Solidarity and Resistance Meet Social Enterprise: The Social Logic of Alternative Cloudwork Platforms

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Amid the popularity of global cloudwork platforms that connect vast numbers of clients and workers across geographic boundaries, local platforms have emerged. These alternative platforms, such as social enterprises, are established by platform workers and social entrepreneurs offering pro-worker platform-mediated work organization. Through two case studies, I situate the ambivalence of alternative platform formations within the social imaginaries and "entrepreneurial solidarities" underpinning cloudwork in the Philippines and the local sources of identification—spatial and local affinities and gender identities driving them. I then examine how these sources of identification shape the versions of fair and inclusive relations of production that they seek to embed in platform design. These represent an expression of agency aimed at improving platform conditions in ways that simultaneously embody and challenge the platforms' business models. The article seeks to contribute to the enrichment of the debates in terms of the politics, nuances, and possibilities for solidarity and resistance in cloudwork in the Global South amid continuing technological development and platform reforms.

Keywords: platform labor, cloudwork, cooperativism, social enterprise, solidarity, resistance, labor organization, identity, spatiality, gender, Philippines

Amid the popularity of cloudwork platforms, such as Upwork, that connect vast clients and workers across geographic boundaries, local labor platforms presenting alternative forms of platform-mediated work organization with pro-worker agendas have emerged. These platforms are established by cloudworkers or social entrepreneurs as expressions of solidarity and resistance aimed at attending to the precarious conditions underlying global labor platforms and promoting community-directed, inclusive, and fairer conditions of work. However, more analytic focus is needed to understand the social logic driving these alternative formations, and how they seek to address the pernicious conditions of platform labor

markets while adopting its form. This is important because it allows us to understand a broader range of resistant and solidaristic articulations in the platform economy while attending to them as a product of personal visions and their interactions with broader social structures and local histories. At the same time, much of the growing research on platform cooperatives and social enterprises has so far largely focused on location-based platforms and on capturing the experience in Global North contexts (Sandoval, 2019). It is important to continually examine how alternative models for resistance and cooperativism are constituted and how they emerge in the Global South where the major supply of labor for cloudwork emanates.

Through two case studies of platforms for Filipino freelancers: *Wrup Up* (worker-led) and *Connected Women* (organized by social entrepreneurs in solidarity with women workers), I identify the importance of local sources of identification—the spatial affinities and gender identities blending with an entrepreneurial logic that drive these solidaristic formations. The significance of this empirical focus is that the Philippines is currently one of the largest growing suppliers of platform labor globally (Payoneer, 2020a), given an active promotion by the government's economic managers. I also examine how these sources of identification shape their perceptions of what constitutes fair relations of production that they seek to embed in the design of their platforms. This aligns with what Dolata (2017) calls "technically advanced sociality" (p. 6), which argues for examining the social aspects of collectivities and the systematic interweaving of social and technical organization in the development of important interruptions of power. Platforms can directly configure the labor arrangements between clients and workers and structure the role of technology in advancing conceptualizations of fair or good work. I aim to understand the local roots of these formations, and how their collective goals are emplaced in their vision and configuration of labor platforms.

Extending our recent work that sought to capture the dialectical tensions surrounding Filipino cloudworkers' cooperative cultures on social media (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020, 2022), I argue that these social enterprise formations are underscored by "entrepreneurial solidarities": an agency expression aimed at materially improving worker conditions in ways that simultaneously embody and challenge platforms' business models. Open resistance is not the only form that solidaristic formations take, and we need to address the diverse ways workers and social entrepreneurs interact with social forces and local contexts to experiment with practices that challenge the constituted social order. Given the cloudwork context, especially as it manifests in the Philippines and in the Global South more broadly, such expressions of "resistance" are likely to surface, and they need to be analyzed amid the wider forms of resistance and activism in the global platform economy. This article seeks to contribute to the enrichment of debates regarding the politics, nuances, and actual meaning of these spaces for local workers and organizers, useful for examining diverse expressions of solidarity and resistance amid continuing technological development and platform reforms.

Cloudworkers in the Philippines: Marginal but Not Quite

It is important to situate our analysis of alternative and community-led, platform-mediated work organization by understanding the conditions of Filipino cloudworkers via the tension between the control

techniques embedded in "planetary labor markets" and how they are positioned in the Philippine labor economy as "world-class workers."

Compared with geographically tethered platform work, cloudwork presents specific challenges for workers that, in many ways, observers would deem precarious. For one, workers compete ferociously for jobs underscored by "labor arbitrage" (Lehdonvirta, 2016). There is also no standard minimum wage, so workers are left to determine pricing for their services while navigating platforms for better options. There is also the challenge of establishing intercultural relationships with foreign clients with diverse work cultures and varying levels of commitment to fair standards of work (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020). Although more experienced workers are able to informally negotiate tasks, rates, or benefits from their clients, others cannot do so, so they suffer from overwork, anxiety, delayed payments, and abuse (Graham & Anwar, 2019; Wood, Lehdonvirta & Graham, 2018). The "seasonality" characterizing cloudwork labor also contributes to precarization—where workers overwork during periods of client and work availability and accept low rates for complex projects during periods of scarcity—further pushed by active government promotion and, consequently, the growing competition among aspirants (Graham & Anwar, 2019).

However, although many Filipino cloudworkers experience the above conditions with cloudwork, they continue to view cloudwork as a viable and appealing work option. As we argue in greater detail elsewhere (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020, 2022), there are two key factors contributing to this: first is the structural condition of labor in the Philippine society and economy, and second, how workers embrace the free, flexible, and technologically savvy category that distinguishes them from other kinds of workers.

The first key element is marked by local structural conditions underscored by persistent informality, precarity, and unemployment. As with many other low-income countries in the Global South, "precarity" has always been the norm for many workers in the Philippines, with poverty and social exclusion inherent in the systems in which workers are embedded (Ofreneo, 2013; Soriano & Cabañes, 2020). The opportunities offered by platform labor, well promoted by government, thus become attractive, as job displacements in formal employment abound amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the cloudwork labor arrangement, where workers are not paid a wage or salary, has no contract for a continuing work relationship, and where work schedules and earnings are not predictable—bears no significant difference from the experience of a growing percentage of Filipinos—close to 40% of the working population who are in vulnerable forms of employment (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2020). Digitally tethered, cloudworkers are also found to display dynamic social networks and to actively exchange survival strategies in self-formed social media communities.

The second dimension is connected to the dominant local perception of online Filipino freelancers (a common term for cloudworkers) as a distinct workforce that possesses a particular level of freedom, flexibility, and technological savviness compared with their local counterparts. Many work opportunities that command relatively decent rates in local economic terms revolve around jobs that are considered "less prestigious" in the Global North. The boom in the country's business process outsourcing (BPO) industry is dominated by work in call centers, transcription, and content moderation, which are taken up by an educated workforce because the salaries can be much higher than regular office jobs, despite their narrow job description or limited career growth opportunities (Fabros, 2016). Further, the idea of

"flexibility," often used to promote cloudwork, is internalized by Filipino cloudworkers not only in terms of the time needed to nurture their families while remaining economically productive but also in terms of the capacity to swiftly move from one skill or opportunity to another. This notion is often exchanged in worker's social media circles and events. Furthermore, in a labor context where full-time employment does not always guarantee receiving social security benefits, protection from abuse and long work hours, or unfair termination, platform labor, along with its promises of competitive dollar earnings, becomes appealing as a step-up from past or other alternative forms of employment.

Possibilities for Solidaristic Formations in the Platform Economy

The rise in instances of solidaristic formations among precarious platform workers globally, in the Global South more specifically (Chun & Agarwala, 2016; Grohmann, 2022; Lehdonvirta, 2016; Soriano & Cabañes, 2020; Wood et al., 2018), inspire research on what facilitates associational bonds or local "cultures of solidarity" (Fantasia, 1988), even when labor conditions may be inconducive to organizing. Workers' diverse experience globally has shown that identifying the local and material contexts of both struggle and resistance is crucial for understanding and giving value to expressions of solidarity (Chun & Agarwala, 2016; Grohmann, 2022; Grohmann & Qiu, 2020).

While we are seeing a range of resistant formations and collective organization among workers in location-based platforms, cloudwork poses unique challenges to collective organizations. Amid labor mobility and acute fluctuations in work locations, it is perceived that cloudworkers would encounter difficulties in coming together as a collective force. The transient nature of transactions underscoring freelance-based digital work, characterized by often small and short-term tasks (Wood et al., 2018) and high levels of occupational and income diversity among cloudworkers, can also create differences in levels of commitment and difficulties building a sense of identity or belonging (Lehdonvirta, 2016) that make traditional forms of resistance seem untenable.

One key assumption surrounding the analyses of worker organization in the platform economy is that workers would fully antagonize platforms because of precarious conditions. As I have outlined in the previous section, however, this is not the case for many Filipino cloudworkers. Although cloudworkers actively recognize the ambiguities, challenges, and even the unfair and abusive conditions wielded by the platforms and their clients sometimes, they rarely address these head-on by challenging the platforms through strikes, unionizing, or explicitly clamoring toward public institutions to directly confront platforms. This follows a dwindling trend toward unionizing in the country (Ofreneo, 2013), coupled with a recent turn in the Philippine political environment that has created a sentiment of hostility toward open protest and resistance (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

This also connects to my earlier point about Filipino cloudworkers' perceptions of being in a different category from other waged workers. Importantly, the discursive work surrounding labeling workers as "entrepreneurs" and "consultants"—pushed by either government, platforms or workers themselves—creates an ambivalent identity. While some literature sees these entrepreneurial values as a challenging basis for identity and social formation, it is interesting to examine how the hybrid identity of the "worker-entrepreneur" contributes to the solidaristic formations that they adopt. Furthermore, while

Filipino workers recognize the precarious conditions surrounding platform labor, they are immersed and highly dependent on the possibilities that these bring amid the lack of better alternatives and broader structural challenges in the local labor economy. The literature on expressions of resistance among Filipino cloudworkers has therefore surfaced "entrepreneurial solidarities," characterized by collective survival exchange strategies (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020), and "hidden forms of resistance" wielded individually and in covert ways by workers toward platforms and clients (Chen & Soriano, 2022).

In an earlier work, we argued that entrepreneurial solidarities emerged from the Philippine postcolonial condition, where platform labor was perceived as an extension of other forms of service-oriented labor in global value chains, such as BPO or care work. Although workers exchange complaints about the ambiguous and unfair conditions surrounding platform labor, their understanding of the limits of public and private institutions prod them to solve problems on their own, compelling them to use available resources to exchange strategies for platform workarounds. In this article, I extend "entrepreneurial solidarities" to analyze the associational relations that emerge as social enterprises embed their critique of global platforms into platform design.

Social Enterprises Driving Platform-Facilitated Organization of Work

Social entrepreneurship is understood as a "process involving the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities to catalyze social change and/or address social needs" (Mair & Marti, 2006, p. 37). The literature on social entrepreneurship is laden with debates, and recent research has shifted from idealization to a more critical stance questioning how social entrepreneurs define the social problems that they address, how this shapes their approach, and its consequences for their intended communities (Dey & Lehner, 2017).

Aligned with examinations of new forms of worker solidarity and resistance, forms of social enterprises driving platform-facilitated work organizations have emerged in recent years. One of their manifestations is as platform cooperatives, emerging as workers' responses to precarious labor. Some of these are "cooperatively owned online labor brokerages," "city-owned cooperatives," or "produser-owned platforms," among other configurations that embed the principles of shared ownership, decent pay, income security, transparency, codetermined work, and worker protections and benefits, among others (Scholz, 2017, pp. 175–185). Platform cooperatives seek to put "democratic ownership" and "decent labor" at the heart of platform design, as they emerge from autonomous self-organization among workers (Scholz, 2017, p. 155). However, the platform cooperativism movement is also well situated in the "contradictions between politics and enterprise, democracy and the market, commons and commercialisation, activism and entrepreneurship" (Sandoval, 2019, p. 12). For example, while maximizing profit may not be the aim of these platforms, they ultimately rely on commercial income for sustainability and ideologically justify soft algorithmic control (see also Karatzogianni & Matthews, 2020).

Still, new worker-led cooperative models that pose alternatives to big tech emerge, especially in the Global South. These may be inspired by some principles of platform cooperativism but do not strictly meet the traditional conceptualization (Grohmann, 2022). It is important to question what ideologies

shape their interests and how these come about, what forms of social change they seek, and how these are ultimately embedded in their design of platforms.

Recently, news about social entrepreneurs led by other actors "fighting to make gig work fairer" has surfaced. These include alternative forms of location-based platforms, such as "Wings," run by entrepreneurs that promise to pay workers a minimum wage, present ecofriendly alternatives, or seek to "humanize the gig economy into a model that is worker focused" and "in ways that are "fair and inclusive" (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2021). Doubts are often cast when change does not emerge from within— or among workers—but from external actors of relative privilege, despite their expressed concerns for promoting social change. However, technologically mediated change often involves significant resources, technical capacity, and scalable relational networks (Dolata, 2017) that ordinary workers may not always have access to. As such, we can expect the continued rise of platform social enterprises that purport to serve as agents for advancing better platform conditions for workers.

In arguing for a better understanding of the "social" in social entrepreneurship, Kimmitt & Muñoz (2017) argue that the important question is how social entrepreneurs make sense of social problems and develop entrepreneurial solutions within processes that reflect their solidarity with the sector directly implicated in the problem. For example, social entrepreneurs may define problems in terms of perceived "institutional weaknesses" (Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2017, p.16) and therefore act on them in ways that challenge some aspects of the institution, instead of seeing them as behavioral problems of workers. Further, some emerge with their solutions through more cooperative and participatory relations involving "active conversations and observations at the local level" (Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2017, p. 16). Whether as worker-led cooperatives or as social enterprises, digital opportunities and challenges will be further configured in terms of the aspirations and ideologies (Irani & Silberman, 2013) of those who are involved (Grohmann & Qiu, 2020) and the local circumstances within which they are organized—including goals, resources, and colonial histories. This implies that these platforms may vary in terms of the transformations they seek and the configuration of platforms to achieve these transformations.

Connected Women and Wrup Up: Local Sources of Identification and Solidarity

In this section, I explore place and gender as two important sources of identification in the two case studies analyzed for this research. The study involved in-depth interviews (conducted from September 2019 to June 2020) with the founders and managers of *Connected Women* and *Wrup Up*, an analysis of press releases, websites, Facebook pages, published reports about these organizations and their activities, interviews with online Filipino freelance workers, and a review of the design of these alternative labor platforms. These were accompanied by interviews with government officials involved in the country's digital labor growth strategy. Piven (2008) argues that it is important to focus on "sources of interdependent power" that are "rooted in the social and cooperative relations in which people are enmeshed by virtue of group life" (p. 4). A key step here is to examine how people find belonging in the social relations they are enmeshed in amid conditions presented by local institutions or systems (Chun & Agarwala, 2016).

Spatiality, Identity, and Solidarity: The Case of Wrup Up

The "spatial concreteness of platform labor" is important in understanding the global geopolitics of platform labor (Grohmann & Qiu, 2020, p. 3); similarly, the role of spatiality and locality is crucial in triggering expressions of protest and in understanding the formation of collective organizations (Chun & Agarwala, 2016; Fantasia, 1988). *Wrup Up*, a tech start-up and social enterprise, was birthed in a city in the south of the Philippines and in the province of Lanao del Norte. Iligan is considered a first-class, highly urbanized city, hosting several universities and colleges that specialize in engineering and information technology, one of which is a state-funded Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT). However, this city has been outpaced by neighboring cities in terms of economic development. After rapid urbanization for almost five decades during industrialization, Iligan saw remarkable outward migration in the late 1990s, which was attributed to the economic slowdown that it experienced in the second half of the 1990s (Basilio & Cabasan, 2004). Neoliberal policies of trade liberalization subjected Iligan's booming domestic industries, such as steel and cement, to stiff foreign competition, leading to a shutdown of major employment sources and a significant decline in investments and employment in the city. Iligan's geographical location also needs to be considered in this analysis. Iligan and its neighboring communities are prone to flooding, being adjacent to Iligan Bay (Clamor, Lamberte, Demeterio, Tanhueco, & Regadio, 2020). Iligan is also proximate to Marawi City, which hosts another important state university in the region but was the site of a violent siege between the government and Muslim rebels from May to August 2017, causing many displacements, loss to the economy and consequent implications to its neighboring towns and cities.

This hybrid of geographical, economic, social, and political conditions perhaps explains why compared with other key cities in the South, such as Cebu or Davao, which have embraced BPO and other IT-related investments that facilitated the employment boom and growth of microenterprises, economic investments in Iligan have somewhat stagnated. However, IT-oriented state universities and colleges in the city continually produce highly skilled talent-seeking opportunities in the city and elsewhere. Although many have migrated to other cities or explored opportunities overseas, workers and new graduates continually seek opportunities that will allow them to stay in the city. Alongside these developments, online freelancing and its emerging popularity among Filipino workers became a considerable alternative to the city's human resource pool, with the city emerging with one of the highest numbers of freelancers in the country. Many of the workers we interviewed at Iligan considered online freelancing a way to get well-paying work without leaving the city. The sprouting of coworking spaces in the city signaled an increasing number of cloudworkers and associational groups of freelancers. This vibrancy of the freelance industry in Iligan led it to be identified as one of the "25 digital cities by 2025" by the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT).

We can trace some of Wrup Up's beginnings to informal networks built by its members. Wrup Up was founded by Andrews Libradilla and fellow Iligan-based digital freelancers in 2016 with the vision of becoming "not just a marketplace to find the right talent" but also a "platform where struggling communities can find opportunities" (Wrup Up, 2020). They drew their initial strengths from building networks with the members of the local organization Alliance of Dependable and Resourceful Outsourced Iligan Talents (ADROIT), and partnering with government ICT organizations to promote platform labor and

training of aspiring workers in the city. This linkage helped them establish networks within the freelancing community and gain legitimacy to organize the start-up. As freelancers, Wrup Up's founders experienced many challenges newcomers faced in the industry, including the uneven power relationships between platforms and workers that triggered them to imagine new and fairer platform arrangements:

> What happens is that there is no security and you can lose a project in one snap. At the same time, these platforms are actually earning millions, and *nothing gets back to the community*. Once you're a freelancer, sign-up, you are on your own…I mean you really need to do your best, need to hustle, need to find ways. (A. Libradilla, personal communication, November 6, 2019)

Libradilla further added the high rates that platforms cut from the workers' earnings that disadvantage workers:

> Apart from that, if you even get a client and get paid, 20 percent of your salary goes to Upwork. Then its 15 percent for Freelancer—it's like a service fee, and it's 12 percent for People per hour. Whether you get the job or you don't get the job, they get paid because someone will be hired. But then *nothing gets back to the community.* (A. Libradilla, personal communication, November 6, 2019)

One would notice how "nothing gets back to the community" is emphasized in Wrup Up founder's lamentation of their platform labor experience. Wrup Up's aim is to establish an alternative local labor 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, personal communication, November 6, 2019). They promise to offer fairer rates for workers, deliver relevant training modules, and offer safeguards during the "low season." Membership in Wrup Up is limited to freelancers residing in Iligan and is inspired by its founders' rootedness in the city.

Wrup Up has been trying to direct its attention toward exploring more Philippine-based clients too, as it intends to service and contributes to the growth and development of local microenterprises and businesses, which can in turn produce more jobs in the countryside. By 2019–2020, Wrup Up had registered approximately 800 registered freelancers and 70 local and international clients, although small in scale compared with global platforms. Wrup Up received a grant from the British Council in 2019, although it lamented the lack of government support that could help the sustainability and scaling up of local start-ups.

Compared with traditional labor platforms, Wrup Up incorporated layers of intermediation to address what they believed were key challenges in the platform economy: (1) heightened competition, (2) low rates and high platform commission rates, (3) labor seasonality, and (4) platform ambiguity. To boost Iligan freelancers' competitiveness, Wrup Up is limited to Iligan workers so that the supply of labor can be more effectively managed, knowing well that competition drives a race to the bottom in terms of rates. As captured in one of their social media posters, a freelance worker and cofounder explained:

> We look after the future of Iligan. With our platform, we want to improve the welfare of Iliganons through the use of modern technology….so that no one is left behind. We want to eliminate the competition from foreign freelancers and by that, we only market our local talents. (Wrup Up, 2018)

Libradilla highlighted the challenge of competing with a growing stream of workers on global platforms:

> Most beginners have the trouble of getting clients. If a client posts a project in Upwork or Onlinejobs.ph, in just ten minutes to an hour, you see maybe 500 or more applications already from China or from India. So we're trying to eliminate the competition. Competition is tough so do you think clients would examine all those candidates? Of course not…and that is what makes it difficult for newbies…We need to create a job market platform that all Filipino freelancers can leverage and only us can bid, although we begin with Iligan then scale up. (A. Libradilla, personal communication, November 6, 2019)

Beyond creating a platform solely dedicated to Iligan freelancers, the company offered training to aspirants and existing workers to boost competitiveness in securing projects. The increasing competition in planetary labor markets required experience and a portfolio that strategically conveyed that experience, which could be challenging for aspirants who did not understand the platform management system or how to "sell their skills" to become marketable on the platform. Compared with training programs offered by the government that largely focused on skills training, Wrup Up offered "insider knowledge" on other aspects crucial to freelancing, such as how to build a competitive portfolio, how to estimate rates and pricing, how to avoid scams, and how to establish relationships with clients. Having thrived in their digital careers, Wrup Up's founders mentored workers in strengthening skills that were highly demanded or could command higher rates. Wrup Up expressed concerns about attracting more local workers to join the platform because they tended to favor larger platforms with more clients and presumed higher rates. To address this, they organized events to recruit members and attract local enterprises and public organizations as clients, which were important for eventually shifting the focus from global to local clients.

As a labor intermediary, Wrup Up organized teams from their pool of freelancers to bid for larger projects. To do this, they verified the skills of their members, including their performance on projects obtained from the Wrup Up platform. The data generated from labor matches were used to recommend freelancers most suitable for a client's tasks or assemble them as a team to bid for a large project while simultaneously distributing opportunities to members in their network. Wrup Up did not charge a joining fee, and when they facilitated a match, the platform charged a 5% service fee for its training programs, a lower percentage compared with other platforms. Another feature in Wrup Up's platform design was the deduction of a percentage (2%) from a client's payment, which was allocated for a freelancer's future needs or emergency situations. This is termed a "trust fund" and can be withdrawn by the worker when the need arises. Aware of the seasonality of online work, Wrup Up managers explained that this feature acts as a safety net for low periods.

With Wrup Up, even though planetary labor markets seem delocalized, workers find a sense of belonging and identification through their attachment to a place and identity as local freelancers. Workers from the same city converge in online spaces and spread information about freelancing through community conversations and local networks. There is a local backbone that drives platform labor at the grassroots, albeit not easily visible amid platform powers and algorithms. The shared context of place presents an opportunity not just for the high uptake of platform labor in Iligan among skilled workers with limited opportunities but also serves as a fertile ground for class consciousness.

Regional and linguistic affinity has been found to be a source of solidaristic formations among highly mobile Filipinos, including migrant workers, with a sense of collective belonging emerging from common history, experience, and visions of progress (Golan & Babis, 2019; Mojares, 1997). However, it also magnifies their cognizance of their emplacement in global competition and, consequently, less attention and solidarity with the plight of platform workers elsewhere. In this example, we see that Wrup Up's sociotechnical interventions are shaped by the spatial boundedness of their experience as platform workers and an affinity for their local roots, and these solidarities are further enriched with continuing socialities on social media. As local historian Mojares (1997) has argued, understanding the internal dynamics of particular societies points us to go beyond the "standard preoccupation with 'big' institutions and events" and allows us to take better "account of the territorial, social, and cultural variations in the people's experience of events," even as we grapple with global technological tides, such as planetary labor markets (p. 226).

Gender as a Source of Identification: The Case of Connected Women

The entry of numerous women into the global digital economy, and particularly in platform work, compels an understanding of how the platform environment presents challenges for women and how women have tried to use this as a source of identification for advancing worker struggles. This is especially important, with a majority of gig workers in the Philippines being women (Delfin, 2020) and gendered pay gaps manifesting in the global freelance economy (Payoneer, 2020b). Where algorithmic matching of labor is based on the impressiveness of a portfolio, gender identity may appear to be sidelined by the basic premise of which workers can perform the work for as little cost as possible. Yet software infrastructures of on-demand platforms encode gender inequalities into their design, and "draw on earlier modes of controlling and exploiting racially feminized service work" (van Doorn, 2017, p. 907).

It is therefore of interest that a social enterprise start-up, Connected Women (CW), was established as a labor platform aimed at catering to the specific needs and conditions of Filipino women. The social enterprise was founded by Gina Romero in 2013 on her return to her mother's homeland in the Philippines. Its beginnings can be traced to Romero's experience running a small start-up company in Singapore. Drawing from her Filipino roots, Romero's company hired her Philippines-based female relatives and their networks, who had IT degrees but were unemployed, to work for her remotely. It was when her network of female entrepreneurs expressed interest in hiring Filipina workers for remote work that Romero realized the possibilities of returning to the Philippines and building a platform that could match global women entrepreneurs and Filipina workers. At the time of writing, CW had 75,000 members in its community and a network of 76 chapters in different parts of the Philippines, expanding through

regular worker workshops and partnerships with international women agencies (Lim Uy Mariposa, 2020). CW's roots can also be traced to the founder's observations of the plight of Filipina overseas workers, including her mother, who were uprooted from their families to clinch a job overseas, or Filipina women who were forced to leave their jobs because of social expectations—as mothers, daughters, or sisters—to care for the family (G. Romero, personal communication, August 26, 2020). This social enterprise's mission was to facilitate opportunities for women in the IT sector to become economically productive while allowing them to sustain their choices, including caring for their families.

Similar to other labor platforms, CW offers a labor-matching service between clients and workers, although their platform design embeds three interlinked features that are integral to the conditions of female platform workers: (1) access, (2) flexibility, and (3) equity. The choice to focus on creating a platform targeting only women workers is aimed at facilitating their access to platform work amid the increasing competition in global labor platforms.

The CW team notes that many female aspirants underplay their skills and their capacities, a challenge in the "reputation economy" where one's chances of attracting clients are connected to one's capacity to establish an image of expertise, reliability, or success (Gandini, 2016). Romero explains:

> When I looked at the CVs, I realized that Filipinas tend to underplay their strengths and overplay their weaknesses. Applicants would tell me, 'I'm just starting out, so it's okay to ask for a low rate'. But this woman has worked in the banking sector for many years and only had to stop when she gave birth. They think they have to start from zero. So how to transfer their experiences and skills into their portfolios is a challenge for many women who have stopped work for some time. (G. Romero, personal communication, August 26, 2020)

In response to this observation, CW's portfolio submission system was updated to train women workers to supply responses that amplified their skills to help them attract clients and obtain rates commensurate to their skills.

Flexibility is often mentioned as a major factor that attracts people to try freelancing, especially for women who believe that platform labor affords them the possibility of performing the dual role of worker-from-home and domestic manager. In our interviews and observations of workers' Facebook groups, female workers often pointed out the perks of working from home while supervising their children's growth. However, behind the veneer of this aspirational image of flexibility, extant literature (Gregg, 2011) and our own research have shown the double burden and "presence bleed" that women experience while managing the dual roles of digital worker and domestic manager. Local gender norms play out. In the Philippines, whether as mothers, partners, or singletons, women are bound by social expectations to perform the role of nurturers, with lofty expectations of them being "efficient, nurturing, and self-sacrificial," whether they perform additional paid work or not (Soriano, Lim, & Rivera-Sanchez, 2015, p. 14). Platforms sell the image of flexibility while workers have to adjust their schedule to the client's preferences despite time zones, respond to emails 24/7, and allow clients to install intense monitoring systems to ensure that workers work per hour of pay. As Romero explained:

Pretty much all the platforms, they do not consider the challenges that women have, or the requirements that women need to be good at their job. It is mainly led by the requirements of the job, and if a woman thinks that this does not work for me, she may not even apply, or may still apply, but end up struggling to balance that work and her domestic duties. (G. Romero, personal communication, August 26, 2020)

To respond to this need, the platform was designed to ask its applicants about their flexibility requirements, allowing aspirants to indicate their preferred schedules in their portfolios and also for CW to understand the specific aspirations of its applicants and how the platform can aid in connecting them with clients who can match their conditions or needs. The platform then suggests a match with clients who are amenable to and support such schedule preferences. Vocal in their advocacy to support the conditions of working women and having been recognized with awards by international development agencies (ITU Telecom World, 2021; UN Women Asia and the Pacific, 2020), CW attracts clients who support the same advocacy. They explained that clients recognize that by accommodating workers who require flexibility, they get an expanded pool of skilled workers, which include those who might not have applied given concerns about domestic commitments.

However, in terms of equity, labor platforms have also been characterized as biased in terms of the data that they solicit from workers and clients (van Doorn, 2017). Unlike traditional platforms that require little information from clients compared with the breadth of professional and personal details sought from workers, the CW platform promotes equitable transparency between workers and clients. Before establishing CW, Romero hired workers from other cloudwork platforms. She explained that most platforms are employer-centric: While platforms request multiple information from job seekers, clients can opt to share as little information as they want. She further explains, "if a worker wants to be hired, wouldn't you also want significant information about the client that can help you in making a decision to accept a project?" (G. Romero, personal communication, August 26, 2020). CW explained that not all clients can accommodate requests to provide substantial information, and this is an aspect that they are continually working on.

Another important aspect of CW's advocacy is in helping women platform workers transition into becoming entrepreneurs. In training workers to obtain larger projects and explore both global and local clients within or outside the platform, CW shifts the workers' orientation toward platform independence but still with entrepreneurial values. Beyond its labor-matching service, the social enterprise incorporates workshops for workers and "worker agencies" on how to develop inclusive businesses and scale them eventually.

Cloudwork Social Enterprises as Entrepreneurial Solidarities: Opportunities and Limits

This article addressed two modes of social identification, which have become the source of social and cooperative relations underscoring alternative cloudwork platforms that emerged in the Philippines. The choice to confine their platforms to Iligan-based or female workers speaks to their specific value orientation and respective assessments of inequity or ideals of fairness in the platform economy. By examining locally rooted sources of social cooperation, we see the emergence of social enterprises that simultaneously challenge and embody platformization logics. Given the entrepreneurial foundations of

these solidarities, we can see that collective formations are not always fully "precariousness driven" (i.e., Fantasia, 1988), but in this case, crystallized by the entrepreneurial spirit that cuts across these experiences to attend to their own interpretations of injustice.

Wrup Up emerged from its founders' shared experiences as platform workers, along with their vision of better platform conditions for Iligan-based freelancers (as well as the social relations and economic conditions surrounding this rootedness to place). Place becomes a marker for the symbolic identification of its members amid the delocalization and individualism of platform labor. Nonetheless, geographic orientation is also the key challenge Wrup Up faces in its aim for sustainability. Wrup Up lamented workers' ambivalence to join, given the scale of clients and projects available to other global platforms. Similarly, attracting high-profile clients can be challenging with a talent pool from just one city. Without systematic government support for such local start-ups, competing with global platforms and attracting local workers threaten sustainability. Although they seek to shift focus toward local clients, these are often small enterprises with relatively lower compared with what foreign clients might offer, given the relative inequity of global markets. Eventually, Wrup Up had to halt its operations in mid-2021 because of financial difficulties, and a lack of support and uptake.

Connected Women, on the other hand, is led by a social entrepreneur who has embedded herself in a network of local female platform workers. Romero, blending her British background with Filipino roots, has scaled the project up with the help of her entrepreneurial upper-middle-class background, foreign networks, and alignment with broader women agendas advanced by international women organizations and tech businesses run by women. There are other global efforts, such as Turkopticon (Irani & Silberman, 2013) or the Just Economy and Labor Institute (JELI, 2021) in Thailand, where external actors of relative privilege have become instrumental in facilitating the organization of workers or in establishing social enterprises aiming for social good. It is notable that while CW also promotes empowerment by training women to become platform independent, it also trains and places women in tasks such as artificial intelligence training or data labeling ("Women at Ciena," 2022), which speaks to the already invisible work of women involved in "ghost work" (Gray & Suri, 2019). Jarrett's (2015) metaphor of the "digital housewife" signifies the parallels between domestic work that supports capital reproduction and the low, unrecognized, or unpaid labor of digital platform workers, especially those involved in peripheral tasks such as AI training or data labeling. This may be CW's strategy to attend to the differing capacities of the aspirants or facilitate better pay for women in the Philippines, given the lack of options in the local labor economy. Nonetheless, how CW will continually configure its platform orientation, including the skills for which it trains women, will be crucial in upholding its commitment to advancing the conditions of women in the digital economy.

The local context is important in the analysis. In the Philippine cloudwork scene, radical action is not the norm among workers, at least not in terms of walkouts or protests that we can observe elsewhere. While Filipino workers are cognizant of the precarious conditions surrounding platform labor, they are immersed in and highly dependent on the possibilities that these bring amid the lack of better alternatives and broader structural challenges in the local labor economy. As shown in the ensuing discussion, cloudworkers' and social entrepreneurs' resistant strategies and repertoires currently manifest in how they insert their concerns into platform features and entrepreneurial initiatives. They reconfigure work arrangements to a certain extent, such as promoting better rates for workers on their platform, building a

trust fund that can serve as a cushion during "low seasons," or incorporating features that compel clients to be sensitive to women's needs. By technological design, they attempt to indirectly subvert some of the underlying logics of global platforms that free clients and platforms from other obligations toward workers. Although CW and Wrup Up operate as labor platforms, they also function as social enterprises and nurture a sense of community among workers, applying a collaborative approach to program implementation. They seek to establish relationships with workers, a feature that is missing in other platforms run as pure businesses. 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. The move to build local communities that help workers establish their agencies as entrepreneurs is interesting to follow in terms of how this directs workers to become independent of labor platforms, and obtain the capacity to generate new opportunities, hopefully with conditions that are more just, for other workers.

Clearly, these platform alternatives do not seek to outcompete platform capitalism. While they attempt to cascade gains toward workers, facilitate better protection mechanisms, or drive for inclusivity, they do not always have strict ethical rules about what clients to work for or work tasks to accommodate, explicit rules for rejecting investment capital, or actively refrain from using the characteristics of growth-oriented businesses as outcome indicators for their interventions. In short, they reject certain conditions but do not necessarily refuse neoliberal logic. Further, while they struggle to increase scale with limited resources, large global platforms will remain at the center of the economic activity, engaging most aspiring workers.

Both CW and Wrup Up are also compelled to collaborate with government organizations to build their local networks and assume legitimacy, and, in the process, echo the state's promotion of platform labor amid its broader precarious conditions. Unfortunately, this allows the government to neglect its responsibility of initiating the much needed broader reforms in the local labor economy. As discussed in earlier sections, the local embrace of the platform economy is implicated in the history of labor precarization in the country. Unless such structural conditions are addressed, the larger population of workers not within the ambit of these alternative platforms and social enterprises will remain dependent on them.

Conclusion

This article builds on earlier works that have explored solidaristic formations in the global digital economy and attended to the emergence of local labor platforms—as social enterprises—that seek to improve working conditions through "technically advanced sociality." I examined the sources of identification encapsulated in "entrepreneurial solidarities" that underscore these initiatives. The article also showed how social context, identity, and modes of production shape the platform founders' and workers' perceptions of what constitutes fairer work in the platform economy and how they embed particular labor ideologies in the design of their platforms and initiatives.

Platforms have a critical social role (Irani & Silberman, 2013), as they configure labor arrangements for a large scale of workers and clients. Platforms imbued with resistant agendas have the potential to further reshape these arrangements to promote pro-worker conditions within platform capitalism. Analyzing the aims, ideologies, and sources of identification of alternative platform enterprises

with social goals becomes crucial because these are embedded in their version of the platform-mediation organization of work. The emergence of such initiatives reinforces a broader idea that local communities can design technology particularly interpretating fairness toward workers and local community needs. This article focused on understanding their beginnings and social logic; however, research needs to continually follow how workers perceive the conditions engendered by these alternative platforms as they develop or reconfigure into new forms.

Technological solutions, of course, are not enough. They are intermediate solutions that social forces generate to improve working conditions within their terms and goals, but these social enterprises can go in different directions as they mature as businesses. As scholars (Sandoval, 2019; van Doorn, 2017) emphasize, despite the promise of platform cooperative models for presenting challenges to the power imbalances encoded in the platform economy, a focus on technological solutions might create an illusion of technology's capacity to solve deeper structural labor issues or put them in the sidelines. Broader structures of neoliberalism and local labor conditions that compel a large scale of workers to embrace unfair labor practices need to be continually challenged. As social enterprises, these alternative platforms can use their partnerships with the government to advance structural reforms that would improve the conditions for alternative cooperative projects, nudging them to think about platform labor not only as a source for job generation numbers but also as an opportunity for dignified work. Nonetheless, we need to accommodate the potentialities of these alternative solidaristic formations that build on local cultures of cooperation as openings for perhaps larger forms of community-led change, even as we continually investigate how power operates and shifts within these formations.

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