

Functional or Cultural: Urban Belonging in Contemporary Platform Economies

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Just as there has been abundant scholarship on the industrialization of cities including city-scapes in the Global South, there is also more recent rich literature on the shift from industrialised bases to service sector urban centers. Within this ‘service sector’ transition, there is now a clear turn to (digital) *platformisation*. Despite the supposedly abstracted turn to the ‘digital’, these platforms are enabled and connected as networks through (undervalued) labour and daily practices of interpersonal work. This labour, which is perpetually in transit connect the interstitial sites of platform economies. In this turn to platformization, new hierarchies of urbanity and belonging are conceived. These are embedded in what anthropologist Ghassan Hage describes as ‘functional belonging’ – in which one belongs if s/he serves a certain ‘function’ in the changing urban center. As these forms of ‘functional belonging’ intersect with more cultural notions of belonging, these raise contradictions around who *truly* belongs in a city and how this belonging is to be gauged – through one’s function or ‘cultural’ affinity. Delving into these contradictions in contemporary ‘platform economies’ through fieldwork conducted in New Delhi and Kolkata, this paper will show how digital platforms markedly transform city-scapes and hierarchies of belonging in the new city.