Uber Developed:

The Implications and Contestations of Ride Hailing Business in South Africa

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Introduction

Founded in March 2009, Uber Technologies has disrupted markets worldwide. The ride-sharing application has steamrolled global transportation infrastructure by marketing inexpensive rides and absolute convenience to consumers across the globe, and gainful economic opportunity to its drivers. The realities of Uber diverge from its idealistic messaging. A growing academic literature documents the manner in which, behind this guise of opportunity and technological salvation, Uber works to dominate the taxi market; it is able to do so through ruthless growth, and practices that many of its drivers have critiqued as exploitative.

On paper, South Africa provides Uber with an ideal environment to continue its growth unhindered. Emerging from brutal Apartheid rule, the country's drastic inequality provides Uber with an advantageous entry point: the platform has a substantial pool of unemployed workers, and a comfortable consumer-base among its middle and upper classes. In this context, Uber opportunistically reconfigures itself into to an economic development institution. However, while South Africa provides the company with a lucrative market, it also poses intractable challenges. As Uber positions itself as a critical player in the development of transportation infrastructure and as purveyor of economic promise, the company has been forced to adapt its approach to accommodate local circumstances. South Africa's transportation infrastructure is not neutral; it was constructed by the Apartheid regime to spatialize racial hierarchies. As Uber has attempted to interface with this system, the company has become enmeshed in its realities of oppression and corruption. In South Africa, brutal turf wars have long been waged over control of taxi routes. While clashes between Uber and traditional taxi drivers have occurred worldwide, nowhere has this violence approximated the battles around transportation hubs in South African

cities. These conflicts are rooted in a enduring history of transportation violence, which pose both unique challenges and advantageous openings for Uber. Here, the company's outsider status is both an asset and a liability. Because Uber is disconnected from South Africa's socio-political climate, the company struggles to negotiate local responses to its presence. Yet, simultaneously, this distinction has broad appeal for Uber's South African clientele and tourists, who see the company as transparent, and reliable.

I will begin with an examination of Uber's strategies in North America, and trace how Uber has taken advantage of and adapted its practices to the South African economic climate. Then, I contextualize Uber's emerging role within South Africa's bloody and racialized transportation history. Lastly, I will follow the popular discourses surrounding Uber and transportation in South Africa.

Uber in the Global North

In the United States, road infrastructure offers a highly developed patchwork by which to navigate through capitalist systems of exchange. Through various modes of transport, both personal and public, individuals traverse these routes, journeying from their homes to business for the accretion of capital, and then on to malls, nightclubs, and foreign cities for its dispension. Uber fits neatly into this ecosystem; with simply the tap of a button, the mobile application summons a vehicle and driver for the one-time trip. In doing so, Uber provides the consumer with a supremely convenient means of transportation. Wielding the application, they can travel from virtually any point A to point B, in and between urbanscapes, while the messy aspects of associated human exchange, of navigation, payment, and tipping, are remotely handled in the digital realm. This convenience is coupled with affordability for middle class users; Uber is able

to offer a pricing model that often undercuts local taxi competition (Rosenblat 2018). However, the company is only able to do this through the growth, maintenance, and control of its expansive fleet of on-demand labor.

In North America, Uber courts its potential workforce of on-demand drivers via traditional capitalist narratives of social mobility. In his book, *Uberland*, anthropologist Alex Rosenblat documents, "Uber uses the language of self-employment and partnership to promote driving for Uber as an act of entrepreneurship" and markets itself using this imagery (Rosenblat 2018). As part of this narrative, the company touts the flexibility it provides drivers, and their autonomy to work on their own schedule. In the company's policy documents, it frames itself as a project "providing ordinary people with more economic opportunities and improving their lives" (Rosenblat 2018). On the company's site, the independence of drivers is compared with the consumer's convenience; emblazoned on Uber's main webpage, and adjacent to their ridership marketing, are messages that proclaim: "Drive when you want," "Set your own hours," and "Opportunity is everywhere" (Uber, accessed December 16, 2018). Thus, Uber articulates understandings of socio-economic mobility within a framework of autonomy and self-initiative. Via the massaging of this imaginary, and aggressive growth campaigns, the company has curated a workforce that comprises primarily part-time workers, who use Uber because "it allows for much-needed flexibility," "compensates for a career transition," or "fills the need for a 'a good bad job'" (Rosenblatt 2018). Some of these drivers report appreciating their newfound independence, and emphasize "the dignity " of keeping what they earn (Rosenblat 2018). However, while Uber Technologies portrays itself as an empowerment-oriented organization that

liberates drivers, in fact, the corporation imposes a rigid system of control and engages in predatory practices to court potential workers.

While Uber drivers are freed from a flesh-and-blood boss, through unconventional methods, Uber tightly manages their behavior. The result is what Rosenblat calls an "algorithmic boss." This algorithmic manager: "incentives [drivers] to work at particular places in particular times" and "penalizes drivers for behaving in a manner unlike what Uber 'suggests'" (Rosenblat 2018). The app can also whimsically adjust prices, including the driver's share, and reserves the right to deactivate drivers with low ratings (Rosenblat 2018). Disobedience also incurs Uber's wrath. Drivers who have attempted to organize themselves have been cleansed from the platform (Rosenblatt 2018). Ironically, Uber is able to maintain its rigid control by distancing itself from the role of employer. Instead, the application operates in a legal gray zone, and treats both drivers and riders as "consumers." Rosenblat writes "By claiming to operate in a world of consumption….Uber excuses itself from a series of obligation that it finds inconvenient" (Rosenblat 2018). As a result of this relationship, drivers must defray the overhead costs of day-to-day transportation. However, Uber's success requires a large labor force, so it heavily involves itself in organizing capital infusions for potential new drivers. However, Rosenblatt reveals, once the driver's are in Uber's fold, they are on their own.

In pursuit of growing its driver base, Uber has been accused by lawmakers and drivers of engaging in predatory lending practices. Uber drivers are required to use newer car models, and, to offset the substantial overhead for any potential driver without current access to a vehicle, Uber encourages these candidates to take loans. At times, the company has directly lent cars to drivers, and partnered with banks to even provide "subprime" loans (Slee 2015). The drivers

that take these offers later realize that Uber's financial guarantees "unrealistic." As a result, some

drivers find themselves in substantial debt (Slee 2015; Rosenblat 2018). Uber has been taken to

court in a number of related suits. At these hearings, former workers describe "debt-to-work

conditions that trap drivers in their working relationship with Uber through Uber-promoted

subprime lease agreements" and experiences that they liken to "modern-day slavery" (Rosenblat

2017). However, Uber's largely continues these practices internationally, and they have

generally succeeded. For instance, from 2014 to 2015, the company more than doubled the

number of its drivers in the United States, from 160,000 to 327,000 (Carson, "Why there's a

good chance your Uber...," Business Insider, accessed 12/15/18). As of 2017, that number in the

United States has grown to more than 750,000, and globally, the company says that it now has 2

million active drivers (O'Brien, "Uber has more work...," CNN, accessed 12/15/18).

Uber's Development Narrative

South Africa has been one of the largest sites for Uber's dramatic global expansion. In

2018, the company has about one million active riders, and more than 12,000 active drivers

(McKane, "Uber South Africa showing strong...," MyBroadBand, accessed 10/16/18). These

numbers make South Africa the largest Uber market is sub-Saharan Africa, and the second

biggest on the continent, after Egypt (Dahir, "Uber's Four-year Journey through Africa's…",

Quartz Africa, accessed 11/5/18). Uber has held a foothold in the country since 2013, when it

began a public relations campaign to promote its service and draw potential drivers (Greef,

"Driving for Uber When You Can't Afford a Car," The Atlantic, accessed 11/5/18). This

campaign for adoption married Uber's domestic narrative of capitalist economic empowerment

with neoliberal development discourse. Like drivers in the United States and other countries in the Global North, South African drivers were pitched that they could make "good money" on the platform, with "no boss" and that they could be liberated through their new arrangement (Greef, "Driving for Uber..." The Atlantic, accessed 11/5/18), Uber's South Africa marketing materials, like their South African policy-maker pitch deck, heavily emphasize opportunity. Uber's mission, these documents proclaim, is "Empowering Drivers" (Uber, Uber South Africa, 2015).

While these strategies align with pitches to workers in Europe and North America, they take on new meaning in South Africa, which has an moribund unemployment rate that hovers around thirty percent. In development literature, the country's labor force is described as a "large pool of unskilled and unemployed labor" and experts understand this skills mismatch as a significant culprit of high unemployment (Nowak and Ricci 2005. 30-31). Within this dour context, Uber's messaging provides hopeful claims of economic opportunity. For the large contingent of impoverished citizens with little training experience, the ride hailing application promises to alleviate suffering and dispossession, and upset established orders. Many of Uber's drivers in South Africa are Zimbabweans immigrants. For these recent immigrants, fleeing an economic downturn, driving is one of the few available job opportunities (Armytage and Markus Bell, "What the Violent 'Uber Wars' Tell Us…," The Conversation, 9/13/17).

Beyond popular appeal, Uber also fits into the neoliberal plan for the development of South Africa. Think tanks, like the Institute for Security Studies, have concluded that the South African economy would benefit from a more flexible labor market, wherein corporations are under few regulations and can freely manage employees (Cilliers, "Employment must be central...," Institute for Security Studies, accessed 11/5/18). When Uber enters a market, it

constructs its own privately managed transportation system. Therefore, it fits this specification, par excellence.

Taxi transportation is not a new focal point for the country's economic development discourse. Prior to Uber, development policy had considered taxi growth in South African development policy. A 2006 report by the Human Sciences Research Council concluded that metered taxis "offered an opportunity to generate jobs with little effort and little cost" and that there was a requisite demand from middle and upper income South africans, as well as tourists (Lowitt 2006). This finding, of a clean division between drivers and consumers, underscores a significant aspect of South African demography: income inequality. According to the World Bank, the country has the highest income inequality rate in the world, with the bottom 60 percent of the country only controlling 7 percent of the country's wealth (Beaubien, "The Country With The World's Worst Inequality Is…," NPR, accessed 11/5/18). This division is largely along persistent racial lines, with white citizens earning an average income of R444,500 ($31,300) to black citizens' R93,900 ($6,500) (ENCA, "Whites still earn more than blacks…," Accessed 12/15/2018). Therefore, if Uber's demand tracks with the report's stratified taxi demand, its riders can be from upper and middle classes, and disproportionately white, and its workforce will be drawn from the primarily black, dispossessed population. South Africa's economic climates provides both a supply of drivers, and a demand for their labor. The development literature also provides Uber with a double mandate: the company can grow the taxi industry, and is the pinnacle of a flexible labor market.

However, South Africa's high unemployment and poverty rates also complicate Uber's growth plans. Car ownership in the country is low, and the vehicles allowed by the platform cost

upwards of $10,500, which far outside means of the the majority of South African population below the poverty line (Greef, "Driving for Uber..," The Atlantic). Uber has adapted its model to this reality. Like in the United States, the company aggressively encourages financing: Uber in South Africa partners with banks and car dealerships (Greef, "Driving for Uber..." The Atlantic), and its website proclaims that "Applications are welcome, no matter what your credit level is" (Uber, "How to drive with Uber in South Africa," accessed 12/10/18). However, to enable further growth, Uber goes a step further. In South Africa, Uber pairs potential drivers with car owners, who operate fleets of Uber cars. The majority of Uber drivers fall into this arrangement, and according to an owner interviewed by the Atlantic, only 10 percent of drivers work for themselves. While Uber helps facilitate some partnerships between owner and drivers through recruiting communities, these relations are not well regulated. Drivers pay for gas and cell data, and owners often set weekly targets, to be paid before the driver's cut is determined (Greef, "Driving for Uber..." The Atlantic). Therefore, while American drivers are accountable to a controlling corporation, South African drivers must additionally report to unregulated bosses.

Uber drivers report being unfairly exploited by these car owners. To accommodate the owner's and Uber's shares of their earnings, drivers sometimes work up to 20 hours a day to make ends meet, and are especially vulnerable to volatile gas prices (Greef, "Driving for Uber..," The Atlantic). Thus, to succeed in South Africa, where the candidate workforce lacks the requisite capital accumulation, Uber establishes a set of patron-client relations. Rather than along kinship lines, and reciprocal social obligations, these systems are built around the driver's dependence on the owner's infrastructure. These unregulated relations also expose South African

Uber drivers to further exploitation by the owners. For many of these drivers, Uber's pitch of "freedom" and "opportunity" goes unrealized.

Beyond offering the necessary infrastructure, the fleet owners also provide Uber with a useful character in their narrative of upward mobility. Uber leverages the figure of the "the fleet owner" in its development imaginary; it portrays the path from driver to fleet owner as teleological. In the company's slide deck, its driver testimonials feature a quote by Kenneth Mambolo, an UberBlack driver in Johannesburg. Next to a beaming image of Mamabolo, a prominent quote reads "Uber is more than job creation, it has changed my life....Next year I plan to expand my business by getting another car, I am very excited" (Uber, Uber South Africa, 2015). Here, Uber emphasizes that driving on the platform is characterized by economic mobility. For Mamabolo, driving for the application is depicted as a gateway to owning and fielding multiple cars. Samantha Allenberg, spokeswoman for the ride hailing company, underscored this outlook, stating, "Driving for someone else is the first entry point first entry point for drivers to join the Uber App," (Greef, "Driving for Uber..," The Atlantic). These examples implicitly define driver-owner relations as temporary, and as stepping stones to a driver's own autonomy empowerment. However, the company has yet to provide evidence that this mythos is a reality.

Through its mandate from the development literature, South Africa's high unemployment rate, the imaginary of upward mobility that it creates, Uber finds itself in an advantageous position as a job creator for South Africa's underprivileged. It's marketing material to South Africa's government hinges on this potential position as an economic savior. The company's presentation to the National Assembly in 2015 emphasizes Uber's "ability to create an additional

20,000 jobs in South Africa over the next 2 years" (Uber, Uber South Africa, 2015). Reports by other agencies agree, concluding that Uber has the potential to induce economic growth (Ndlovu 2017). However, the anecdotes of Uber drivers in South Africa have revealed that this growth is far from symmetrical across income brackets. In the United States, Uber drivers struggle to cope with Uber's large cuts. However, in South Africa, drivers must distribute earnings back to both the company *and* the car owners, and retain only a fraction of their income. Thus, the company's role can be critiqued in the same vein as Black empowerment policy from the 1990s. Rather than providing a stimulus the impoverished population, "It preserves the dominant economic position of white capital" (Tangri 2008). In this case, "white capital" is not white-run companies enriched during Apartheid, but instead, a multinational, silicon valley-based corporation.

In South Africa, Uber's marketing extends beyond its touting of inevitable economic opportunity. The company argues that its business provides critical means of developing South Africa's underdeveloped infrastructure. In its 2015 slide deck, the company prominently features several slides describing how Uber provides a "reliable transportation option that is complementary to other solutions" and makes public transportation "much more attractive" by filling in missing links along South Africa's terrain. The slides showcase, through chique diagrams, that large gaps between bus and train stations, and between cities, are currently being traversed via Uber rides. Uber is accurately referencing critical gaps in South Africa transportation infrastructure (Uber, Uber South Africa, 2015). However, there are several problematic dimensions to Uber's stance on its ability to connect these various locales. South Africa's transportation system is not a neutral space; it was constructed through policy aimed at extending Apartheid into infrastructure. Thus, any extension of existing infrastructure is

necessarily a political, non-neutral act. In the case of Uber, the infrastructure is extended in a

manner that reproduces racial hierarchies; it transforms the cityscape into an environment easily

navigable by the white, wealthy population. Additionally, rather than filling a complete

infrastructure void, the company is displacing an existing business, the metered taxi. First, I will

review manner in which Uber collides with a specific industry these metered-taxis, and the

broader context of transportation violence. Then, I will discuss how Uber reproduces the

spatialized racism built into South Africa's highly planned cities.

The Uber Wars

In August, 2017, Uber announced that it was hiring a private security security force to

protect its drivers in South Africa. The move came after a spate of violence against Uber, which

included vandalism, beatings, and car torching---in one instance, a driver was killed (Dara,

"Being an Uber Driver in South Africa..," CNET, Accessed December 10, 2018). The

perpetrators of these attacks are largely believed to be taxi drivers, who have protested Uber's

growing foothold in South African cities. These taxi drivers have accused rideshare workers of

engaging in unfair competitive practices (Kneale 2018). The drivers allege that Uber is stealing

their business by flouting regulation and undercutting their prices. Describing state responses as

inadequate, the taxi drivers have wielded violence to discourage Uber drivers from picking up

passengers around transportation hubs (Kneale 2018).

The various layers of Uber's have adapted themselves to these dangerous circumstances.

At the executive level, Uber has taken action; they have lobbied for government action and

against the complacency of the police, and hired the aforementioned private force. The company

spokesmen have also challenged the taxi drivers' claims. They contend that Uber is operating unlawfully, and that rather than stealing business, Uber is growing demand by providing South Africans with a transparent, convenient, inexpensive, and safe alternative to the traditional transport. In Uber lower ranks, drivers have adapted their practices to this intimidation. They disseminate information about which areas to avoid, and disguise their identity, instead masquerading as family members of the riders. They have also responded to the attacks in kind, and have torched metered taxi cabs (Kerr and Nieva, "Being an Uber Driver in South Africa..," CNET, 8/4/17). The South African media have given these incidents the moniker "Uber Wars" (Armytage and Bell, "What the Violent 'Uber Wars' tell us.." The Conversation, 9/13/17). The title is reminiscent of the bloody "Taxi Wars," a phenomenon that has plagued the transportation industry since the 1980s. The Uber wars are being fought between metered taxis that seat up to four passengers and their rideshare counterparts, who both cater to South Africans and tourists with disposable income. In contrast, the Taxi Wars were historically, and continue to be, fought in a entirely different sector; these 16-person minibuses, controlled by "mother body" taxi associations, instead battle for lucrative routes that transport the working class black citizens for their day to day business. However, the minibus taxi violence foreshadows Uber's rise, showcases the racialized built environment within which it operates, and highlights some of the complex challenges that the rideshare company faces as it tries to navigate South Africa's socio-political landscape.

Taxi Violence

Before 1987, South Africa's sprawling transportation network was tightly regulated by the South African Transport Services (SATS). This governing body extended racialized Apartheid policy to infrastructure; it embedded segregation in transportation sector by making it difficult for the black population traverse the spatialized divisions between black and white communities. South African leadership had emplaced these delineations early on in city planning; they had designated specific residential areas to be cordoned off for "Non-Europeans." In cities like Johannesburg, writes anthropologist Andre Czegledy, these demarcations resulted in "a cityscape broken into a patchwork quilt of neighborhoods serviced by conspicuously few transport corridors" (Czegledy 2004). There are substantial gaps within the apartheid regime's bus and train system. As a result, without a personal vehicle, navigating this built environment, "Getting around town," is incredibly difficult (Czegledy 2004).

While taxis could have provided a necessary means of traversing this landscape, SATS tightly constricted black taxi ownership. A critical component of this system was the Local Road Transportation Board (LRTB), which rejected over 90% of taxi permits for black applicants. The board heavily restricted the number of licenses, and placed sizing limitations on vehicles (Dugard 2001). However, in 1987, state policy shifted. When revolutionary currents threatened the Apartheid regime, deregulated the highly structured taxi industry afforded a potential avenue to placate the discontent masses. In her comprehensive review of taxi violence in South Africa, Jackie Dugard concludes:

> "The sudden deregulation of the taxi industry in 1987 formed part of the government's broader attempt to 'introduce' the market to an enclave of black South Africans who, for the most part, had no experience of capital accumulation. Deregulation was implemented as a means of strengthening the economy by giving enough blacks a stake in the system to dilute the revolutionary climate" (Dugard 2001).

Therefore, the National Party followed an approach that foreshadows Uber's development

narrative. For the Apartheid government, an unregulated transportation market could be a source

of economic opportunity for a disenfranchised populace. In the wake of this sweeping about-face

in policy, Dugard writes, "the barriers to entering the taxi industry went from selectively

permeable to functionally absent, causing thousands of taxi operators to flood into the industry"

(Dugard 2001). However, the precipitous shift from draconian regulatory practices to

overcrowded chaos provided an disastrous opportunity for criminal organizations to cement their

control.

Before the switch to an unregulated market, several actors were uniquely positioned to

monopolize the market. Taxi associations like Majakathata emerged to provided legal

representation to drivers in exchange for rental fees (Luce 2016). Additionally, state corruption

played a critical role in disproportionately empowering a select few. Before the policy change,

only individuals that were connected to authorities, and the corrupt authorities themselves, could

skirt regulations and provide fleets of illicit minibuses without fear of state interference. During

deregulation, these operators and extant taxi associations were uniquely poised to solidify their

dominance of the industry (Dugard 2001). When the lucrative market became increasingly

overcrowded, the associations consolidated their power into "mother bodies." These were

"violent taxi associations" that effectively regulates the prices and supply of the "volatile,

over-traded commuter transport market" through attacks on and intimidation of rival entities

(Dugard 2001).

During late Apartheid, these rivalries were stoked by state agents to destabilize the

anti-Apartheid political movement (Dugard 2001; Kynoch 2005). However, the violence outlived

the National Party's dominance, and has continued through the 1990s and into the 2000s (Greef, "In South Africa's 'Mafia-Like' Taxi Industry…," NYT, 7/22/18). To this day, the mother bodies are controlled by charismatic leaders who micromanage their respective territories and flout state intervention in their business (Luce 2016). These operators compete for routes in an unregulated industry that comprises over 200,000 minibus taxis, makes up 63% of South Africa's transit usage (in contrast to the metered taxis' 7%), and has an estimated revenue of over $1.2 billion (NYT; OECD 2018). This system is a dangerous, chaotic solution to the inadequacies of South Africa's public infrastructure; however, it gives non-white bodies mobility by extending existing infrastructure to subvert the intentions of apartheid-oriented city planners. Rather than being the result of state policy, in South Africa, the minibus taxi industry is an example of how "private sector dictates the pace of urban change" (Czegledy 2004). However, there is an informal state presence that must also be accounted for.

A Corrupt State

The "taxi bosses," who run the mother bodies, are powerful figures that both antagonize the state and simultaneously are deeply imbricated within it. In many respects, taxi bosses challenge and subvert the state. Samantha Deborah Luce describes how one taxi boss, "The General," considers himself to be a "thorn in the side of the state" and uses his power to lobby against propositions to extend city bus routes (Luce 2016). The South African government has also decried the blatant violence perpetuated by these gang leaders, and a few people in the industry have been prosecuted (Dugard 2001). However, because of state bureaucracy and corruption, this is far from the norm. The South African government as been lambasted for its

inefficiency (Chipkin 2012). When it comes to the taxi industry, Dugard writes, "the state

bureaucracy is unable to deal in a coordinated manner with this level of organised crime"

(Dugard 2001). A critical aspect of this is state corruption, which was magnified when the taxi

industry was deregulated.

As previously mentioned, during the inception of the minibus taxi industry, only people

with connections to the state were able to operate in its harsh regulatory environment. When the

industry became unregulated, government officials quickly became invested in the business.

Now, a major factor in unchecked taxi-violence is the "ownership of taxis by officials, including

police officers" (Dugard 2018). There are even cases of police officers using their authority to

avail their taxi associations while undermining their rivals (Dugard 2018). Thus, taxi-bosses, and

their industries, are deeply ensconced in the country's political context. The mother bodies are

heavily intertwined with the inefficiencies of the bureaucracy. The taxi gangs are ultimately

abetted by the state, rather than challenged by it; with its help, they are able regulate their

business through the informal politics of popular sovereignty and violence. Uber, borne within

the American political context, it unprepared for infrastructure regulated in this manner.

Within the United States, Uber pushes against regulation. It constantly seeks to grow and

maintain utmost control of its workforce. It has done so through practices that have drawn

criticism; Uber has been accused of violating workers rights, and engaging in unfair competitive

practices. The first section of this paper outlined these questionable practices and the legal gray

area within which they occur. Given its proclivity for extra-legal operations, Uber could be

expected to thrive in South Africa, where the government's involvement in transportation can be

largely characterized by inaction; Uber may have expected that it would benefit from a weak

state. However, South Africa's Taxi Wars have revealed this assumption to be false in two critical regards. The first is that, in fact, South Africa's transportation infrastructure *is* highly regulated. However, this regulatory environment is not constructed by a single governing body. In lieu of formal regulation, informal system of governance largely regulates transportation infrastructure. Here, violence and intimidation, rather that legal regulation, has been used to modulate competition. Second, while "South African government" as one coherent entity has struggled to intervene within transportation and legislation has moved at a "glacial" pace (Ndlovu 2017), Dugard's analysis of the Taxi Wars demonstrates that state actors interface with the industry more than in the United States. However, unlike in America, they are involved informally, as shareholders in the industry.

Thus, as metered taxi drivers resort to violence, they are in keeping with a history of violence-as-regulation. Uber's struggle to grapple with this response reveals the extent to which it actually relies on a strong government. While in the United States, the company can count on a responsive police presence to protect its drivers, it cannot in South Africa. Because Uber is new arrival to the country, and a foreign company, it offers few points of access for the police to become financially invested in its protection. Uber drivers claim that the guards actively do not stopping the violence, and accuse the police of being invested in the metered-taxis ("Uber attacked...Police watch and do nothing."). Even as Uber pleads for protection from local police, they have largely stood by throughout the violence MyBroadBand, 8/3/17; Magwedze, "Conflict Between..," EWN, 2017). Yet, the violence perpetrated by the metered taxis as also been an unexpected asset for Uber; the company can market itself as a safe, transparent corrective to an aggressive, corrupted industry.

Compensating for Deficient Infrastructure

Like the minibus industry, Uber makes up for deficiencies in South Africa's infrastructure; the substantial gaps in the apartheid regime's transportation network meant that having a personal car is critical to traversing cities like Johannesburg (Czegledy 2004). Uber, like metered taxis, compensate for this deficiency. However, unlike the minibus industry, Uber is augmenting the existing transportation options by providing a convenient mode of transport for exclusively upper and middle class South Africans and tourists; its fares are too high for the test of the population (OECD 2018). These demographics have warmly received Uber and there is evidence that the ride-hailing application have even increased demand for taxi-based travel. In 2014, as Uber had just entered the South African taxi market, IOL, a news company, published an article on the smartphone app. The articled featured testimonials that expressed approval of the ride-hailing platform, emphasizing how easy it made "going out" without a car, and appreciation for the "snazzy vehicles," algorithmic pricing, and availability of registration information (Grange "With Uber, calling for a cab is appsolutely easy," IOL, 7/8/2014). This sentiment was echoed by other articles, South Africa TripAdvisor discussion boards, and conversations with South Africans studying at Brown University (Alexa Clark, Interview, 11/5/18; Rufaro Sithole, Interview, 11/12/18).

Before Uber, to move around town without a personal car, these individuals had to rely on the metered taxis. These taxis gained a reputation for being violent, and aggressive, and for overcharging passengers (DeMaio, Personal Communique, 11/12/18). In contrast to the taxis, Uber offers quality assurance and convenience. Now, citizens with the means can efficiently

navigate the urbanscape, even without a car. Similarly, tourists can negotiate the unfamiliar

space by simply opening their phones, and rely on the familiar service. Thus, Uber allows these

wealthy individuals to go about their business, between their homes, workplaces, and nightclubs,

without grappling with the fundamental inequities build into apartheid transportation

infrastructure; it reinforces a transportation division, and allows it to continue into the present.

Optics

The violence against Uber drivers has fueled perceptions of metered-taxis as dangerous,

further buttressing Uber's contention that it provides a safe alternative to other means of travel.

This materializes in news reports and comments threads, which accuse the metered taxi drivers

of generally being criminals, and even "savages" (Comments, "Uber violence isn't over," ENCA,

9/8/17). Some articles emphasize that these drivers would join Uber, however, they cannot pass

Uber's background checks (Jacobs, "The real reason why metered taxi drivers don't want Uber,"

News24, 5/24/16). The accuracy of these accusations is difficult to substantiate, and in marked

contrast, taxi drivers argue that they are unable to afford a car that meets Uber's standards

(Greef, Atlantic). However, these accusations showcase how aspects of the taxi drivers'

resistance backfire. In a press release, a spokesman for Uber South Africa stated, "That a few

metered taxi operators are choosing violence and threats against those bringing choice in

transportation is unacceptable. Violence only underlines why people are increasingly choosing

safe, reliable alternatives like Uber" ("Uber asks SA police for help amid rising taxi violence,"

Business Tech, 6/17/17). Thus, while their violence is a means of resistance against Uber, there

actions are liable to be reinterpreted by the company and its clients as further evidence of the

industry's depravity, and the criminality of its drivers. Uber is able to contrast itself with these metered taxis, Uber is understood as providing an adequate vetting process.

However, Uber's outsider role also exposes the corporation to negative criticisms. Of course, the company's most vociferous opposition comes from metered taxi drivers. The taxi associations have pointed to the outsider nature of the "taxi hailing" companies, describing them as "overseas-based companies who are unregulated" (Reporter, "SA meter taxis to take on Uber…", IOL, accessed 11/5/18). Taxi drivers also invoke the history of apartheid in their critiques. In one article, A taxi driver expressed that ""White people don't take taxi now. It's Uber," and "Apartheid was finished and now it's starting again"("Being an Uber driver in South Africa can be lethal," CNET, accessed 11/5/18). Yet, these metered taxi-drivers are increasingly being joined by disaffected Uber drivers, who have begun openly pushing back against the company's exploitative practices. At the risk of being deactivated from the app (Greef, Atlantic), Uber drivers have launched protests and taken to social media like twitter, where accounts like "South African E-Hailing Association" describe the company's policies as "slavery" and ride-hailing companies as "oppressors." Thus, in South Africa postcolonial climate, Uber's role as an outsider, combined with its aggressive, disruptive, and exploitative practices, results in its characterization as a colonial entity.

Conclusion

In South Africa, Uber continues to pursue its incessant growth, and does so by pivoting towards the role of economic developer; the ride-hailing application promotes a narrative wherein it is the provider of both job opportunities and socio-economic mobility. However,

development is not an apolitical activity. In South Africa, Uber engages with a transportation architecture designed to differentiate classes of South African citizen. Uber's interface with this constructed landscape, and attempt at extending it, accentuates systems of domination. Uber's platform continues to reinscribe the racialized disparities with wealthy and poor; it affords the former with a convenient means of interacting with the landscape, inaccessible to the latter, and provides a means for transfiguring the unemployed into a highly controlled "flexible" labor source. However, the relation between Uber and transportation infrastructure is not unidirectional. In turn, South Africa's reality imposes itself on the company, forcing to to adapt to an environment where it must contend with colonial associations, a corrupt police force, and overt violence.

In this context, change is unfolding at a breakneck pace; metered taxis have announced their own ride hailing app (Report, "SA meter taxis to take on Uber with YooKoo app," IOL, 9/1/17), while in other parts of Africa, Uber is experimenting with its own minibus service , that could one day challenge the entrenched, but lucrative, minibus taxi-industry (Mavundza, "Uber is launching a minibus…," Business Insider SA, 11/7/18). The intersection of ride-hailing applications and South African political reality will continue to produce disruptive outcomes, eventualities that will exceed the control and expectations of any one actor, be they an executive, Uber driver, taxi boss, or metered taxi driver. However, these outcomes will be fundamentally interwoven with South Africa's complex history of transportation and oppression.

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