Society and Space

On delivery waiting: The entanglement of gig and border temporalities in platform cities

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Abstract

The politics of time, and particularly practices of waiting, spring in the narratives of any border crossing. This article draws from the scholarly analysis on migratory temporalities, to shed light upon the temporalities of urban delivery platforms, strongholds of migrant labor. We focus on waiting both as a research object and analytical lens to further comprehend the intersectional precarities at work in the food-delivery sector. What does the border tempos have to do with a delivered meal? Based on ethnographic research conducted in Spain and Chile, we gathered two sets of distinct temporalities coming together: on the one hand, the codified periodization of migratory statuses; on the other, the uncertain timing of speed and still, labor and no/labor of digital gigs. The intersection where the border and delivery chronopolitics come together remains understudied. Drawing on select empirical examples, delivery waiting emerges as a central and ambivalent practice among riders' everyday lives.

Keywords

Delivery, waiting, migration, temporalities, platform capitalism, city

Introduction: The lived politics of time and waiting

Santiago de Chile, 11 May 2022. At the intersection of Santa Rosa and Alameda, in the heart of the city centre, one can barely make out the Andes Mountain range, hidden behind the dense curtain of smog. The air is hot and dry, and the traffic is non-stop, a moving

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landscape of smoke, horns, and people on the run. On the pavement, dozens of riders crowd together as they wait at the Fashion's Park spot. They congregate here strategically: Taco Bell, Domino's and McDonald's are on the corner, from which they can rush off in four different directions. Next to the green backpacks of Uber Eats, on the ground lie the red ones of *PedidosYa*, a Uruguayan company, and the orange ones of *Rappi*, a Colombian firm with the slogan "*Entregamos con amor*" (We deliver with love). *Ya* (now) and *Rappi* (fast) reflect the imperative of immediacy inherent to these platforms, although delivery also depends on downtime like this. Some riders take a break and have a snack. One pulls out a pair of pliers and starts to fix his bike, turning the pavement into a makeshift open-air workshop. A Venezuelan courier, new to Santiago, approaches a small group showing Google Maps, and asks: "What do you think of this route?", followed by advice on distance, safety, and journey time. Two women pick up one backpack and go out together to deliver, riding the same motorbike. Another hangs mobile batteries around his neck, where he charges his phone. More than a time-out, today's waiting is full of interactions. Behind me, I hear the buzzing of a *mosquito*, that hybrid between bicycle and motorbike that travels the streets like a precarious and noisy machine. The petrol engine that has been fitted to the bike starts to fail, and some riders get together to look at it and chat with the guy. After a few minutes, his smartphone buzzes again and he says goodbye to the group: "I've got to get going".

Urban landscapes are graphic sites of a global tendency towards filling the public spaces with "platform im/mobilities" (Altenried et al., 2020; Gibbings et al., 2022). Based on our international research project on riders' everyday lives and platform capitalism, our ethnographic inquiries in several cities in Spain and Chile share the same point of departure: food-couriers do not only deliver by moving quickly from restaurants or ghost-kitchens to clients, but also and mainly, by waiting in the midst of their mobile journeys. Balancing between algorithmic-designed waiting and improvised and self-calculated waiting there are multiple instances of immobility, both for longer or shorter time periods. As such, waiting is a co-constituent counter part of the act of fast delivery of prepared (mostly fast) food: waiting for the algorithmic decision to pick one rider, and not another one, in order to match certain demand and take responsibility of a given order; waiting for the food to be prepared and packed out of the kitchen; waiting in traffic jams and during the necessary road safety measures to be taken during the delivery itinerary; waiting for the client to open the entrance door, to later receive the delivered food through the private door; waiting again for the next order and start the cycle of waiting within the circuits of urban delivery. The allocation of time, indicating when to speed and when to stop, seems to be only mediated by company applications, with ongoing discussions about algorithmic control vs. autonomous decision-making ; (Diz et al., 2023; Griesbach et al., 2019; Shapiro, 2018). In contrast, this article deals instead with the entangled temporalities in the platform-based food delivery sector.

The themes of time and speed have been central to social theory (Wajcman and Dodd, 2016). They were key to the analyses of industrial capitalism by Marx, Weber, Simmel, and EP Thompson, and to some extent this theoretical corpus has conceived that to be modern is to live in a runaway world (Giddens, 2002). In his analysis of modern urban life, Simmel (2002) describes a nervous city dweller characterised by restlessness, haste, and distraction, subject to the rigours of the clock and the productive rhythms of the market. Time as a topic of social inquiry returns with strength in the era of globalisation and new digital temporality, when speed and acceleration have become central analytical objects (Castells, 1986; Urry, 2000; Virilio, 1986). Thus, a series of writings advance interpretations of acceleration *à la* Virno and time-space compression *à la* Harvey, informing for instance, productive geographical debates on "chronopolitics" (Klinke, 2013). In this context, the attention to waiting in sociological analyses (Auyero, 2012; Jeffrey, 2008) points to stratification systems

in terms of the apportionment of time, where waiting entails "to be the subject of an assertation that one's own time (and therefore, one's social worth) is less valuable than the time and worth of the one who imposes the wait" (Schwartz, 1974: 856). Recent work equips us to think about the role of time in a late capitalist world of 24/7 productivity (Crary, 2013); a seemingly increasingly mobile world, where "waiting through spaces of mobility is an often-inevitable and frequent experience woven through the fabric of the mobile everyday" (Bissell, 2007: 277).

Sarah Sharma reacts to these readings based on "speed theory", as too easily proclaiming the impact of technologies on producing fast-moving flows of goods, capital, people, and ideas at global scale. By rescuing the materiality and complexity of "lived time", her book *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (2014), critiques a tacit agreement that the world is getting faster. Sharma elaborates a biopolitical economy of temporalities, proposing a more situated reading of the different experiences of time, for instance:

> The taxi driver in most major metropolitan cities in North America is almost always newly immigrated and waiting for accreditation papers. Many drivers are seeking asylum. The taxi driver straddles multiple temporalities, both personally (the offset clocks of time zones that dictate phone calls home, the slow progress of work-visa applications, the movement of their children through the U.S. school system) and professionally (the tempos of those they must transport, the slow traffic, night and day, the ticking of the clock and the running meter). (2014: 55)

It is precisely from this understanding of the lived politics of time as "entangled temporalities" (Sharma, 2014: 8), that we engage the everyday tempos experienced by platform food-delivery couriers, most with migrant background (Altenried, 2021; Orth, 2024; Van Doorn and Vijay, 2021). While Sharma focuses on how people's different relationships to labor reconfigures their experience of time, some scholars focus on how the border regime primarily shapes lived temporalities, mainly in terms of "waiting" (Jacobsen et al., 2020; Khosravi, 2010, 2018, 2021; Van Houtum, 2010). From early on, feminist readings have been key to reject the tendency to homogenize migrant subjects developing a feminist geopolitical analysis of waiting and im/mobility (Hyndman and Giles, 2011), advancing a nuanced take on waiting, as in being attentive to its ambiguities with "generative possibilities" (Mountz, 2011). For a decade now, the literature on border policies and waiting has been flourishing (Mitchell, 2022).

Drawing from the consolidated scholarly analysis of migratory temporalities, this article sheds light upon the temporalities of delivery platforms. Concretely, we focus on waiting both as a research object and analytical lens to further comprehend the intersectional precarities at work in the food-delivery sector. What is at stake when deportable riders wait for orders to come in their applications, staying still for long hours in visible urban spaces? What does the border have to do with a delivered meal? Based on ethnographic research, we gathered two sets of distinct temporalities coming together: on the one hand, the linear and delimited periodization of migratory statuses; on the other, the fragmented and intermittent timing of speed and still, labor and no/labor of digital gigs. While an emerging body of work is engaging migrant labor in the digital gig economy (Lata et al., 2023; Schaupp, 2022; Van Doorn et al., 2022), the intersection of the temporalities of the border and platform labor remains understudied (Annavarapu, 2022). Based on empirical insights from a qualitative research project, this article engages the layered temporalities of border policy and delivery platforms, by focusing on everyday practices of waiting carried out by food-couriers during their urban itineraries.

This work is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted during 2022–2023 in Spain and Chile. We carried out ethnographic observations during several urban itineraries through the "hot zones" of food-delivery activity in downtown areas of three cities: A Coruña, Zaragoza, and Santiago de Chile. Our qualitative research includes ethnographic journaling together with regular semi-structured interviews to couriers from different delivery companies and with diverse geographical backgrounds. Under previous written consent, all interviews are maintained anonymous under pseudonyms.

The article's first section engages in a literature review of time and waiting in platform studies to then address what has been written about time and waiting in migration/border studies. The second section introduces our empirical observations of urban delivery, describing times-spaces of waiting among food-couriers in urban centers, and exploring their collective production of what we call *geo-situated knowledges*. The third section engages experiences of waiting for change in migration status, compiling testimonies about how platform work relates to requirements related to residency and work-permits. As preliminary conclusions, we advance delivery waiting as a deeply ambivalent state of uncertainty, captured in the notion of *un/wanted time*. This delivery waiting, while enabling migrant riders to navigate the chronological topographies of flexible platform cities, ultimately remains within the unbending parameters of the border regime.

Time and waiting in platform studies and migration studies

Delivery times

The platform economy has spread alongside the proliferation of "on-demand service" and a "just-in-time workforce" (De Stefano, 2015). The food delivery sector is visible in urban squares, streets, hallways, and restaurants, where an array of platform precarities modulate daily journeys. Insecurity, low wages, unpredictable protocols for hiring and laying off, patchy and intensive labour schedules, or information asymmetry resulting from algorithmic management are just some common features ((Casas-Cortés et al., 2023) ; Woodcock and Graham, 2020). However, analyses correlating precariousness and temporality remain scarce in platform studies, with some exceptions. Some authors underline the blurred boundaries between free time and working time in the case of the self-employed, who (apparently) design their own working hours freely and flexibly (López-Martínez et al., 2021). Others, like Popan (2021), show how datafication and delivery time metrics affect couriers' moods (anxiety, sadness) and condition their actions (speeding, waiting around). Through flexible urban itineraries, precarity also operates on the level of time. As in other flexible jobs in the contemporary city, platform couriers perform their task not within a specific physical location but through mobility *and* waiting, whereby the "workplace is constructed through a continuum between time-spaces of permanence and movement" (Jirón and Imilan, 2015: 133). Time and space become precarious embodied experiences, marked by vulnerability, hyper-availability, and simultaneity in their continuous juggling with times and rhythms of different urban activities. Hustle constitutes their routine (Ravenelle, 2019). This hustling among gigs speaks to a condition of urban life emerging from everyday experiences of uncertainty, including prolonged states of "waithood" (Thieme, 2018). Time management through apps encourages "digital mobile workers" to be constantly active, turning the city into a workplace on the move, while the costs associated with generating a workplace for companies disappear (Jirón and Ulriksen, 2023).

This platform city organizes value accumulation around the capture, algorithmic processing and monetization of user data, intersecting with enduring socio-spatial inequalities

that reveal the geospatial dimensions of the platform economy (Stehlin et al., 2020). In the food delivery sector, which unlocks new sources of value through the disaggregation of time, the materiality of rider's mobility reveals the entanglement of the platform and the city. On a daily basis, an "interstitial platform infrastructure" (Stehlin et al., 2020: 1254) extracts value from pre-existing public infrastructures, such as sidewalks, road networks, squares, transportation systems, telecommunications and GPS. However, this platformization of mobility does not manifest equally everywhere, since these companies have to interact and articulate with local political economies, power relations, laws and regulatory structures, urban scales, inequalities and distinct cultural landscapes, all of which engender different forms of digitalized mobility.

In the food delivery sector and given the perishability of a meal, the allocation of a rider to an order must occur as quickly as possible (Richardson, 2020). In her inspiring research, Lizzie Richardson looks at the "orchestration" and "flexible arrangement" performed between couriers, consumers, and restaurants in each order. Many times, open to contingencies, the undefined role of riders affects their urban performance. One example is their waiting in restaurants, where they are neither staff nor customers. Riders may wait in line with customers picking up orders, which is typical in fast-food restaurants; or may be invited to be separate from customers, who are also waiting to be served; or are required to enter through the back entrance, to pick up the order in the kitchen. For every situation, "the exact practices of the delivery rider therefore depend on adaptations of the specific service routines of each restaurant" (Richardson, 2020: 632). These adaptations take place within particular spatio-temporal framings, which are essential to understand the lived experience of platform delivery. Nonetheless, these adaptations are not only characteristic of the riders but also of the platforms, which transform the urban context. Platform operations intervene through digital arrangements which deploy "conjunctural geographies" (Graham, 2020). This is done by making intermittent but constant use of public spaces and devices (bike lanes, municipal benches, tourist hubs), as well as by interfering with previous urban time frames, snooping pedestrian journeys and traffic rhythms at peak hours of high demand. In turn, platforms deploy contingent adaptations upon the times-spaces mediating between actors.

Through the lens of mobilities theories, food systems are complex circulatory networks that bring together a wide range of temporalities (Hayden and Zunino, 2020). In logistical terms, coordination and time synchronization for food trade is key. But the mobilities of food and eating are also related to the temporalities of everyday commuting or expanding workdays. In fact, the ontology of food is linked to circulation. As Hayden (2023) notes, human mobility is intimately related to food. Early restaurants were linked to hotels or inns and catered to the needs of populations far from home. Lack of access or food insecurity can be a reason for the movement of people, while migration involves moving food practices from one place to another. In the food delivery, migrant riders are entangled in these multiple temporalities for the circulation of food. As in the previous example, waiting in restaurants shows how this circulation not only is based on speed, but also depends on pause times. However, as the ethnographic material shows, delivery waiting does not imply inactivity, but assembles interdependent im/mobilities.

In the rare treatment of waiting in platform studies, its description is often reduced to poor working conditions, boredom, and harshness in the face of inclement weather. Still, waiting might also activate sociality and solidarity among riders. This is the case of "waiting points", in squares, malls, parks, or outside eating places, which become sites for self-organisation and social bonding (Cant, 2020; Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020). It is therefore necessary to reflect on the ambiguities of delivery waiting. Waiting could be scrutinized

in relation to the figures of hope, doubt and uncertainty. Following Janeja and Bandak (2018), the politics of waiting refers to the structural conditions that force people to wait, while the poetics of waiting speak to the possible existential openings which might be able to emerge from temporal relations of uncertain outcome. In its ambiguity and contingency, "waiting is not to be found merely in the absence of action but in an uncertain terrain where what is hoped for may or may not occur" (2018: 16). It is this open-ended understanding that we apply to our ethnographic gaze to delivery waiting.

However, beyond the experience of riders on the streets, it is worth highlighting some structural mechanisms driving the temporality of the workforce in platform capitalism. First, delivery work both shapes and is shaped by historically contingent contexts of racialisation, a key organising principle of "racial platform capitalism" according to Dalia Gebrial's ethnography of Uber's rise in London (2022). Her analysis unveils the co-constitutive relationship between racialisation and platformisation, particularly visible since the global financial crisis of 2008, when platforms absorbed surplus populations unable to access formal and standard employment. In that context, platforms developed legal and technological techniques as worker mis/classification (classifying workers as self-employed, independent contractors rather than employees) and algorithmic management (monitoring workforces remotely, with minimal use of human supervisors) as forms of racial practice, deployed to re/organize surplus urban labour power. This cheap, precarious, disposable and interchangeable workforce was shaped by both race and immigration policies, as well as neoliberal austerity. In the case of Uber, the deficit in public funding for urban services, such as transport, favoured the entry of the platform into the city. At once, the presence of racialized subjects in the platform economy is marked by immigration regimes, which in contexts of poverty, unemployment and austerity, exclude racialized populations from the welfare state, forcing them to occupy precarious positions in the gig economy. The uncertain promise of a possible "gig" and the lack of better opportunities elsewhere keep these workers attentive to the platform, whether they are paid or not:

> Indeed, the platform model relies on maintaining a seemingly endless stream of workers available to accept, within minutes, 'gigs' requested by consumers. To function, this requires more workers being 'plugged in' to the app than 'gigs' available at any given time and location. The worker is not paid for time spent waiting, 'plugged in,' despite this waiting being central to the platform's promise of an on-demand service. (Gebrial, 2022: 4)

This analysis makes us see the disposability of platform workers through their cultural, social and political disposability inscribed in certain bodies through racialization, and unveils that just-in-time logistics are crucial to the making of surplus value in platform labour. In contemporary capitalism, logistics is defined "as both the practices involved in moving goods and the management systems for organizing this movements" (Anderson, 2022: 1463). In the gig economy, especially after the coronavirus pandemic, developments in logistics have led to more intense monitoring of both production and labour processes, reducing wage costs through bogus self-employment, unpaid overtime, and inadequate (or non-existent) health and safety provisions, including essential issues such as lack of access to toilets and unhealthy shift patterns. Along with these structural mechanisms, platform logistics operates through the politicization of temporalities of exchange that discipline working bodies (Chua, 2022). Although Taylorist-Fordist mass production reminds us that the speed-up of the supply chain is not new, current logistics have intensified temporal precision so that goods do not remain unproductively immobilized, while workers along the supply chain are subjected to the temporal demands of productivity and efficiency

through algorithmic processing and control. Unlike the temporal linearity of the industrial discipline, platform temporalities are rather multiple, flexible and fragmented.

Nevertheless, while algorithms are said to produce standardized time-spaces, they do not have hegemonic outcomes (Ziewitz, 2016). Couriers can assert their needs by interacting with them. Manipulating the app, setting up tricks, or evading the facial recognition algorithm designed by the platforms to control the multi-users accounts among riders in a precarious migratory situation, they establish their own tactics and calculations, introducing fissures in the algorithmic control (Allen-Perkins and Cañedo-Rodríguez, 2023; Diz et al., 2023; Ferrari and Graham, 2021). These tricks attempt to repair the shortcomings of platform work (Velkova and Kaun, 2019). This notion of repair allows us to think about the fragile temporalities of riders by analysing the materialities that make up their work, and that can break down at any moment: smartphone, batteries, bicycle, backpacks, clothes, bodies, benches, the pavement, the streets, etc. Temporalities of breakdown, maintenance, and repair, upend linear and teleological histories of large technology platforms "by reminding us that time flows at many different paces and in many different directions at once, not all of them fast or – as conventionally understood – forward" (Jackson, 2017: 173).

Analysing the labour politics of time in a sector where digital technologies have normalised the imperative of immediacy, Chen and Sun (2020) describe a regime of "temporal arbitrage" where "fragmented rush" is the norm among riders. This regime is based on stratifying the value of people's time. That of couriers, who live on temporal margins, is subject to structural and persistent depreciation. "The order of temporal arbitrage normalizes (1) the customer's cultural expectations for timed and closely monitored service fullfilment and (2) the workers performing their duties in an increasingly frenetic and fragmented manner" (2020: 1563). Every day, riders experience time through calculations and interruption. Algorithmically calculated time marginalizes the embodied riders' experience of time, which depend on traffic, urban infrastructures and spaces, digital work processes and socio-economic structures. Reinforcing this idea, Wu and Zheng (2020) examine platform work through a socio-material lens, where space and time are not experienced separately. From this perspective, each time an order is to be delivered, several behind-the-scene activities must be performed synchronously. Between pressure and fragmentation, workers co-construct multiple spatio-temporalities and delivery tactics to meet the demand for speed. These tactics show how they often bridge the gap between the logic of the app's "real time" and the spatiotemporal constraints, embodying a "temporal agency" and being at once "victims and architects of time" (Duus et al., 2023: 18). The contrast between the flat time of the algorithm and the riders' irregular and contingent time, full of pauses, delays, fatigue, traffic jams, rain, wind, and unforeseen events, creates "frictions of time" (Duus et al., 2023: 207). According to these authors, riders are exposed, because of such frictions, to "unwanted time": long waits in restaurants, glitches, waiting in the square, etc. These long delivery waits are further shaped by the very border regime which is embodied by couriers. Their assigned migrant status also extracts time and value from their waiting.

Bordering times

The experience of forced waiting springs in the narratives of any border crossing, but particularly those deemed irregular ones. The critical migration scholar, Henk van Houtum, speaks about time being brutally marked by migration policies in "Waiting before the Law: Kafka at the border" (2010). He engages the temporal consequences of administrative bureaucracies during the waiting times at the quest of migration offices as a Kafkian form of oppression. The anthropologist Shahram Khosravi renders his own

experience of migration tempos with rich empirical material and analytical finesse in *Illegal Traveler: An Autoethnography of Borders* (2010). The book is not about a personal self nor about a whole border regime in abstract. His vivid appraisal of changing and repeating countries in dizzying itineraries from Teheran to Oslo achieves a thorough picture of the temporalities lived within migration circuits. This is why his writings, documentary films and talks on waiting deeply resonate with experiences of im/mobility, especially by those who find institutional impediments and long-term obstacles in their journeys. Shahram Khosravi identifies three dimensions of the temporalities of border practices: "waiting, delaying and circulating, all three of which result in time stealing" (2019: 417). By forcing migrants into these imposed prolonged periods, their time is both painfully being extracted and racialized as less worthy.

Using time as a technique of domination is traced back and connected to the colonial hallmark of denying coavalness, that is, being perpetually regarded as in another time, assuming to be stuck in a historical belatedness and therefore treated as less. Khosravi, building on Michael Hanchard on Afro-temporality, points to how "racial time is defined as unequal temporal access to resources and power" (2019: 417). In Marxist terms, bordering practices accumulate wealth through stealing time, producing a large amount of surplus of time to be put to work cheaply (Khosravi, 2018; Rajaram, 2018). As such, "temporal bordering constitutes an army of reserve labour, whose time is regarded as surplus and wasted and therefore easily depreciated" (Khosravi, 2019: 420). Regardless of Khosravi's critical eye towards the border regime, in his accounts, the condition of being constantly robbed of time while journeying appears as a deeply painful state of affairs, yet unexpectedly hopeful. As such, the act of waiting, entails an edgy encounter between uncertainty and hope. This radical ambivalence of waiting is later developed in *Precarious Lives*, his study of youth in Iran (Khosravi, 2017), and keeps coming into his last work on prolonged waiting as insomnia, "sensing it in the form of boredom, despair, anxiety and restlessness, but also anticipation and hope" (Khosravi, 2021). It is precisely this ambivalent understanding of waiting, as a precarious condition where uncertainty and prospect intermingle, the one we appreciate among migrant food-couriers.

In addition to these key contributions on thinking the power of migration policies upon time, from the post-Marxist tradition of Autonomy of Migration, Mezzadra and Neilson advanced the notion of "temporal borders" as the multiple uses of time for the "selective inclusion" of mobile flows and ordering of subjects on the move:

> Border regimes themselves increasingly use technologies of temporal management, whether they seek to speed border-crossing processes by using biometrics and chipped passports or to slow and even block border passages through such techniques as detention, interceptions, or "preemptive refoulement". The concept of temporal borders attempts to grasp these diverse temporal processes and strategies at (. . .) and well beyond the moment of border crossing. (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013: 133)

Temporalities of migration have progressively gathered scholarly attention during the last 10 years. While the notion of "waiting" and "temporal borders" has been explored in the context of asylum (Bagelman, 2016; Tazzioli, 2018), most studies focus on current border temporalities affecting *illegal* flows (Jacobsen et al., 2020). For instance, based on ethnographic research at the Southern edges of EUropean external borders, the notion of "temporal economics of illegality" point to how irregular migrants are not only subjected to extended periods of waiting, but also to the "active usurpation of time" by state authorities through serial expulsions and retentions (Andersson, 2014). In their analysis of the

temporal implications of border policies, and centering on waiting as a technique of governing migrants through seemingly linear and technical periods, some authors speak in terms of "redemptive time space" (Drangsland, 2020), "time-space of hesitation" (Chakkour and De Koning, 2023), "temporal sequestration" (Avalos, 2022), or "political economy of waiting as suspense" (Zharkevich, 2021).

While most of these appraisals balance power and counter-power dynamics, that is, have a counter-temporalities argument built into their analysis, recent scholarship has dedicated specific attention to the empirical development and the political-analytical relevance of the "temporalities of resistance", such as sanctuary practices achieving "temporal disruptions" (Mitchell, 2022), or "waiting as facilitator of resistance" among displaced groups of people (Schouw Iversen, 2022). Also, Martina Tazzioli speaks of a unique kind of political agency emerging from "temporary migrant formations", that is, among those with no stable collective identity nor long-term relationships. Collective forms of belonging, mutual support and resistance emerge among disperse subjects in motion without complete paperwork as a kind of "politics in transit" during the time of border-crossing (Tazzioli, 2020).

This analytical renaissance of the notion of time has been called "a temporal re-turn" in migration research by renowned human geographer Katharyne Mitchell (2022: 1). Our article builds upon this engagement with time in migration studies to explore the everyday temporalities emerging in scenarios of intersectional precarity within the food-delivery sector in urban context. Let us turn now to the ethnographic analysis of delivery waiting at the intersection of migration and platform work. Building upon Khosravi's double notion of waiting, we signal how on the one hand, delivery waiting provokes suffering. On the other hand, delivery waiting leads to perplexity, which may entail further knowledge on the platform regime in place.

From speed to still: Waiting on the move along the circuits of urban delivery

Interviews with riders often had to be rescheduled. The shifting temporality of the delivery sector characterised their WhatsApp messages. Uncertainty, tentativeness, and unforeseen changes oozed in expressions such as "for now", "in the meantime", or "for the moment". Between our two interviews, from April 2022 to April 2023, Mariano's both migration and labor status had changed. After 20 years of working in an insurance office, Mariano left Venezuela and moved to Spain. This was thanks to the promises of asylum program offered by Spanish migration authorities to specific Latin American countries during certain periods (Moreno-Amador, 2023). In 2022, 40 years old and settled in A Coruña, he is rejected in all the jobs he applied for, because as an asylum seeker, he has a residence permit but not a work permit until his application is processed and granted. This waiting period as asylum-applicant while residing in the country of reception usually takes from 6 months, the temporal framework officially announced, to 12 months or more, due to longer administrative procedures and lack of personnel. This imprecise migration status, referred to by Mariano as being "in limbo", over an indefinite kind of temporality, might get resolved in positive or in negative terms, leading to regularization or irregularization of asylum applicants. In this interim period of waiting – stressful and impotent for the applicants – the food delivery sector has become a feasible way to make a living.

When we first met, Mariano was delivering for Glovo with an account he had access through a family member who had arrived in Spain before him. In the app, his account only allows him to work on weekends and holidays. This bothers him but allows him to keep

looking for other jobs. When delivering in this rainy and hilly city, he uses a bicycle during the day and an electric scooter at night, to avoid getting too tired. The latter has a battery life of only four hours, but he works for about nine. His administrative vulnerability leads him to ride the city respecting traffic rules with more caution than usual. He knows that running a red light, jumping on the pavement, or taking a forbidden direction are tactics used by riders to gain time and improve their metrics, but the fear of being stopped by the police makes him a cautious rider.

Sitting on a bench in one of the city's main squares, which he calls "the office", Mariano waits with his yellow backpack, attentive to his phone. As the other Glovo riders, he is paid by the number of deliveries, not by time. That's why, he says, "a long wait is a worry, an uncertainty ... I need orders to arrive". He knows that the control he has over his time is limited: "Your time depends on the time of others: the kitchen, the restaurant, the customer". In the framework of just-in-time logistics, waiting becomes an "unwanted time" (Duus et al., 2023). For him, it is unfair that the customer can negatively rate his performance in the app, while he cannot rate the work of other actors involved in delivery: "If I'm late, I'm punished, but I also have to wait in the restaurant for the meal to be delivered, which can be delayed, or for the customer to open the door for me". These contingencies, and a temporal regime that sanctions and demands speed, explain the "fragmented rush" among riders (Chen and Sun, 2020).

However, learning to wait also has its rewards. As others working through digital gigs but without a formal labor contract, Mariano can choose where to connect to the app. Dodging the city's frequent rains, he often starts working from home, taking advantage of the fact that he lives close to many restaurants. While waiting for his first order, he surfs the internet for better jobs, chats with friends in Venezuela, or watches his favourite series. In the *plaza*, while waiting, riders huddle together and exchange tips and tricks that, though fragile, denote a temporal agency. They share shortcuts and alternative routes to Google Maps, to go faster or avoid "risky" areas. They list the restaurants with slowest kitchens. They learn how to refuse or reassign orders: when the delivery distance is too great, the race is not worth it. The more experienced ones teach newcomers how to disconnect from the app by looking for "dead spots", i.e. "places where the app doesn't catch you, for instance, under a bridge, so you can rest for 10 minutes".

Mariano recognises waiting as an ambiguous object: waiting time is concerning and upsetting, but also allows for certain opportunities. For instance, waiting allows for learning alternative uses of the application, and getting to realizations about its rationale: "I realized that without your geolocation, you are nothing", said Mariano noticing how the allocation of orders depends on where and when riders are located. These realizations speak to how in those *intermezzos* of waiting, riders are strategizing, thinking through, and producing situated knowledges – such as knowing how, where, and how much to wait, as well as learning to dis/connect to the app or getting safely and quickly around the city. In a very material way, these are not only situated knowledges, but rather what we call *geo-situated knowledges*. These geo-located know-hows come from the spatio-temporal embodiment of the city under delivery structural rhythms, while simultaneously holding precarious administrative status. We build this compound term upon the contribution by Donna Haraway (1988) on the partial yet accurate knowledge coming out of specific lived experiences – in this case, migrant platform couriers – adapting it to the conditions of satellite-based algorithmic calculus of space-time metrics for delivery.

A year after our first interview, Mariano's situation was different. Spain was one of the first European countries in advancing legislative regulation of platform labour. The Legislative Royal Decree was signed in 2021 to establish standard employment

legislation in the delivery sector, and to ensure "algorithmic transparency" (B.O.E. n. 113 12 May 2021).[1] Once the so-called *Rider Law* was passed, platforms such as Deliveroo left the country. Others, such as Glovo, did not follow the new legislation, accumulating fines of more than 200 million euros for employing "false self-employed" couriers without standard labour contracts.[2] Coinciding in time, after "being in limbo" and waiting for his "asylum application" to be resolved, Mariano was granted the so-called *International Protection*, which includes temporal residence and work permit for up to a year. He left Glovo and started working as a waged employer for Just Eat, which began to hire its workers under the parameters of the new law. Then, his relationship with time and waiting changed. At Glovo, he could choose where to wait, but Just Eat assigns a waiting area and a weekly schedule with times and places to start working: "Just Eat is always moving you around. Every week you can start at a different time and place". Now, Mariano is paid by time, not by deliveries, and waiting becomes – challenging the notion of Duus et al. (2023) – somehow a "wanted time", a time to rest. He feels more relaxed and knows that he will get paid if he keeps his shift. However, the workload is higher and time control is strict. Mariano has the maximum contract offered by the company: 20 hours a week, in which "the requirement is to be always available". The irregular shifts, changing weekly on short-notice basis, together with the request of taking every single order, makes this option "hard to combine it with other jobs". Still, Mariano is advised by his mates how to manoeuvre in the face of the metrics reports that the company sends them individually each week. On their journey, riders are exposed to spatio-temporal constraints that contrast with the "real time" of algorithmic calculation (Duus et al., 2023), and put their metrics at risk:

> When you arrive in front of the building you have three minutes to make the delivery, but first you have to lock the bike, make sure that the address in the app and in Google Maps is the same, perhaps go up to a fifth floor without a lift, or wait for the customer who may be in the bathroom, be old or have a broken entryphone.

Faced with these constraints, he applies collectively developed geo-situated knowledges with several tricks to improve his metrics. One of them is to arrive, ring the entryphone and press the "delivered" button on the app. He then goes up to the house and delivers the meal. In the meantime, another order might arrive, even as he is going upstairs. However, he knows that the new order is likely to be close to his current location, and that he is able to take orders in any location through the city now, without the previous apprehension to be stopped by the police asking "for papers", at least during the period granted with temporal residency and work permit under International Protection.

Our fieldwork reveals how these entangled temporalities, engendering particular know-hows, vary in each context. In Santiago de Chile, at the place of our first ethnographic vignette, where Alameda and Santa Rosa Avenue cross, this site becomes more than an urban intersection. It is a sample of how precariousness has a differential impact according to class, gender, or migratory origin. Elena and Gabriela, two Venezuelan women in their 30s recently arrived in Santiago, deliver together on the same motorbike. Both started working at Rappi during the Covid-19 pandemic, whose crisis led to numerous layoffs and filled the streets of Chile with riders (Vecchio et al., 2022). The current tense Chilean context, with regular public debates on violence, poverty and insecurity, reminds them of their last years in Venezuela, and in their conversations, they repeat what they hear every day on the streets and in the media: inflation, insecurity, violence, crisis, impoverishment. This context modulates the practices of the riders. While the public debate on migrant regularization was on the air, these two young women wait and ride together for safety

reasons, to protect themselves against the violence of robberies and sexual assaults. As both migrant and women, they disconnect from the app at night and press the "stop orders" button when they are close to districts they perceive as dangerous. For driving in the city, they use the Waze app, which warns of speed cameras and police checkpoints.

Before saving a good number of *pesos* and investing in a motorbike, Elena delivered for Uber Eats by bike. She moved around in the vastness of Santiago, following the platform's incentives: "I was waiting on the move. If the app said, 'high demand in Barrio Italia', that's where I would go". Now she is a *parrillera*, meaning that she rides on the back of the motorbike and delivers orders, while Gabriela drives and waits with the engine running. They split the profits and when they finish, they return together to Puente Alto, in the south of Santiago's Metropolitan Region, where it is cheaper to rent and where many migrant riders live.

Elena and Gabriela know by heart the downtown map, but they know that the best orders come from the more affluent white sectors, further east and closer to the Andes mountain range, as tips are added to the distance bonus. Each delivery order seems to entail an urban border. As in other Latin American metropolises, spatio-temporal practices of the city are marked by the increase in violence, the migratory crisis, and the militarisation of the frontier. As such, the language of security and fear is translated into spatial forms (Caldeira, 2000). This penetrates the migrant couriers' practices, when they enter the halls of high-rise and gated communities, where they have to pass through the grilles and go to the doorman or security guards, who may act as intermediaries. In Santiago, the riders transform the city in terms of emerging forms of urban mobility and ways of transporting food: they fill it with colourful isothermal backpacks and sound, from their buzzing *mosquitos* or *bicimotos*, a new hybrid vehicle. Those coming from abroad incorporate mobility practices from Colombia and Venezuela, such as making motorbikes popular – until then little visible in Santiago, especially when ridden by women.[3] Also, there has been a rise in street garages where all kinds of locomotive tools are sold and repaired. They cross spatial barriers and strategize ways to temporarily manoeuvre traffic in the streets. They wait on the move, activated by need, uncertainty, and hope. In the meantime, as the following section shows, they wait to be reunited with their families, to regularise their administrative situation, or to get a better job.

Waiting in the meantime: The border tempos among food-delivery couriers

Zaragoza, Spain, 10 February 2022. Loud dancing music coming out of the public benches in Plaza Aragón, near the biggest McDonald's and a variety of restaurants in the city's downtown. With portable speakers hanging from bikes at rest, several young couriers gathered for hours to chat. While some are smoking, many are laughing while constantly checking their phones. Individual couriers come and go with meals in carefully prepared bags to be placed and delivered in their backpacks. Still, the rowdy mob remains, in a constant-yet-intermittent occupation of those benches near restaurant entrances during long evenings. These kinds of improvised street-gatherings take place on cold and hot days in this city known for its temperature swings. The variety of accents, clothing, skin tones and hair textures is highly concentrated within those gatherings of couriers, contrasting with the uniformity of most pedestrians passing by. "I arrived from Venezuela less than a year ago, and since then, you can find me here every day" – told us Miriam, a young girl studying in the mornings and delivering in the evenings. Also an asylum-seeker at the time, she held a

temporary residence permit; therefore, she felt safe and energetic moving around the city. Nearby, Idrissa was part of the improvised musical gathering at the corner of McDonald's: "I used to work in the fields, picking up tomatoes from sunrise to sunset, under angry orders from a loud voice everyday. I am much better off here, my only other possible option to work in Spain". He has been living in Zaragoza for five years, without returning to his home country, Senegal. His residency and work permits were still pending, given that there is no migratory agreement between Spain and this West African country on visas nor asylum, which in turn, engenders situations of illegality producing a population of "*sans papiers*" (De Genova, 2004).

In both cases, as asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, these Latin American and African riders are all waiting for their status to be regularized, although with differences in periods and conditions in terms of temporally granted rights to reside and work. In the meantime, these series of administrative vulnerable situations correspond to the workforce necessary to the on-demand gigs via apps, a workforce totally available and flexible, while unprotected to be easily interchangeable and ultimately disposable (Altenried, 2021). While there is no public disclosure about statistical data on delivery platform employees, further qualitative research is pointing to the primacy of migrant labor in the delivery sector, confirming the co-constituent relationship between the border regime and the platform economy ((Casas-Cortés, 2024) ; Gebrial, 2022; Schaupp, 2022; Van Doorn and Vijay, 2021; Van Doorn et al., 2022;).

Regarding time and waiting as related to the question of migration, we draw from Sharma's distinction among one "universal time" and "multiple and uneven temporalities" (2014). While citizens operate under one recognized and shared temporality, migrants in diverse administrative statuses move and make a living within parallel temporalities filled with distinct tempos and kinds of waiting: waiting for administrative documents to be evaluated and resumed for further regularization; labor permits; or family re-unification, each one moving along particular schedules and rhythms. The large spectrum of administrative positions leads to different amounts and experiences of waiting. As with Sharma's example of the taxi driver (2014: 55), we suggest the rider as a similar icon of these "entangled temporalities", marked by the tempos of the migration system while crisscrossed by the timings of family and labor spheres, within the chronopolitics of the platform city. As taxi drivers, riders are "almost always newly immigrated and waiting for accreditation papers". Many times, both are seeking asylum. These two types of mobility workers "straddle multiple temporalities" (Sharma, 2014: 55): paraphrasing this author, both personally – the progress of work-visa applications, their children school schedules – and professionally – the traffic, smartphone warning and the algorithmic calculation of time.

This entanglement of temporalities is reflected when Miriam, the asylum seeker from Venezuela who rides a heavy and old electric scooter to deliver Uber orders through downtown Zaragoza, speaks about how she barely manages to squeeze the different timings requested from her during one day: taking delivery orders received at random times through the journey, while responsible for a series of unyielding family commitments such as waiting for her daughter at the regular school pick up time, always with her big backpack on her body. All those everyday requests of juggling time are placed within the uncertain and longer-term kind of waiting required for her asylum application. When she first arrived in Spain with a refugee claim, she was told by migratory authorities that her application would take six months to be resolved. Until that date, she was told, she had the right to stay – a residency permit – but not the right to labor – a work permit. This precarious administrative status allows for free mobility in the city (she will not be arrested and deported), yet not to search for a job. This is when she and her *compatriotas* found platform-based delivery as a

possibility to easily enter the labor market to survive during the application time: "Glovo and Uber accounts were being advertised for rent in social media." Miriam situation exemplifies how the demands of flexibility blur the temporal boundaries between labor and family life, while using migrantized populations as disposable logistics workers, who remain connected waiting for the phone to ring, while absorbing the risks associated with just-in-time supply chains (Chua, 2022).

One way to entangle the *longue-durée* temporality of the border regime, which requests long periods of waiting to obtain regularization, with the on-demand dizzying temporality of delivery, is through the very platforms' digital infrastructure, which depends on the app for workforce recruitment and supervision. Our research has confirmed the easiness to access and use a shared delivery account: "you just need to know the username and password to start receiving orders through your smartphone", says Miriam enthusiastically; "I bought my backpack online and started to deliver, making money for each successful order and giving a percentage to the owner of the account." The spread of this practice of having multiple users under the same delivery account held by a third party has been ethnographically studied but not numerically documented (Casas-Cortés, 2023a). This modality of accessing delivery accounts is becoming the norm among many couriers in Spain, leading to a series of inquiries for law-breaking filed by unions and disseminated by mainstream media. While companies initially declared them "rare and illicit", only a flimsy Facial Recognition System has been put in place in order to appear that serious measures were being taken against identity fraud. Nonetheless, riders point to how the efficient biometric algorithmic calculus defeats its own purpose of accuracy when it is so easy to fix by emails, self-calculations of time anticipating the identity check, calls, disregarding the app's order to take a selfie as a means of identity verification, or syncing with whoever rents the account at the earliest opportunity. Those accounts with many riders on them are not finally blocked, contrary to the threats made in public by these companies.

This is happening within one of the European Union's member states strictly following Schengen requirements of border control, as well as under Spain's own national migration law *(Ley de Extranjería)*. This migratory legal corpus does not allow labor without work permits, and breaking this precept is rigorously persecuted by authorities. Yet, Glovo, with its tacit refusal to follow the 2021 Rider Law, which established regular labor contracts in the delivery sector, is able to make deliveries based on migrant riders with a plethora of somehow incomplete administrative statuses – asylum seekers, refugees, applying for tolerated status ("*arraigo*"), etc. – that is, without permission to legally work. Still, the company allows and even "incites" – as Miriam puts it – those without all the required documents to deliver under this logo: "It is ok to keep delivering if your NIE (Foreigner Identification Number) is outdated, you can renew it at any time." Our interviewees confirm that most Glovo riders have an almost, though not quite yet, deportable status. Instead of the regular vs. irregular migration dichotomy, most couriers held certain papers, but not all, dwelling in a time-space of administrative precarity: as in short-term periods of permitted residency or periods of permitted work, based on shifting requirements and thus, unexpectedly changing from one to another. The temporal instability of this administrative precarity is shown in the fast pace of turnaround in the delivery sector.

These riders, with their required and improvised im/mobilities through the urban time-spaces simultaneously deal with waiting times to process their paperwork and juggle their administrative statuses. Still, as in delivery waiting, the tempos of the border regime, while having significant consequences upon people's lives, remain ambiguous, with certain ambivalent openings. Khosravi's etymological exploration of waiting helps to speak about the ambiguity of waiting: Persian, Dari, and Arabic speakers use two words for waiting, *entezar*

and *sabr*. One entails anticipation and expectation, waiting with hope; the other one refers to enduring, being patient while suffering. He explains how waiting as *patiente* is related to patience, from the Latin term *pati*, which means "to suffer." In turn, waiting as *attandre* is connected to the English *wait*, which originally comes from "watch" and "to be awake". It is also connected to the French "*attendre*" which means "to direct one's mind toward". Khosravi embraces both connotations in order to understand, and to cope, with the stealing of time caused by bordering practices. On the one hand, border waiting provokes suffering. On the other, border waiting leads to perplexity, which may entail further knowledge and questioning the logic of the border regime in place:

> Border waiting engenders wakefulness and vigilance (...) Border waiting means constantly updating oneself about legislations, new legal openings and conventions. It also means tirelessly collecting documents, finding new resources, updating networks and at the same time being watchful. (Khosravi, 2020: 205)

Our ethnographic research points to how migrant riders' *sans (touts) les papiers* (Chakkour and De Koning, 2023) are definitely juggling multiple series of waiting times, where *patiente* and *attandre*, are both present.

Conclusions: Un/wanted times in platform cities

Except for places with certain labor regulations in force, the current food-delivery sector is based on self-contractors delivering for platform companies, most of them with no citizenship status. This reality empirically addressed in the literature, usually as two separated subjects, escapes both conventional employment classifications *and* regular migratory status requirements. There are many ways to study such intersection. This article focuses on the question of lived temporalities by riders under the tempos of the current border regime and the deadlines of platform-based delivery: how is it to dwell in a time-space of administrative precarity in a job market that requires constant im/mobilities in an urban context?

Our analysis follows Sharma's notion of "entangled temporalities" as our point of departure in order to further investigate the question of waiting. We draw from the rich resurgence of the question of time in border and migration studies, mainly Khosravi's point on ambivalence, in order to engage the entangled temporalities of waiting in the delivery sector. What does the border tempos have to do with the hustle of a delivered meal? Based on ethnographic research conducted in Spain and Chile, we gathered two sets of distinct temporalities coming together: on the one hand, the overly codified and consecutive linear and delimited periodization of migratory statuses; and on the other, the unexpected timing of speed-and-still, labor and no/labor of digital gigs. The intersection where both the border and delivery chronopolitics come together is rich in experiences and exceed the parameters of this article. Drawing on select empirical examples, we focus on delivery waiting as made by im/mobile periods during the riders' urban itineraries. Our ethnographic engagement points to the centrality of waiting in this just-in-time sector. Furthermore, this regular act of pausing as core feature of efficient delivery entails both negative and positive aspects for the couriers.

This article sheds light upon the temporalities of delivery platforms. Drawing from the consolidated scholarly analysis of migratory temporalities, it contributes to further understanding of how platform economy works, focusing on the entanglement among gig and border temporalities. Our empirical appraisal points to the analytical proposition of *un/wanted time*, capturing the deep ambivalence of the state of precarity understood *à la*

Tsing, both limiting and opening possibilities for life in platform cities. For delivery couriers, the continuous and multi-layered act of waiting entails "life without the promise of stability", the condition that Anna Tsing prescribed as the norm in late capitalism (2015: 2). On their journey, riders are well aware of how the unplanned nature of time is uncertain and frightening, while indeterminacy itself also becomes a site for opportunities. Capturing this serendipitous tension, delivery waiting entails a deeply ambivalent state of uncertainty. This is source of unstable entangled temporalities, although muffled through the emergence of *geo-situated knowledges*. Our compound term builds upon the pertinent contribution by Donna Haraway on the partial yet accurate knowledge coming out of lived experiences, adapting it to the conditions of satellite-based algorithmic calculus of space-time metrics for delivery. As such, riders produce place-based and digital driven know-hows coming out from their spatio-temporal embodiment of the city and delivery structural rhythms. They might get elaborated on-the-go by a single rider, or been passed along several couriers, mouth-to-mouth or text-to-text, during the many waiting times in the delivery journey.

Recapitulating our ethnographic material in this article, some geo-situated knowledges observed among delivery couriers in Spain include hacking techniques of algorithmic calculated times of delivery based on everyday itineraries to improve their metrics, which hopefully will correlate into better payment and easier orders. Another significant strategy is mapping the city in terms of areas of satellite reach to determine where they can temporarily disconnect from delivery orders without being punished for it. In Chile, migrant couriers have adapted to ways of moving in the city, developing placed-based ways of locomotion, such as the *mosquito* or bike-motorcycle, and women have developed the practice of delivery by couples, in order to improve safety in high-risk urban environments. Finally, and more explicitly connected to the border tempos, the spreading practice of renting and sharing delivery accounts allows multiple riders without the necessary citizenship status to enter into platform labor markets. This geo-situated knowledge of becoming a rider *sin papeles* involves all kinds of learnings, including how to inhabit the city during multiple im/mobile periods. While counter-intuitive to the imaginary of the hiding techniques of clandestine situations, migrant riders speak of how maximizing the visibility of their delivery itineraries, going through the most populated areas of the city, acts as a protective strategy for many semi-deportable riders in their unprecise wait for further regularization, since platform delivery is not a target yet for migration authorities in Spain nor Chile.

In all of those instances though, while enabling migrant riders to navigate the chronological topographies of flexible platform cities, delivery waiting remains within the contours of an unbending bordering time. Our future research plans to further explore this deep and uneven ambivalence as key feature of the *platform city*: how are those intersectional precarities at work in urban sites dominated by platform economy sectors, full of possibilities yet notably limited, where gig forms of re/production meet the biopolitics of the border regime?

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Notes

1. The so-called "Rider Law" was signed on 11 May 2021, and came into force on 12 August 2021 in Spain. It introduces two points considered pioneers at legally regulating platforms: (a) the redefinition of platform workers as employees with regular duties and rights assigned in standard labor regulations; and (b) the demand for transparent use of artificial intelligence in labor contexts.
2. Available at: https://elpais.com/economia/2023–01-24/trabajo-impone-una-multa-a-glovo-por-emplear-a-falsos-autonomos-y-ya-acumula-205-millones-en-sanciones.html
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