

“CREOLIZED” PLATFORMS: A TOOL OF EVASIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the emergence of platform-based ride-hailing groups created by drivers in Bogotá, Colombia, who seek to increase their earnings and autonomy without government regulation. These drivers engage in evasive entrepreneurship by developing alternative forms of coordination using social technologies and smartphone applications as tools of disobedience (Thierer 2020). The success of one such group is challenging the institutions and status quo in Bogotá. This study focuses on this group and its members aim for autonomy which forms the basis for the informal technologies and new forms of agency, looking to “exit” the systems that constrain them. The study highlights how the emergence of this type of informal platform, which is referred to as a “Creole” platform, can inform the debate on the nexus of evasive entrepreneurialism and emergent collective innovation and action, providing insights into the limits of government and corporate policy design. The findings of this transdisciplinary study contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection between technology, entrepreneurship, and collective innovation for liberal outcomes in the context of ride-hailing platforms in Bogotá and have implications for policy-makers and scholars alike.

KEYWORDS: Evasive Entrepreneurship, Creolization, Informality, Platforms, Autonomy

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I. INTRODUCTION

In Bogotá, Colombia, a rapidly evolving landscape has unfolded with the spontaneous emergence of unique ride-hailing collectives of drivers, referred to in this paper as “Creole” platforms.¹ This development has brought forth a novel approach to entrepreneurship, which contests conventional governance and regulatory systems models. Primarily, these collectives comprise drivers with a focused ambition to augment their financial earnings and ameliorate their employment conditions. To this end, they leverage social technologies and smartphone applications as tools to devise and establish alternate forms of agency.

Essentially, they use technology as a conduit to challenge, and sometimes defy, government regulation. This behavior stretches the boundaries of traditional institutional frameworks and stirs the waters of established norms. The resourcefulness and tenacity exhibited by these groups, coupled with their growing success, have set a precedent that challenges the status quo. This has sparked a series of debates and discussions across various platforms.

The central point of these conversations is the intersecting roles of technology, entrepreneurship, and governance within the scope of ride-hailing platforms. This is of particular interest in contexts characterized by low levels of institutionalization. These emergent “Creole” platforms, with their distinctive

characteristics and strategies, force us to reconsider established paradigms. By pushing the boundaries of traditional frameworks and challenging government regulations, they underscore the fluidity and dynamism of the digital marketplace in the modern era.

These ride-hailing collectives, with their innovative approaches, are not just reshaping their work lives but also influencing broader debates on how technology and entrepreneurial spirit can drive changes in governance and regulatory models. They stand as a testament to how entrepreneurship can adapt and thrive, even in institutionally frail contexts, reshaping the gig economy landscape in developing countries like Colombia. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) What strategies are platform drivers using to foster autonomy and political agency? 2) How does technology contribute to platforms’ ability to create autonomous spaces?

To answer these questions, this article employs a qualitative case study methodology, drawing on in-depth interviews with drivers and passengers and digital ethnographic methods for analyzing online social media platforms. By examining the lived experiences of those involved in these “Creole” platforms, the article provides valuable insights into the intersection of technology, entrepreneurship, and social innovation in the context of Bogotá’s ride-hailing platforms and contributes

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to a better understanding of the potential for informal technologies to inform policy design both public and private in the Global South.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The present study focuses on the online community of drivers created through the creolization of a *foreign* platform technology in Bogotá. This community of drivers, known as Drivers Club Bogotá, operates in an informal legal context due to the absence of regulations governing ride-hailing platforms in Colombia. Additionally, the community confronts the dynamics of multinational platforms, as the creolization process copies and replicates in an artisanal way the coordination mechanisms and processes of companies such as Uber. This article, therefore, examines Drivers Club Bogotá from the perspective of drivers' agency which seeks autonomy from both government and from private forms of corporate governance. This agency manifests in processes and activities that fall under the rubric of evasive entrepreneurship (Thierer 2020).

II.1. EVASIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In the abstract theories of entrepreneurship presented by Schumpeter (2000) and Kirzner (2015) there is a tendency to assume that institutional structure and framework is a given. These theories, for example, often take as given the existence of clearly defined property rights and dependable enforcement

of laws, which are typical assumptions in neoclassical models. However, this is not always the case in real-world spaces and much less in contexts of low institutionalization like cities of the Global South, including Bogotá. Similarly, the works of Mises (1998) and Hayek (1978) underscore the role of entrepreneurial actors in driving economic change and disruption. However, they also operate within a framework that assumes a relatively stable institutional structure that has been revised in the literature, particularly when focusing in the Global South (Boettke and Coyne 2009). My focus on evasive entrepreneurship and on the potential of technology to drive change, particularly in contexts of flawed institutionalization, represents a distinct yet complementary perspective.

In numerous urban areas of the Global South flawed institutions have amplified the significance of informal, evasive, and small-scale entrepreneurship. Simultaneously, these flawed institutions have intensified the challenges of initiating more capital-intensive enterprises and "normal" forms of entrepreneurship. In other words, entrepreneurship should not merely be reduced to opportunity-seeking or promoting innovation. Rather, it should encompass a wider understanding that includes the emergence processes of any activity that results in changes in the marketplace, institutions, and society at large. Also, considering that these changes are often pursued not solely for the purposes of profit maximization or commercialization.

In this scenario Baumol (1996, 2010) has already extensively explored the role of entrepreneurs in different institutional settings, arguing that the structure of rewards in a society determines whether entrepreneurship will lead to productive, unproductive, or even destructive outcomes. In this examination of evasive entrepreneurship, Baumol's theoretical foundation helps us understand how informal actors in less institutionalized contexts might leverage technology to create productive outcomes even when formal institutional supports are weak or non-existent. Thus, my exploration here aligns with the view that entrepreneurial actors are pivotal in shaping economic and societal outcomes but stress that these actors can operate outside formal institutional frameworks (Burns and Fuller 2020; Lucas and Fuller 2017) and that technology can empower them in novel ways and has done so to date (Elert and Henrekson 2016; Thierer 2020; Ufere and Gaskin 2021).

In Latin American contexts like Colombia, the rhetoric around "entrepreneurship" has unfortunately been co-opted to camouflage social exclusion. Governments have been noted to utilize this term to advance policies that singularly emphasize the promotion of high-value startups—often referred to as "unicorns" or the more localized term "*multilatinas*," a way to call Latin American-based companies with success outside the region—or champion the myth of the "self-made man." These narratives, unfortunately, served to exclude certain individuals from political and societal

participation. Such a discourse lacks the necessary critical perspective on collective action (Ostrom 2000, 2009, 2010a), thereby sidelining social, cooperative, collective, and evasive forms of entrepreneurship. This research seeks to proffer an alternative perspective that advocates for evasive entrepreneurship while recasting it in a more democratically horizontal light, also complementing important literature on social and emergent forms of entrepreneurship (see Haeffele and Storr 2019; Storr 2010; Storr et al. 2015, and others).

Recognizing the importance of these elements, it becomes critical to develop theories of forms of entrepreneurship that can effectively harness social innovation, particularly in contexts of low institutionalization in which evasiveness becomes a contextual need. These alternative forms of entrepreneurship entail subtle differences between policy, ideological, institutional, evasive, and social entrepreneurs and are a topic of ongoing discourse in management, politics, and organizational theory. In this framework, evasive entrepreneurship (Elert and Henrekson 2016; Thierer 2020) refers to processes that challenge or evade the established institutional infrastructure. It is characterized by how people interact with institutions and how they create new organizational forms outside the wider (and failing) institutional environment and is very useful to understand the situation in Bogotá.

The scholarly discourse of recent times on evasive entrepreneurship, particularly by Thierer (2020), has also

increasingly underscored technologies, particularly digital platforms, as ideal tools to evade and challenge institutional structures intentionally (Hagemann et al. 2018; Thierer 2016, 2022). Entrepreneurial actors leverage technological tools to challenge and bypass institutional systems—a concept encapsulated by permissionless innovation (Chesbrough and Van Alstyne 2015; Thierer 2016). According to this theory, technological tools can become instruments of freedom or resistance, enabling individuals to contest or evade government and large corporate activities that hinder their liberty. Furthermore, these technologies facilitate new forms of social movements and collective action, challenging stagnant or corrupt institutions. These technologies can also be used to contest large private corporate structures that are often out of touch with the needs of individuals and communities.

In this sense, as exposed by Thierer (2020), technology has significantly shifted the institutional balance of power. This shift has been directed towards more decentralized entities as opposed to hegemonic actors, prompting a re-evaluation of established dynamics and power structures. These innovations have proven to be disruptive, altering traditional hierarchies and offering new avenues for individuals and small groups to exert influence and autonomy.

It is essential to acknowledge here the nuance that entrepreneurship can have both constructive and disruptive impacts on a society and economy, and

these impacts can often depend on the surrounding institutional structures. Kirzner (1985) emphasized the risks of superfluous discoveries resulting from excessive regulation, which disrupt the balance between production plans and consumption demands. In this context, evasive entrepreneurship, especially in areas of flawed institutionalization, may create discoordination or non-contributory innovations. However, this perspective may not apply to all situations, such as in the Global South, where evasive entrepreneurship could be an essential tool for sparking innovation and fostering productivity, looking to work around strict regulations.

Moreover, the advent of technology, as mentioned before, can play a significant role empowering evasive entrepreneurs to challenge established institutions and democratize economic participation. This can lead to valuable creations, shifting from superfluous to productive discoveries, even in the absence of formal institutional support. However, whether this shift leads to better coordination of production and consumption, or discoordination remains a contentious point. In essence, understanding the impacts of entrepreneurship necessitates a consideration of various factors, including socio-political context, technology, and institutional structure. Evasive entrepreneurship, therefore, might be seen as a blend of Kirzner's superfluous discovery and innovative, productive outcomes, epitomizing both the challenges and opportunities in less institutionalized environments.

However, beyond Thierer's valuable perspective, which places this type of contestation solely within the sphere of citizen-state relations, it is necessary to recognize that such a narrow focus may overlook the broader applicability of these dynamics of evasiveness. In other words, similar patterns of power shift and contestation must also be anticipated in other social contexts. These contexts could be characterized by struggles between decentralized entities and established hegemonic interests, whether they be governmental or private.

The idea of decentralized versus hegemonic conflict is not exclusive to the public sphere. It is potentially applicable, in some cases, to the interactions between individuals and corporations. Thus, it is crucial to take into consideration the shifting balance of power in a variety of social, economic, and political interactions. Moreover, it is crucial to view technology, like platforms, as a catalyst for change, not only in the realm of citizen-state relations but also in the individual's engagement with corporate entities.

In this sense, it is also crucial to recognize that technological advancements empower individuals to negotiate, contest, and potentially redefine their relationship with larger, traditionally dominant forces. Underscoring here the transformative potential of technology and how the complex interplay of power dynamics it institutes is extending beyond the state to include various corporate and societal structures. Consequently, evasive entrepreneurship must be theorized

as a mechanism of challenge that can restrict the unchecked activities of both governments and private corporations. Deploying technologies for evasive purposes can enable individuals and communities and foster technological civil disobedience and liberation.

However, this empowerment is not solely a product of human action in organizing a community and engaging in evasive entrepreneurship. The technology itself also affords a new form of agency (Davis 2020), which needs to be understood in terms of the evolving relationship between digital platforms and human actors.

II.II. CREOLIZATION

Understanding the conditions of affordance from a cultural and institutional legitimacy perspective can help frame the contextual analysis of ride-hailing platforms in Bogotá and how digital technologies can articulate new forms of agency as manifest in evasive entrepreneurial action. The interaction between technology artifacts and platform drivers can be addressed by explaining technology uses in the Global South. In this case referring not only to a geographical location, but rather, as addressed previously, to an institutional condition in which regular market and socio-political institutions are not fully developed.

A conceptualization in this regard was elaborated by the historian of science and technology, David Edgerton (2007) in his essay, "Creole Technologies and Global Histories: Rethinking how Things Travel in Space and Time." In

this seminal work, Edgerton argues that technology, in general, is understood uniquely around the ideas of novelty, innovation or creativity and that this limited perspective cannot contribute to a comprehensive account of technology and society. Instead, he argues that the focus on innovation needs to be complemented by studies of technology use and, more importantly, how technologies are used in a specific context.

Promoting a view of technology's effects on societies from these two perspectives, that is, innovation and use, Edgerton pays particular attention to the development of technologies in the Global South, or what he defines as the "poor" parts of the world. Edgerton denounces, rightly, that the Global South appears to be invisible concerning technology. Furthermore, he says that an innovation-centered perspective on technology has excluded the ways southern contexts generate and appropriate technologies. According to Edgerton (2007, 92), the story of the Global South, its peoples and their relationship with technology is told from the view of "transfer, resistance, incompetence, lack of maintenance, and enforced dependence on rich-world technology," where "imperialism, colonialism, and dependence were the key concepts, and the transfer of technology from rich to poor, the main process." He says, "Whatever the view taken of what technology has done in the poor world, what 'technology' is has not been seriously debated" (Edgerton 2007, 94).

Delving deeper into the etymology of "creole" (originally "*criollo*" in

Spanish) helps elucidate these ideas. Primarily, "creole" referred to local adaptations of something initially foreign, specifically designating locally born European and African descendants in the Americas, the offspring of European colonists and African slaves, as distinct from the native population. In essence, "creole" signifies something that originated elsewhere but has since evolved uniquely. "Creole" also evokes connotations of being grounded, authentic, common, and popular, often in contrast to the "refinement" of the metropolis, today, the so-called "West."

Thus, Creole technologies refer to technologies that have been adapted and employed in a unique manner beyond the time and location of their initial significant usage. Many a time, these foreign-origin technologies synergize creatively with indigenous ones, resulting in hybrid technologies. These hybrids not only amalgamate creole and local technologies but often evolve into new creole technologies themselves.

Technology studies and theories still do not clearly conceptualize the characteristics of technology in the Global South. Instead of being uniquely transferred from the North, Edgerton argues, "southern" technology grows from hybrid processes, from the interaction of the "rich" and "poor" worlds, and the interactions of "Northern" technologies with human beings of the "South." Therefore, a Global South's particular engagement with technologies would depend on a "complex, original, and changing technological landscape which included, importantly, mass

technologies first developed elsewhere but used in distinctive ways” (Edgerton 2007, 94-95).

Edgerton states that technologies, like creolized languages, go through transformations that make their form and function applicable to local conditions and needs in a hybridization process. Moreover, these hybrid technologies can create new uses for people. Equally, understanding that “creole” beyond hybrid is also “local, genuine, vulgar, popular” (Edgerton 2007, 102), thus giving a conceptual framework to understand how government institutions in Bogotá confront a scenario in which discourses and rationalities are in conflict, where what is “popular,” “local,” or “genuine” is not what governs and is not what the expert elite articulate or desire.

The concept of evasive entrepreneurship intersects with the notion of creolization, particularly in the context of technological innovation and adaptation. As discussed previously in cities with low institutionalization like Bogotá, flawed institutions have amplified the importance of informal and small-scale entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs in these contexts leverage their local knowledge to develop private solutions that challenge or evade the existing institutional infrastructure. This form of entrepreneurship aligns with the idea of creolization, which involves the adaptation and unique use of technologies beyond their original time and location of significant usage. The evasive entrepreneurship that occurs in Bogotá can be seen as a form of creolization, where foreign platform technologies

are adapted and employed in distinctive ways, creating new uses and opportunities for individuals and communities.

Evasive entrepreneurship, supported by these technologies, challenge stagnant or corrupt institutions. The evolving relationship between digital platforms and human actors allows for new forms of agency where technology itself becomes a tool for empowerment. In the case of evasive entrepreneurship in Bogotá, the use of creolized platform technologies has facilitated the emergence of initiatives like Drivers Club Bogotá, which would not have been possible without the hybridization and adaptation of these technologies to local needs. Both concepts highlight the agency of individuals and communities in shaping their socio-economic environment. Understanding the relationship between evasive entrepreneurship and creolization can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of innovation and socio-economic development in cities like Bogotá and other similar contexts in the Global South.

II.III. A NOTE ON “NOXIOUS” MARKETS AND EVASIVENESS

It is important to attest here that the argument for evasiveness, collective action, social cooperation, and, most of all, the creolization of digital technologies could be also related to the growth of market forms that could be considered “noxious,” such as black markets (Satz 2010, 2023). The connection between informal entrepreneurship in black markets and evasive entrepreneurship lies in

their shared characteristic of operating outside established institutional frameworks. Both forms of entrepreneurship seek to navigate and circumvent regulatory barriers and limitations imposed by flawed institutions.

Informal entrepreneurship in black markets typically refers to economic activities that occur outside the formal economy, often due to regulatory barriers, high entry costs, or limited access to legal channels. However, evasive entrepreneurship, as understood in this article, encompasses a broader understanding of entrepreneurship that challenges or evades the established institutional infrastructure. It includes not only informal activities but also innovative approaches such as creolization that create new organizational forms outside the wider institutional environment.

From a normative standpoint, it is relevant to consider the moral propriety of the regulatory barriers imposed on informal entrepreneurship and evasive entrepreneurship. The regulatory barriers can hinder economic growth, limit opportunities for individuals, and perpetuate exclusionary practices. Examining the moral propriety prompts critical reflection on the underlying power dynamics and systemic inequalities that shape institutional frameworks. It raises questions about the fairness and equity of the existing regulations and whether they serve the best interests of all stakeholders. By highlighting the challenges faced by informal or evasive entrepreneurs, it becomes evident that the normative perspective plays a crucial role in evaluating the social and

ethical implications of regulatory barriers and institutional constraints.

The question of the moral propriety of the regulatory barrier is important because it engages with broader considerations of justice, inclusivity, and the legitimate exercise of power. It invites a critical examination of the social and economic consequences of regulatory barriers on marginalized communities and entrepreneurs operating in the informal and evasive spheres. Assessing the moral propriety of these barriers requires an understanding of the context and the impact they have on the livelihoods of individuals and communities. By considering the moral dimension we can challenge the status quo, advocate for more equitable systems, and foster an environment that encourages entrepreneurship while addressing the concerns of regulatory legitimacy and propriety. All in all, in a context where the main issue is that the institutions are failing and the informal sector for a long time has become the major component of the economy, labor and society (Calderón Díaz 2018; Salcedo-Pérez et al. 2020), the category of entrepreneur, or in the case of this article, evasive entrepreneur in Bogotá, Colombia, Latin America, and the Global South is no longer only an economic category, but a moral one. A category of presentation and identification of subjects that respond to the inefficiencies and failure of state institutions and as also discussed in this article, of private corporations which do not respond to the needs and aspirations of people in these settings.

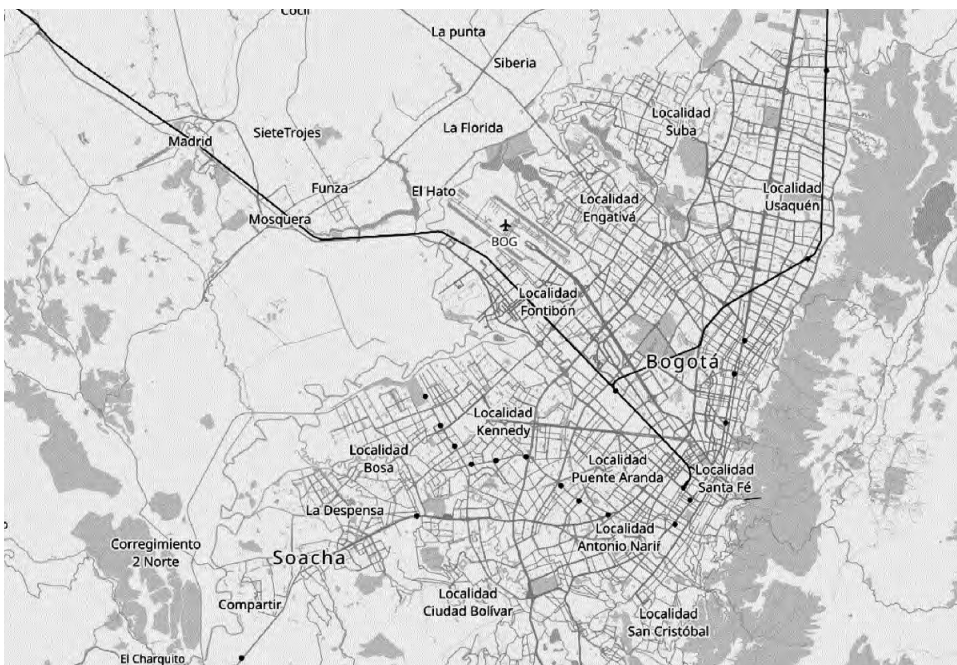
III. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Bogotá Distrito Capital (D.C.), the setting in which this article’s discussion focuses, is the capital city of Colombia, situated on a high plateau in the Andes. With a metropolitan population of over 10 million, it serves as the cultural, economic, and political center of the country. Founded in 1538, Bogotá is the capital of Colombia and houses the highest-ranking branches of the government. It is the country’s leading market, attracting foreign investment, and has the largest nominal and per capita GDP, contributing significantly to the national total. The city experiences socio-spatial divisions, with wealthier

residents concentrated in certain neighborhoods and lower-income populations residing mainly in the southern and peripheral areas.

Latin American countries, including Colombia, face challenges in their institutions, referred to in some literature as “patrimonial states” (Mazzuca 2021). These states fail to effectively govern and are captured by rent-seeking groups. Institutional incapacity, lack of resources, and corruption further undermine the state and its ability to provide public goods. Predatory coalitions, including the military, party machines, criminal organizations, and even workers’ unions, manipulate the government for personal or group

FIGURE 1: MAP OF BOGOTÁ D.C.



Source: Author created using Open Source Platform OpenStreetMaps

advantage. Colombia shares these institutional shortcomings with other Latin American countries, although it has also experienced macroeconomic stability that is very uncommon in the region and is paired with a history of violence related to politics and drug trafficking.

It is in this context where the emergence of Drivers Club Bogotá as an alternative “creole” platform took place. On January 10, 2020, the popular ride-hailing platform Uber made a stunning announcement that it would permanently withdraw its services from Colombia (Uber 2020). In its announcement, Uber cited the Colombian government’s failure to produce adequate regulations for ride-hailing platforms as the reason for its departure. Specifically, Uber argued that the government failed to recognize ride-hailing platforms as technological companies providing peer-to-peer mediation, rather than transportation companies. This announcement caused an uproar among the Colombian population, visible on social media with the hashtag *#UnaSoluciónParaUberYa* (a solution for Uber now), promoted by Uber’s farewell post on Twitter, which soon became a trending topic (Twitter 2020).

In the days that followed, a taxi union leader responded to the outrage of platform drivers regarding Uber’s decision and the government’s inability to come up with a solution to the issue of transportation platforms. In a video that also went viral, the union leader made, amongst many things, sexist remarks to female Uber drivers, telling them to “go back to being housewives.”

This outburst of the taxi union leader generated further outrage, including a response on international and national television from a female member of a community of platform drivers called *Drivers Club Bogotá*. In this TV interview this female driver explained her outrage about the sexist comments but mainly how her group was aiming to be “independent” of the need to rely on platforms like Uber by organizing itself via Facebook, WhatsApp, and other digital platforms. Furthermore, that her group “was not going to wait” for the government to create regulations (Bogotá 2020, 2022b).

The emergence of Drivers Club Bogotá and the powerful and defiant words of the female driver disrupted a discourse that is all too present in Colombian society: A focus on the functionality and details of the law rather than its practical (or desirable) implementation (Gómez-Lobo 2019; Trujillo Vergara 2020) and the impossibility of coping with the pacing problem of technology regulation (Hagemann et al. 2018; Marchant 2011; Marchant et al. 2011; Thierer 2020).

At the end of this event and in response to the outrage and support by the users and drivers of the platform, Uber declared that it was going to function again in Colombia with changes in its model, whose fundamental adjustment was that the user will lease the vehicle and the driver. In that sense the model that is still in use by Uber and other ride-hailing companies in Colombia allows to lease a vehicle with a driver under an agreement between

the parties at the time of the service request. The platform being the point of contact that connects the two parties so that they celebrate a contract between them. This new model added a step in the request of the service called “accepts the lease contract,” in which both parties reach an agreement, which makes it different from the model traditionally used by platforms worldwide.

So far, the evolution of platforms in Colombia and Bogotá has been a complicated path. In 2013, when Uber started operating in Bogotá, they created a secret group of drivers for their “special transport” service. These drivers used white vehicles with a unique government-approved license plate code. In 2014, a senator from the National Unity Party proposed a law that categorized Uber and similar platforms as “luxury transportation.” However, this proposed legislation was withdrawn from Congress because the government issued a decree regulating “luxury taxis” which specifically targeted ride-hailing platforms. The decree did not impact the platforms in Bogotá since their services were no longer considered luxury.

In 2015, senators and representatives from various political parties presented an initiative to regulate “private transportation service through technological platforms.” One senator also proposed a project to regulate the status of drivers and individuals earning income from platforms, requiring unionization and other worker protections. This project resembled a law passed in Mexico City. However, these initiatives faced opposition from different

political parties and interests associated with taxi unions, preventing them from gaining necessary support.

In 2017, Uber, Cabify, and other multinational platform companies initiated a “signature collection” process to advocate for their regularization under favorable rules. They aimed to demonstrate public support and potentially qualify for a referendum. Although they collected over three million signatures, the proposal was archived in Congress due to lobbying from taxi union leaders. In 2021 multiple ride-hailing regulation projects were discussed in Congress, representing different political parties and ideologies. These projects were combined into one bill (003/2020) (Congreso de Colombia 2020, 2021; Representantes 2020) which included tax payment requirements for platform companies, mandatory insurance similar to taxis, and unionization. The bill also proposed changes to taxi regulations, such as eliminating the quota system and implementing surge pricing. It specified licensing requirements and associated costs for platform drivers, similar to taxi drivers. Additionally, multinational platform companies were required to have legal residence in Colombia and pay income tax.

However, the discussion of this bill coincided with national strikes and protests in Colombian cities, including Bogotá in April-July 2021 (Turkewitz 2021). Taxi companies threatened to join the protests if discussions on labor rights for platform drivers versus taxi drivers continued. As a result, representatives from the ruling party withdrew

their support, and the bill was archived. To date, no other initiatives had been presented at the time of writing, leaving ride-hailing platforms in a legal gray area in Colombia.

It is in this context of unstable corporate institutionality and undefined regulatory frameworks where the case of Drivers Club Bogotá emerges as an interesting example. A community of drivers that, while still affiliate with the various ride-hailing platforms that are still functional to date in Bogotá, started to conform their own space of autonomy.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This article employs a qualitative research approach that primarily utilized digital ethnography and critical digital methods (Baym 2006; Bogotá 2022a; Kozinets 2006; Leszczynski 2018, 2019, 2020; Pink et al. 2015; Salmons 2021). To be specific, the research includes 42 semi-structured online synchronous and asynchronous interviews with platform-related actors in Bogotá and a thematic analysis of the data generated from these interactions, including the images and media provided by the informants with the software NVivo and coding (Chapman et al. 2017; Saldaña 2021; Williams and Moser 2019). Asynchronous or synchronous online interviews were used depending on the subject and availability. All quotations have been translated from the original Spanish by the author. Analysis of online data from media outlets, government online data, websites of government

representatives, and platform corporations' websites was also developed. This online data comprised publicly available documents, website publications, images, infographics, and videos.

When discussing ethnographic processes using digital means, it is important to understand that the digital world is networked and constantly interconnected. As such, digital ethnography always involves networked connections that are dynamic and not fixed (Pink 2016; Pink et al. 2015, 2017). In software operations, data is mechanically interpreted to produce different representations. Similarly, when people interact with technology, they interpret data and generate meanings to create an online persona (Moore 2017). Therefore, when dealing with the digital world, we transform ourselves into online entities, and we must interact and interpret meanings in an online-mediated way. Digital ethnography, thus, studies and describes the cultures and opportunities made possible, created, or altered by the presence of digital technologies (Hjorth et al. 2017; Pink et al. 2015).

Digital ethnography focuses on the interconnected nature of the digital world, involving constant interpretation of data for communication and representation. This process helps shape online identities as users interact with technology (Moore 2017; Pink 2016; Pink et al. 2015, 2017). The field explores cultures and potentialities created or influenced by digital tech.

Critics questioning its anthropological legitimacy overlook the fact that it's not seeking to replicate traditional

ethnographic methods, but rather, studies media utilizing its own techniques (Pertierra 2018). This is exemplified in the digital ethnography of a drivers' community in Bogotá, which is shaped by their platform-based work environment.

Pink (2016) argues that digital ethnography is characterized by multiplicity, de-centering of technology, openness, and reflexivity. "Multiplicity" acknowledges the diverse approaches required due to the varying contexts of research. "De-centering" shifts focus from the digital artefacts to users' experiences and critical observations of them. "Openness" refers to the constantly evolving nature of the digital world, suggesting methodology should be adaptable. Finally, "reflexiveness" centers the researcher's experiences and cultural framework, emphasizing the subjective nature of their interpretations.

Some critics argue that anthropological work cannot be done without active and long-time participation in and observation of a community, which would disqualify digital ethnography as a valid social science and humanities methodological framework. However, Pertierra (2018, 61) addresses that "media ethnography makes use of ethnographic methods to study media without claiming to be doing anthropological work." For this article, the study of a drivers' community in Bogotá requires digital ethnography to develop and apply innovative and critical digital methods, rather than traditional ethnography.

The utilization of digital ethnography in research necessitates an

open-mindedness towards critical and unconventional perspectives. To address this, it is necessary to expand from the theory of digital ethnography and incorporate critical methods as discussed by Leszczynski (2018, 2019, 2020). By articulating digital methods as methodologies or approaches to comprehending and making sense of the world, Leszczynski (2018) addresses the challenges and queries about the rigor that digital ethnographies can generate. The first approach entails resolving the epistemological limitations of digital methodologies and the criticisms that can arise from these constraints. Leszczynski (2018) asserts that triangulation and representativeness account for the challenges of digital research. In this case, she proposes ways to enhance meaning in qualitative digital research by triangulating the gathered data and utilizing data-analytic methods to manage big data, thereby resolving the tensions between quantitative methods and the examination of socio-spatial relationships.

The second approach undertaken in the digital methods framework for this article involves a detailed examination of digital-visual artifacts as crucial objects of study (Leszczynski, 2019). This assertion brings forth the contention that digital methods, especially those revolving around digital-visual artifacts such as pictures provided by the actors in their activity, or any other graphic representation created by these actors, are incredibly useful for analyzing underlying politics, subtleties, and hidden meanings. These are elements that may not always be expressible

during an interview but can be portrayed more effectively and impactfully through an image or video.

Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential of images and videos as direct objects of research. They offer a unique lens to explore the complexities of individuals' interactions and relationships with digital platforms. These visual elements are capable of reflecting the internal struggles, dilemmas, and dynamics that may not always be articulated adequately through words. They can encapsulate the essence of experiences, emotions, and attitudes that might otherwise be lost in verbal communication.

All in all, this article uses robust digital methods approach and develops an all-encompassing digital ethnography, laying emphasis on the seemingly mundane interactions with technology in everyday life. This is particularly relevant for cities like Bogotá (Leszczynski 2020). Here, it's noteworthy to mention that digital tools, such as ride-hailing apps, social media platforms like Facebook, and messaging applications such as WhatsApp, which the drivers predominantly use to execute their various evasive strategies in their daily activities, have become as commonplace as any other digital artifact. Such tools are deeply embedded in the fabric of contemporary societal evolution. Their pervasiveness and integration are so profound that they are indistinguishable from routine, everyday activities. Their impact, while often overlooked due to their mundane nature, holds profound implications for

understanding human behavior, social interaction, and the multifaceted relationships between individuals and digital technologies.

V. FINDINGS

The findings of this research indicated that Drivers Club Bogotá (Bogotá 2022b) is a community of approximately six thousand members comprising drivers from different ride-hailing platforms operating in Bogotá, Colombia, such as Uber, DiDi, and Beat. Some drivers also work with InDrive (2022), a platform that operates on real-time offers that "auctions" rides to the highest bidder and provider, serving passengers and freight in urban and regional areas and that its very common in the Global South.

However, what makes Drivers Club Bogotá an outstanding example of an evasive entrepreneurial community is the scale and sophistication of their structures, afforded by platform technology and their community agency. Starting as a Facebook group in October 2017 (Bogotá 2022b), the community grew and developed into a coordination and governance system that emulated the peer-to-peer processes of Uber and others in a creolized way. Drivers in the community developed direct personal relationships with different users and expanded a critical mass of users to consolidate the system, looking to eventually stop working with the corporate platforms.

To copy the peer-to-peer system of a platform like Uber, drivers in the community used WhatsApp groups, a Facebook group, and a push-to-talk walkie-talkie type app called “Zello.” When a driver is contacted directly by a known or referred user requesting a ride, and if the driver is unavailable, the system locates another driver near the location that can provide the ride. Additionally, drivers use a taximeter-like mobile application called “Blumeter,” which allows them to replicate the dynamics of Uber and other multinational ride-hailing platforms, such as surge pricing and therefore establishing their own rates and even policies according to those rates.

Due to the lack of regulation from the local government and an intention from the platform companies to expand their critical mass, most platform ride-hailing payments in Bogotá are made directly between drivers and passengers in cash. This is due to drivers’ proclivity to avoid rides paid by credit card (to avoid paying platform commissions and thus incur debt with the platform companies), and the latter is one of the main reasons drivers started to organize themselves into alternative communities, and while still working with the “traditional” platforms, creating their own system of work.

Typically, drivers commence their workday by perusing the rates for Uber or DiDi, and subsequently adjusting their rates via the utilization of the “Blumeter” app to enhance their competitiveness and capture a larger share of the ride-hailing market during peak

hours, thereby potentially augmenting their earnings and effectively competing against Uber and others. Drivers then proceed to manage their workday by participating in the various structures provided by the Drivers Club Bogotá, such as the WhatsApp groups, Facebook group, and Zello channels, and engage in a process of multihoming as expounded upon by (Belleflamme and Peitz 2019; Bryan and Gans 2019) by also utilizing other ride-hailing platforms sometimes simultaneously (see Figure 2).

As explained very eloquently by one of the drivers:

I explain: It turns out that a passenger needs a ride. Then the passenger communicates with the WhatsApp group of passengers and administrators, and they then notify our group of drivers to give details of the trip, destination, and the pick-up address. Whoever is closest to that address answers for the Zello channel and gives the channel administrator the estimated arrival time and that’s it.

... Our difference is that we charge a little less than what the applications are charging at the time. For example, if I am driving, and there is a trip request, and I am close so, I let the Zello group know that I [can] provide the service ... when I get to look for the passenger while I wait or that’s what I look at Uber at how much the rate is and if there is surge pricing.

... Every day is like this, and I generally do that. I have all the applications at the same time, Uber, DiDi and I'm keeping an eye on the Zello of Drivers channel. And what comes out, I take.

The driver's description provides practical insights into the internal functioning of Drivers Club Bogotá, illuminating how drivers' coordination and sense of community is predicated on flexibility and coordination of work. While Drivers Club Bogotá uses various mechanisms to remain competitive and efficient in the mobility sector, drivers

exercise agency in their management of multiple platforms simultaneously. This practice of multihoming is a coordination strategy that enables drivers to thrive in a fiercely competitive market, and passengers' everyday mobility practices reflect an understanding and articulation of this strategy.

Multihoming is not just a preference but a necessity for drivers seeking to make a good living. Thus, Drivers Club Bogotá's "creole" coordination structure affords the flexibility necessary to compete effectively in the Bogotá ride-hailing market. The hybridity of these communities arises

FIGURE 2. MULTIHOMING OR 'JUMPING AROUND PLATFORMS'



Source: Image was provided to the author by a driver via WhatsApp message

from the fact that drivers are not exclusively linked to any one platform and can work simultaneously among them, often relying on the club's structures to do so. This enables different ways of providing mobility within the platform sector. The liquid and hybrid nature of platform usage and mobility provision structures highlights the deep dependence of these processes on the human beings involved and uncovers an additional element of drivers' agency which is the yearning for autonomy.

V.I. LOOKING FOR AUTONOMY

Based on the results of this investigation, it was discovered that the drivers' primary goal was to create an alternative to government regulations and corporate structures that no longer work for them. The latter facilitated the development of a new independent space utilizing platform technology. The drivers who were the subjects of the Drivers Club Bogotá case study expressed no interest in becoming regularized or integrated into formal labor structures. They believed that doing so would hinder their innovative use of platforms, which allowed them to exercise greater control over their livelihoods and daily routines. This viewpoint was succinctly articulated by one driver:

If I am honest, we would not like the platforms to be legalized and our work regulated, and I know that I am speaking for my colleagues. Why? Because this would add a cost that we would have to pay to

the government, if you understand me, and I disagree with that. ... I know that the moment they [the platforms] become legal and give us employment benefits, that will add many things, and many people will lose their jobs again. Why? Because I know that they [the government and platforms] will want some newer cars, they will take our income for social security, and they will not accept older cars. The worst [scenario], they are going to force us to unionize and stuff. Just like taxi drivers, and that is not our way of working. Imagine paying the salary, clubs, and trips to Miami to one of those fat taxi unionists [laughs].

The perspective of this driver illuminates their apprehension towards potential platform regulations and the strong inclination towards autonomy that is linked to this apprehension. Expressed in the affirmation that the legalization of platforms, including their "creole" emergent forms, in Bogotá would lead to additional costs that many people could not afford, such as social security fees and taxes, regulations to "level the playing field" with taxi companies, and the requirement for newer vehicles, as demanded by Uber for example (Uber 2022).

These drivers also feared being forced to unionize, even though union membership is not mandatory in Colombia or some other Latin American countries (Bensusán-Areous 2019; Bensusán and Santos 2021), as they perceived unions as no longer representing

workers' interests and being transformed into clientelist structures linked to the government (Bensusán-Areous 2019; Mazzuca 2021). This perspective demonstrates the drivers' fear of losing the autonomy that their own (creole) use of platforms provided if labor regulations were imposed, particularly to the unions that have not fulfilled their role in terms of worker protection in Latin America. While platform drivers in the Global North are fighting for their right to unionize (Heater 2021; Hogan 2022), which was recently successful in the United Kingdom (Ziady 2021), this is not necessarily a priority for drivers in the Global South.

The various interviews with the drivers reveal a lack of confidence in institutions and a willingness on the part of drivers to even establish an alternative system that takes care of their health and retirement needs. As expressed by Thierer (2020, 159): "Citizens are increasingly using innovations and new technological capabilities to push back against authorities who have lost touch with common sense or failed to adapt public policies to the will of the people."

One of the drivers was forthright in defending their work model when asked about the strengths of the platform and the possibility of regulation. They were fervent in expressing how the platform, along with the development of the creole platform as an autonomous structure, provided drivers with freedom:

It would be a disaster if they start making labor rules. We start to have

to pay fees and taxes for work and income ... and to top it all off, having to put up with the fat bastards of taxi drivers and union members because if a regulation comes out, they are going to turn us into that ... If one already has the structure of the platform and here in Drivers [Club Bogotá] we have our space to manage ourselves as, excuse me for the language, we f***ing like it. Why are they going to change it?

... I think that the point of the platforms as they work now is that they allow us to escape from the reality that there are no jobs and that salaries get taxed to half in the jobs that do exist. Platforms gave me freedom, and if they regulate them, well, we'll stop having the freedom ... Let us work in peace!

The directness of language employed by certain drivers reflects how Drivers Club Bogotá empowers drivers to avoid involvement with institutions that are viewed as corrupt and prone to mistreating workers. In Colombia, exclusion from economic growth and welfare benefits has historically generated informality and precariousness (Mazzuca 2021; Mercado 2021). Colombia and Bogotá have suffered from chronic unemployment rates, which worsened due to pandemic-related lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. Colombia ranked third highest in unemployment rates among OECD countries in 2022 (República 2022), and almost half (46-48 percent) of economic activity is informal, particularly in urban

areas (DANE 2022). In Bogotá, the informal economy is estimated to account for 41 percent of economic activity (de Bogotá 2022). The creators of Drivers Club Bogotá, therefore, view platforms, and in particular their “creole” creation as tools for “winning” against a system that excludes them. In other words, they have chosen to exit (Hirschman 1970) in a context where public and private institutions are unresponsive to drivers’ needs and welfare, and informality is widespread.

Furthermore, drivers also displayed, amongst other grievances against companies like Uber, unanimous agreement in criticizing multinational platform corporations for their inadequate safety precautions, a matter of grave concern to them. Corporate entities such as Uber, particularly within the Latin American landscape, have often touted their intricate system of safety checks as a major attraction for ensuring driver safety (Uber 2015). These safety verifications encompass a wide range of areas including personal identification confirmation, documentation and vehicle status validation, thorough background examinations focusing on any criminal charges or traffic violations, a detailed analysis of the driver’s credit history, and scrutiny of job references.

On the other hand, passengers undergo virtually no security screenings apart from the rating system and the creation of an individual profile. In recent developments, features such as an emergency assistance button integrated within the platform interface, round-the-clock support for any incidents, GPS tracking, machine learning

algorithms embedded in the platform, and user verification via a linked Facebook account have been introduced to bolster safety measures (Uber 2022). All multinational ride-hailing platforms operating in Bogotá implement these security protocols.

However, these measures have been met with widespread disapproval from drivers who believe that they fall short of ensuring their safety. They point out the refusal or apparent reluctance of these platforms to enhance and augment these safety measures, prompting their allegiance with Drivers Club Bogotá. Their alliance with this organization seems to be primarily driven by their dissatisfaction with the status quo in terms of the platforms’ approach to safety. Drivers Club Bogotá, through its advocacy and collective power, aims to push for higher safety standards and more effective checks in the ride-hailing industry. As expressed by a driver:

A passenger asked me for a ride, and halfway through it started to change my route with the app, and then he pointed a gun at me and asked me to give him the money of the day and well, that day, thank God, I was starting out, and my cell phone was not stolen. When I asked Beat for help, they didn’t solve anything for me, and he was a passenger with a photo and social network and everything ... That was the final [straw], and I joined the support groups [of Drivers Club Bogotá]. At least one can warn that there is a dangerous area or describe that

person who harmed one to protect others.

To summarize, it is unequivocally apparent that drivers perceive their distinct coordination and organizational methodologies as instruments for upholding their dignity and improving their working conditions. This perception exists within a challenging environment where other reliable sources of income, safety, and welfare remain scarce or inaccessible. Such circumstances inevitably lead to a reflection on how the concept of autonomy informs a novel form of agency where individuals, exhausted from incessant protest and pleas for change, can simply exit by forging their own path and *modus operandi*.

VI. DISCUSSION

Platform drivers, including members of the Drivers Club Bogotá community, are unique, evasive entrepreneurial actors who challenge both societal and legal norms. They operate within an environment characterized by institutional frailty and a pattern of patrimonial seizure by groups seeking rent. Technologically driven civil disobedience has emerged as a vital part of this new form of agency, providing drivers with the ability to exit from the structures they interact with daily. Such a tactic significantly influences government policy in Bogotá, where legal and regulatory frameworks grapple to keep pace with swift technological and societal shifts. Additionally, platform drivers engaging

in technologically facilitated disobedience challenge corporate (state and private) models that exploit them or fail to provide adequate resources to ensure their well-being and personal and communal development.

In this context, choosing to exit from institutions, both public and private, serves as a method for individuals and communities to express their discontent, whether these institutions recognize it or not. The strength of this exit strategy lies in its act of doing. In situations where institutions prove to be ineffective or are hijacked by rent-seeking entities, traditional forms of protest or political participation may fall short in effecting change. Thus, the strategy of exit—evading the system—becomes the only viable course of action. This “exit” is more than merely leaving a job or a situation, it represents a form of resistance, a non-traditional protest in itself. It emphasizes individuals’ capacity for self-determination, wherein they shape their reality by adopting alternative means of operation, separate from what corporations prescribe. By exercising their agency, these drivers defy the conventional norms that contribute to their dissatisfaction and exploitation, instead creating new paradigms that better respect their dignity and improve their work conditions.

Such a perspective fuels a fresh approach to agency, moving away from conventional forms of protests such as strikes or collective bargaining. Instead, individuals, weary from these traditional forms of pushback, opt for a quieter but equally powerful form of protest by

shifting their actions, changing their routines, and establishing their unique mechanisms for performing tasks. This could mean finding creative ways to enhance their safety on these platforms, engaging in collaborative efforts like forming driver alliances, or even moving away from these platforms altogether and setting up their own independent operations. Thus, the desire for autonomy informs and inspires this new wave of agency, which allows drivers to reclaim control over their lives and labor in a context where they feel that traditional paths to safety, income, and well-being have failed them.

A debate might ensue regarding whether this alternative form of agency and the pursuit of “exit” falls under the scope of social or policy entrepreneurship rather than evasive entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, the deviation in the field, the attitude, and positioning of the entrepreneurial actor—in this case, platform drivers—sways the argument toward evasive entrepreneurship. Policy entrepreneurs participate in collaborative activities within and around government to spur policy developments, whereas evasive entrepreneurs break policy boundaries and may even pose a challenge to private corporations. Evasive entrepreneurship involves actors primarily focused on circumventing policies and creating organizational structures and resistance forms that were perhaps non-existent, rather than striving to reform the structures already present.

Members of Drivers Club Bogotá have turned to digital platforms to secure

a sustainable income and, more importantly, to achieve their goal of eventually operating independently. This shift in societal engagement, aimed at evading and disconnecting from both state regulations and corporate structures, holds profound implications for Colombia.

As pointed out earlier, the nation’s institutions have been usurped by rent-seeking factions, transforming them into personal estates (Mazzuca 2021; Mercado 2021). Traditional modes of political representation, participation, and demand, including social protests and rights assertion, seem ineffective for platform-based workers in cities like Bogotá. For instance, drivers creating their own “Creole” platforms show no inclination to use the political system to instigate change. Instead, they aim to exploit platform opportunities to gain influence and secure outcomes that align with their interests, by evading and exiting state and corporate systems. In essence, they are seeking exit strategies from these systems (Berg and Berg 2020; Hirschman 1970; Thierer 2020).

The drivers of Drivers Club Bogotá have rallied collectively with a goal of achieving autonomy and generating welfare alternatives, neither of which were offered by the state or the private sector. Owing to the high costs of complying with regulations and being hired by formal or regulated markets, these platform drivers were barred from them. As a result, they repurposed the platforms into tools that allowed them to bypass restrictive regulations and corporations that disregarded their needs. This formulation of the “Creole”

platform was driven by the drivers' quest for autonomy, a perspective that goes beyond the constraints imposed by both markets and states (Ostrom 2010b; Ostrom 2014; Wall 2017). The emergence of Drivers Club Bogotá offered a platform where drivers could carve out a space for autonomy and self-sufficiency, characterized by their flexible arrangements and staunch independence. By harnessing technological tools to develop alternatives for their livelihoods, they managed to create and govern a space of their own.

VII. CONCLUSION

The conduct of the drivers associated with the Drivers Club Bogotá presents an interesting study in evasive entrepreneurship. Their conduct is a process that champions autonomy, calling into question and challenging traditional institutions that have become outmoded, overly restrictive, and increasingly unresponsive to the needs, anxieties, and ambitions of ordinary people. The drivers are not merely passengers in this shifting landscape, but active participants, shaping the future of their industry. Moreover, these drivers' actions contribute to the discourse on horizontality, or the distribution of power and responsibility across all levels of an organization or community. Their initiative has led to the emergence of new opportunities for various forms of agency, with a notable emphasis on political agency. This notion of horizontal power, previously limited to academic debates,

has found practical application in the actions of these drivers.

One pivotal revelation from this study is the preference of the Drivers Club Bogotá members for self-devised systems over dependence on government bodies or major private companies, including international ride-sharing platforms. This clear preference is narrated through the drivers' experiences and reflects how technology can equip individuals with an enhanced sense of autonomy and agency. Such behavior aligns with global research that highlights the potential for communities and social movements to independently address problems and become conduits of the liberal discourse and project, as highlighted by Novak (2021). This phenomenon occurs without the intervention or assistance of state or private sectors, marking a significant shift in traditional power dynamics.

The drivers' capabilities, facilitated by technology, and their aspiration for self-governance depict a process pushing towards collective autonomy. This method proposes new types of political agency and long-lasting collective action.

In essence, drivers operating on various platforms in Bogotá are carving out and managing autonomous spaces as a direct response to government and corporate entities' perceived indifference to their concerns. By leveraging the technology provided by these platforms, drivers can evade and exit established systems, turning the limitations and inadequacies of their environment to their advantage. They employ platform technologies to circumnavigate

the restraints of their environment and establish autonomous zones where the welfare, voice, and interests of their community are at the forefront. Thus, they are not just adapting to the digital revolution, but shaping it to their advantage, forging a new path where their interests are safeguarded, their voice heard, and their autonomy respected.

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