

Alex Rosenblat, *Uberland: How Algorithms are Rewriting the Rules of Work* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press 2018)

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labour, superior public health, and administrative bureaucracy). In addition, this chapter could have been better integrated into the book, as it is unclear how it connects to the preceding chapter on cheap labour and the following chapter on women's leverage regarding reproductive work. Other chapters detract for Brown's overall argument. For example, in "Reproduction and Race," Brown discusses the racist population control policies aimed at African American women, including involuntary sterilization and birth control campaigns, but Brown's claim that the "ruling class" wants all women to have more babies to ensure a future workforce is difficult to reconcile with the evidence that Brown presents. Lastly, the book would benefit from a conclusion that would tie different chapters together and strengthen Brown's central argument. Overall, *Birth Strike* is an effective re-evaluation of women's reproductive labour and a timely call to action, but the sheer breadth of issues that the book attempts to cover and relate to reproduction means that some chapters are unconvincing and end up weakening the author's overall argument.

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Alex Rosenblat, *Uberland: How Algorithms are Rewriting the Rules of Work* (University of California Press 2018)

UBERLAND IS at its core, a chronology of the work experiences and working conditions of Uber drivers across the United States and Canada. Yet, through the myriad of these drivers' accounts, Alex Rosenblat goes deeper, unpacking the faulty foundations and hustle of gig work, post-capitalism and the advent and exploitation of employment within

the digital economy. The book features Rosenblat's ethnographic experiences of being an Uber passenger, riding over 5,000 miles across twenty-five cities in the United States and Canada over the span of four years, as well as her netnographic experiences of visiting driver forums daily, and action research advocacy, that placed her in a number of meetings with senior Uber executives.

This heteroglossia, that is, multiple perspectives and voices, culminate in *Uberland* to narrate the ways in which technology is rewiring the American dream. Uber, the Silicon Valley tech giant, has promised to deliver freedom and flexibility through turn-key entrepreneurship where drivers can use their own vehicles, set their own schedule, and be their own boss, thanks to Uber's digital platform and algorithmic management practices. Rosenblat examines this rhetoric of freedom and flexibility from the perspective of the drivers, noting that their motivations to drive for Uber are diverse. She uncovers various types of drivers – full-time drivers, part-time drivers, and hobby drivers and highlights the socio-economic, racial and gendered differences that catapulted each of them into this line of work in the first place. While interesting, this is on par with some of what has been uncovered in the existing scholarship on the career experiences of ride-hail drivers.

Where Rosenblat makes her mark with *Uberland* is by lifting the veil of Uber's opaque management practices. She illustrates Uber's cogent history with their Tom-and-Jerry antics, whereby Uber outruns stakeholders and regulators by narrow escape, and then charges into new markets due to regulatory technicalities and infrastructure inconsistencies. Uber's employment arrangement is murky at best. For example, Uber positions drivers as both independent

contractors and “consumers” of Uber’s technology, like their riders, rather than employees. In doing so, Uber is able to skirt paying drivers a minimum wage, among other labour laws. Though not formally acknowledged as employees, Rosenblat sheds light on the ways in which the algorithms manage and (mis-)manage drivers. She reports that Uber hires workers using background checks, vets their vehicles and in some geographies, even goes as far as to offer vehicle payment plans and loans, processes ride-hail payments, resolves driver-customer conflicts, provides bonus opportunities through surge pricing, and disciplines drivers through temporary suspensions and terminations due to inactivity, gaming the system, as well as low customer satisfaction. Uber in effect, prevents drivers from making informed decisions about how they want to do their work, using tactics such as obscuring customer’s ride destinations and capping refusal rates prevent drivers from turning down rides.

Much of what we know about Uber pertains to these faceless, algorithmic management strategies. A key contribution of Rosenblat’s work is her pursuit of understanding how drivers react and respond to these algorithmic micro-management practices. Importantly, she details how the drivers come together in online forums to voice key concerns, gain clarity on questions that they may have, learn tricks of the trade and drive collective action and change. While much has been acknowledged about Rosenblat’s probe into the way in which Uber harnesses digital prowess to control its workforce, she also critically identifies how drivers skirt the isolation propagated by their independent contractor status by relying on their own digital forums to voice their issues, gain clarity, and drive collective action and change. For

example, Rosenblat shares insights from the online driver forums that detail drivers’ complaints about wage theft speculations about missing tips, neighborhood surge price irregularities, and surviving instances of abuse and harassment.

Uberland contextualizes workers’ motivations and experiences against the broader landscape of the sharing economy and post-capitalist ideology. Intended for a mass audience rather than purely an academic one, Rosenblat’s framing of the sharing economy is a shorthand rendering of the complexities of a postcapitalist economy. For all intents and purposes, *Uberland* is accessible to the reader and does shed some light on the socio-political mechanisms at play that might inspire someone to drive for Uber, using their own car while facing the unintended cost consequences of vehicle wear-and-tear while Uber skims off the top as a rentier in these digital transactions. In this era of precarious work and intensified digitalization, Rosenblat’s book provides a holistic account, unpacking Uber’s opaque business practices through her rigorous ethnography and investigative journalism skills, while demonstrating care and compassion towards the drivers that she spent countless hours with. It is this very juxtaposition – Uber’s sterile yet invasive algorithmic management practices alongside a humanist account, where Rosenblat gives a platform for silenced gig workers who have been denied the basic rights and benefits afforded to employees, to voice their stories that makes this book invaluable.

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