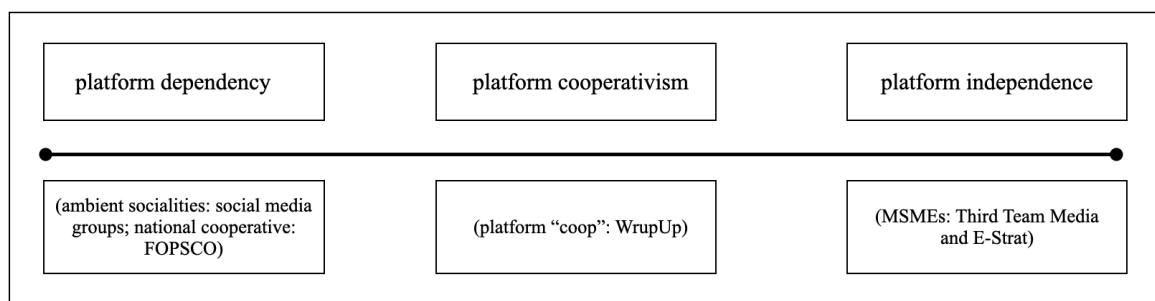
With "community-building" aspirations, both Castro and Licera highlight the importance of diverting their attention from foreign clients to local business, to "help them grow." In shifting towards a local orientation, they intend to service and contribute to the growth and development of Philippine microenterprises and businesses, which they believe can create ripple effects in terms of jobs creation in the countryside. Known as "coaches" in the industry, they speak regularly in events where they encourage their mentees to "stray away from platforms" and offer training on how to build their own digital start-ups.

Since registering their companies as formal businesses, they are a team of full-time employees – social media managers, digital marketers, multimedia creators – that receive legally sanctioned benefits such as health and insurance, although they

maintain a local network of "flexible hires" from their personal and professional contacts that can be tapped in cases of project surge. This implies a blending of formal and flexible employment also characteristic of informality common in the Philippine labor economy, where community and familial ties blend into business and labor management processes. Although they initially maintained physical offices, they moved to a purely virtual office to save on costs. They shared that there are many former freelance worker-groups who, in their dismay with labor platforms, have slowly transitioned into becoming small, medium or micro-businesses, albeit still "under the radar."

ENTREPRENEURIAL SOLIDARITIES: ENTREPRENEURIAL LOGICS WITH RESISTANT IDENTITIES

This chapter presented the emerging solidaristic formations among cloud workers in the Philippines, but the formations we present here can potentially resonate with collective formations among platform workers elsewhere. Our aim is to show that despite the challenges posed by some features of the platform model of labor organization, emerging solidaristic formations work to counterbalance platform control, manifesting diverse expressions of workers' agential practices. We discuss them as a spectrum of "entrepreneurial solidarities," where workers deploy strategies to resist platform control but differ in terms of how they embrace, negotiate, and resist the controls of labor platformization (Figure 21.1). We also highlighted how entrepreneurial solidarities are characteristic of Filipino cloudworkers' ambivalent position amid Philippine labor conditions and their "internalized eliteness" and aspirations of being recognized as "world-class workers" in the digital economy.

platform dependency	platform cooperativism	platform independence
(ambient socialities: social media groups; national cooperative: FOPSCO)	(platform "coop": WrupUp)	(MSMEs: Third Team Media and E-Strat)

Figure 21.1 Entrepreneurial solidarities

While extant literature highlights the "structured antagonism" (Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2019, pp. 1–2) that arises out of resistant formations in platform mediated work that render workers continually dependent on platforms, we spotlight other emerging formations that directly interrogate labor platformization and its controls. This spectrum of entrepreneurial solidarities allows us to examine a range of resistant identities emerging from the platform economy, and surface platform workers and entrepreneurs as new labor subjects with resistant identities outside the scope of traditional claimants of labor protection or labor resistance models. The case studies showed their multiple aims and how they fluidly navigate volatile identities that can be in opposition to each other: sometimes they see themselves as workers and at times as entrepreneurs, consultants, and businesses; sometimes as activists and at other times as government

partners. The range of examples also allows us to expand and diversify the spaces and scales of solidaristic expression in the neoliberal global economy to cover the multiple "workplaces" inhabited by digital workers: social media, co-working spaces, tech start-ups, and local communities. This can be seen as a confrontation of capital's attempts to gain ultimate power across spaces and contemporary structures.

Whether as Facebook groups or as a national co-op of digital freelance workers, there is a recurring discourse of optimism towards digital labor, with workers celebrating the opportunity and flexibility that online freelancing and labor platforms provide. Amid their resistive potential, ambient solidarities are platform-dependent. While they celebrate the promises and the neoliberal discourse surrounding platform labor, they also discuss their resentment and critique of its oppressive conditions, and exchange expressions of support as well as strategies on how to thrive amidst these conditions. In these solidaristic formations, Filipino cloudworkers cultivate expertise and reputation-building, as well as collaboration and serendipity production enveloped in random expressions of shared experience. The role that they play, given the ambivalent marginality of online Filipino freelancers, has important implications: these groups help pacify the feeling of defeat because they serve as a support mechanism for justifying their work choices and allow for strategies to crystallize, useful for collectively thriving amid difficult conditions. And yet, this unique solidarity is marked by the dialectics of optimism and discontent; opportunity and resistance; and solidarity and inequality (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020). Although Facebook groups facilitate entrepreneurial solidarities of reinforcement and care, they also reinforce labor platform logics. Where workers become coaches and agencies for each other amid the limitations of structured government support, Facebook groups and FOPSCO essentially function as recruiters for digital platforms by making the ambiguous digital platform environment more aspirational, less complex, and more realizable for local workers. Further, these solidaristic formations manifest asymmetries in terms of occupation, earning, control, and influence – some workers are able to thrive in this industry with large projects and a more stable client base that afford them a sense of leadership, while many others continually struggle with microwork and heightened competition, or are continually dependent on the patronage of elite workers. These asymmetries are reflected in emerging organizational dynamics highlighting the role of influencers in the construction, maintenance, and reinforcement of such groups.

Platforms have a critical social role (Irani & Silberman, 2016) as they configure labor arrangements for a large scale of workers and clients, and platforms imbued with resistant agendas have the potential to further re-shape these arrangements to promote pro-worker conditions. For the platform co-op model, their resistant strategies and repertoires lie in how they insert their concerns into platform features and initiatives, thereby negotiating labor platformization. As social enterprises, platform co-ops such as WrupUp nurture a sense of community among workers and apply a collaborative approach as they seek to establish relationships with their workers. Perhaps important to consider is how these platforms see workers – as members and partners with specific aspirations – and not just as dispensable job-seeking entities in a global digital market. Nonetheless, their adoption of platform logics implies that although they reconfigure labor arrangements to a certain extent, such as training workers to command better rates, screening clients, or building a trust fund that can serve as a cushion during "low seasons," they still could not provide security nor force clients to offer benefits to workers. As van Doorn (2017, p. 917) emphasizes, despite

the promise of cooperative models for challenging the power imbalances encoded into planetary labor markets, a focus on technological solutions might create an illusion of technology's capacity to solve deeper structural labor issues or if not, put them in the sidelines (see also Englert et al., 2020). Yet, it is important to recognize how this local initiative surfaces workers' agential practice, inserting resistant narratives in their vision of a more pro-worker platform – crucial in identifying possibilities and pathways for configuring labor in the context of platform capitalism.

For start-ups such as Third Team Media and ESTRAT 360 Marketing, the realization of the advantages for platform independence is driven by a recognition of platform labor control and their entrepreneurial position as "elite workers" in the Philippine labor economy: driven to realize their potentials, tech savvy, and well-networked. This hybrid formation underlying the relations of production that they advance – combining the formality of regular businesses with the flexibility that they embrace as former platform workers – needs to be seen as a creative expression of solidarity emerging from workers' sensemaking of possibility in the digital economy. But how they will continually configure their businesses to embed pro worker labor conditions while struggling for financial viability will be crucial to follow in the future.

These formations appear distinct but there is a constant dynamic movement between and across them. Solidarities on social media solidify an entrepreneurial ideology but it is within its informality and ambient nature that Facebook groups manifest a candid, diverse, and intersectional set of issues and where practical and timely techniques of survival are exchanged. It is possible that entrepreneurial solidarities – everyday talk, gripes, and experience – can lead into the design of alternative labor platforms and development of pro-worker businesses. But for many workers joining these groups, there is no intention nor capacity to take the solidarity forward into platform co-ops or other forms of collective action. Yet, it presents a critical vantage point for understanding how workers in the context of digital capitalism can come together to discuss and negotiate platform control.

In examining the materiality of these solidaristic formations, it is interesting how resistance to technological capitalism is ambivalent and calibrated in the sense that platform capitalism is interrogated but all forms embed technology in multiple ways. Whether as a site facilitative of sharing experiences and strategies that convert workers as a ready labor pool for platforms (FB groups, FOPSCO), as a platform for reconfiguring labor arrangements (WrupUp), or as a start-up business (Third Team & ESTRAT 360 Marketing), technology is critical to these expressions of solidarity. Further examining the material dimensions of collective formations would show that all four possess distinct local structures and labor conditions that shape their nature (Chun & Agarwala, 2016; Englert et al., 2020; Grohmann & Qiu, 2020; Ness, 2015). As we have argued elsewhere, "the historical, economic and cultural circumstances comprising the digital labor environment in the Philippines" (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020, p. 9) help explain the nature of these solidarities: the prevailing precarity and labor informality, the sense of aspirational autonomy of workers from infrastructural challenges, the dwindling appeal of unions, as well as the valorization of the digital economy. Entrepreneurial solidarities in Facebook groups are supported by the high levels of social media use in the country and the growing number of geographically dispersed aspiring and current workers requiring entrepreneurial strategies developed on their own or collectively given the lack of strategic support from government. The

platform co-op model emerges from a city where the labor context is physically and symbolically shared by members and yields a unique formation capable of actively tapping into local capacities and resources. Platform independence is rooted in areas with sprouting businesses requiring technology services that these former freelancers, turned businesses, can cater to. These unique sources of identification, material resource, and conditions give the workers the drive to pursue their distinct aims.

In returning to our approach of "digital workerism" (Englert et al., 2020), which spotlights how workers and their experiences are central to the critique of capitalism, these expressions of solidarity among cloudworkers signal workers' own ways of working around digital platform conditions within the constraints of structures and institutions. Given the entrepreneurial foundations of these solidarities, we see that collective formations are not always fully "injustice nor precariousness driven" (i.e. Atzeni, 2016; Fantasia, 1998) but in this case crystallized by "aspirational imaginaries," which underscore the entrepreneurial spirit that cuts across these experiences. While workers are cognizant of the platform economy's injustices, many of them are highly reliant on it for survival.

Collective formations among workers that emerge do not necessarily mobilize against the source of injustice, but instead self-organize and work within and around the controls of these structures within means available to them. This can be explained by workers' positionality vis a vis the broader global digital economy and the shortcomings of the state; as neoliberal subjects they are expectedto be "entrepreneurial" – independently solving their struggles by themselves (Gandini, 2016; van Doorn, 2017). Essentially, this points to some key elements and contradictions in collective and resistant formations in the context of global digital capitalism.

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