Romanian and Turkish Migrants Working in London’s Night Economy: Invisible People of the Nocturnal City?

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CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES
TIGY ROOM | 09:30 – 12:30 | 24.03.2014
'If a country, firm or individual does not adapt to the 24/7 time culture, there will be a price to pay. It is no longer a case of ‘the early bird catches the worm’; it is the sleepless bird that does so!'\(^1\)

Dear colleagues,

My presentation will cover the following themes:

1. The Case: Romanians and Turks in London’s night economy
2. The Literature: and why the people of the nocturnal city remain largely ignored
3. Theoretical Challenges: Proposal for anthropology of nocturnal work

In the next couple of pages, I summarise briefly my case to introduce you to my research topic. During the presentation, I aim to unravel some of the theoretical quests that I have been engaging with in the past few months since I started my PhD. And I will address some of the challenges ahead, mainly focused on the fieldwork plans, due to start in October 2014.

I hope to offer you a few entry points to kick off a productive and intellectually engaging discussion, worthwhile of your time. I am very much looking forward to seeing you at the next CPS seminar.

Many thanks,

Cezar

My study aims to describe, analyse and problematize the situation of Romanians and Turks in London’s night economy. It builds upon research that I carried out during my research masters, and furthers the project’s aims by comparing in great depth the experiences of European citizens (Romanians) with those of third-country nationals (Turks) working nights against the backdrop of the emerging social inequalities in the context of globalisation – as in the process of colonising the world after dark.

Over the last three years, I have consistently carried out nocturnal ethnographic fieldwork in London, which is an innovative method of data collection because it allows access to hard-to-reach population that otherwise would not be reached via the usual diurnal ethnographic method.

One premise of this study is that for London to have a 24 hour society, mini cab and bus drivers, market traders, night staff in hospitals or cafes, city traders, firemen, entertainers, sex workers and night cleaners working long nights in London. A second premise is that London’s night workers are by and large migrants working unsociable hours, low paid jobs, and sometimes in dangerous conditions. Thus, the study departs from and complements a research tradition that focused on nightlife themes and examines nightwork.

It is along these lines that I aim to explore London’s night economy and see whether there are particular groups (minorities, immigrants) who inhabit the night more than others, in order to explore some of the most tangible and pressing inequalities that Romanian and Turkish migrant face while working nights in London. The aim is to portray the voices, descriptions and evidence coming through the unfolding lives of these night workers, in a way that Howard S. Becker calls it ‘telling about society’ through combining the participants’ words with the field notes and my own observations as in Teresa Gowan’s approach. And by using the case of Romanian and Turkish citizens working in London’s night economy, I aim to build up to what Douglas Harper, argues to be ‘one of the jobs of using cases – to delimit boundaries’. Namely, building up theories on night worker communities in London, that help us ‘see the most sociologically meaningful boundaries of cases and their complications’ (1992, p. 219).

Based on this strategy and against these considerations, I will shape the provisional conceptual framework starting from asking the following inter-connected research questions to compare:

- How are inequalities reflected in the social and family lives of Romanian and Turkish night workers in London, and what inequalities family lives reveal?

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• Through what other nocturnal activities practiced by nightshift workers could inequalities be revealed? And,
• Whether the night workers are the segment of what ‘now constitutes a permanent “outside” of capitalism’⁴ or they are at the very centre of neoliberal capitalism accumulation?

By the end of the discussion on the definitions and terminology, I hope to have build-up a provisional framework for problematizing issues around night work as well as finding a common language to discuss any provisional outcomes in terms of how individual experiences of night workers are reflected in the social and family lives of Romanians and Turks working the London nightshift, i.e. at this stage, discuss only differences and similarities amongst Romanians, EU citizens with full rights to work legally in Europe, compared to the Turkish night workers who enter European countries on a visa permit, and therefore are more likely to enter the unseen night sector of the UK job market.

References

Becker, Howard Saul, Telling about society, Chicago guides to writing, editing, and publishing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).


Gowan, Teresa, and ebrary, Inc, Hobos, hustlers, and backsliders : homeless in San Francisco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
