Racial platform capitalism: Empire, migration and the making of Uber in London | SAGE Journals

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The critical platform studies literature has built a compelling picture of how techniques like worker (mis)classification, algorithmic management and workforce atomisation lie at the heart of how 'work on-demand via apps' actively restructure labour. Much of this emerging scholarship identifies that platform workforces are predominantly comprised of migrant and racially minoritised workers. However, few studies theorise migration and race as structuring logics of the platform model and the precarity it engenders. This paper addresses this gap by exploring how the platform economy – specifically work on-demand via apps – both shapes and is shaped by historically contingent contexts of racialisation, and their constitutive processes such as embodiment and immigration policy/rhetoric. Beyond identifying the over-representation of racial minorities in the platform economy, it argues that processes of racialisation have been crucial at every stage of the platform economy's rise to dominance, and therefore constitutes a key organising principle of platform capitalism – hence the term 'racial platform capitalism'. In doing so, this paper draws on the racial capitalism literature, to situate key platform techniques such as worker (mis)classification and algorithmic management as forms of racial practice, deployed to (re-)organise surplus urban labour-power following the 2008 financial crisis. This framework will be explored through an ethnographic study of Uber's rise in London. Through this, the paper demonstrates a co-constitutive relationship, where the conditions of minoritised workers in a global city like London post-2008, and the political economy of platform companies can be said to have co-produced one another.

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