

# Work at What Costs?: How Platform Labor Shifts Across Borders Through A Multi-National Comparative Ethnography of the Ride-Hailing Industry

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Tuesday, March 5th, 11:00 A.M. – 12:15 P.M.

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With the explosion of the platform economy, there has been a growing interest in the phenomenon of platform labor. Yet, although platform labor is a global phenomenon, few studies have comparatively examined how different social, cultural, and political landscapes shape how platform work is experienced by workers. Accordingly, we cannot adequately theorize the experience of platform labor without a fuller and more global perspective. This article fills this gap by offering an empirical comparison of the largest segment of platform laborers, ride-hailing drivers, working both in the Global North (the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom) – and the Global South (Ghana, India, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa). Our multi-layered data includes participant observation, interviews, and archival data from online driver communities. We document the varieties of algorithmic management and precarity experienced by drivers. In particular, we showed that, in the Global South, due to differences in the built physical infrastructures and socio-political environments, multiple actors emerged to facilitate and constrain the work of Uber drivers, which both weakened Uber's algorithmic management of drivers and increased the economic and physical precarity for drivers. In this way, we noted that what has been typically understood as a service triangle has become a service ecosystem for ride-hailing drivers in the Global South. In sum, this study shows how platform companies “travel” across regions, with some components of the business model transferring well and others getting lost in transit.



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