

BOOK REVIEW

Invisible Migrant Nightworkers in 24/7 London, IMISCOE Research Series.

Julius-Cezar MacQuarie, 2023: Springer. Cham, 259 pages, ISBN 978-3-031-36185-2, 130,79 Euro (hardcover), 39,99 Euro (softcover)

In many cities over the world, people travel every night to work the ‘graveyard shift’. This book is about them: The invisible nightworkers who are marginalised by the daytime society and obscured by darkness. This fascinating book brings the field of migration studies, labour studies and night studies together. Many, but not all, of the nightworkers are migrants that have to escape the mechanisms that regulate who enters in what sector of the labour market. Especially, undocumented migrants are attracted by night work because of the advantage of being invisible from immigration controls, tax office and also because of the lack of language obstructions in most of the night jobs. MacQuarie describes how the urban economy of London drives on nightwork. An important argument he makes in the book is how rejection of this group and tolerance happen hand in hand and this claim goes beyond London.

The paradox, earlier described in more general terms by Suzi Hall (2021), reflects the situation that migrants who perform essential work at night are considered disposable yet indispensable. They are seen as a threat, denied access to social rights, but half tolerated for supporting the economy. This book subscribes to the understanding that migrant workers are politically rejected and accused of swamping the labour market, but economically they are ‘the half welcome migrants’ who keep 24/7 cities on their back.

MacQuarie proposes to include the idea of glocturnal cities into Saskia Sassen’s conceptualisation of global cities (1991) in order to recognise the continuous demands for 24/7 work/leisure/nightlife in global cities. It is not entirely clear how this should be included in

the conceptualisation but the acknowledgement of the essential nature of nightwork for global cities is convincing. Migrant night workers inhabit a peculiar location in the geography of glocturnal cities. They live in opposite rhythms to mainstream society which makes them invisible to friends, unavailable for family and absent in the minds of those working in day organisations in charge of regulating other forms of work. An important conceptual contribution to the field is that MacQuarie discusses precarity not only as a socio-political approach but also as an epistemological position to describe a set of processes that inflict onto every aspect of one’s life such as the social, biological, physical and the psychological.

Apart from a great topic, an innovative method is applied in this book, the nightnography (night ethnography). This method of data collection adds important knowledge and insights to the field of night studies as it does not only focus on the labouring of workers but also of the nightnographer. The author of the book worked himself nightshifts as a loader at the new Spitalfields market in London. Bodily consequences of precariousness that are hard to explain in conversation are made clear through descriptions by the author of the tracked distances he walked during night shifts, descriptions of pains and aches, the hours he slept, the time spent on commuting but also vivid descriptions of tiredness. By reading the book you will learn that the time from 2 to 4 am at night, referred to as nadir, is the most difficult time frame for human bodies, it is when bodies are at lowest level of activity. The author often feels weak at that time of the night and suffers from loss of balance, illustrating that nightshifts are not only tiring, but also more risky to accidents than day shifts. Another example is the description of the nightshift jetlag, defined as a social form of jetlag. It is a tiredness that goes beyond the physical felt by people in industrialised societies as it is also very much impacting your

social life and functioning. Nightworkers live in precariousness because of the low pay and bad working conditions but also because they grow more isolated from mainstream society and alienated from their families.

Nightwork seemed to be about the freedom to choose how and when one worked. Yet, even after several years of nightshifts at New Spitalfields night market very few of the workers portrayed in this book had reached a level where they were afforded that degree of independence. Capitalism normalises nightwork, but it is argued that it disregards precarity. Capitalism also refuses to recognise/find solutions for problems nightwork pose. Even though MacQuarie found through his study that capitalism learns how to enact competition and not collaboration and that it is difficult to organise collective action with nightworkers he *did* manage to organise actions and produce a charter for nightworkers. He also produced a film on Romanian nightshift workers in London and a podcast (NightWorkPod) to raise awareness to the conditions of nightworkers. A clear aim of the book is to visibilise nightworkers and raise awareness of the problems with nightwork.

The book is an important plea for more research on nightwork in global cities. In a special issue on geographies of the night I edited myself almost 10 years ago (van Liempt *et al.* 2015) nightwork was not even addressed and I realise this is a serious flaw. I would highly recommend this book as an excellent resource not only for researchers in the field of migration, labour studies, globalisation and night studies but also for experts in the field of labour migration and labour regulation.

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