

N!GHTWORKPOD

EP03

REFLECTIONS from RESEARCHING the NIGHTSHIFT

CREATOR | PRODUCER:

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GUEST:

Dr Marion Roberts, Emeritus Professor, Westminster University, London | UK

PEOPLE: Operations Manager, Professor,
Outreach Workers, Sex Workers, Fire Fighters

PLACES: London (UK) | Budapesta (HU) | Sofia (BG)

CHRONOLOGICAL PERIODS:

Contemporary

THEORETICAL APPROACHES:

Ethnographic theory

TOPICS:

Night-Time Economy
Capitalism, Globalisation
Transnational Migration
Sexual & Public Health
Bodily Rhythms
Circadian Rhythms
Safety, Fire Fighting

DISCIPLINES:

Social Anthropology, Sociology

UNIT:

Centre of Policy Studies

You're listening to the NightWorkPod. I'm Julius-Cezar Macquarie, and I am an anthropologist. NightWorkPod is a Podcast about the invisible lives of nightshift workers. In this episode, I reflect on the lessons learnt whilst podcasting about experiences of London's 'other workers' invested in the nightshift. Though not exclusively, most of those people working the nightshift are migrants, and males. In these series, I tried to address the gender-sensitive issues and show that in my research I have met and spoken to women as well as men. This is dependant of the job sector. I found that more men work in construction, bus driving, fire services; Also that women are working in ambulance services, supporting the marginalised, in addiction services and soup kitchens, but they remain unnoticed. Whilst in most part London is asleep at night, the 'other workers' are up, yet they are invisible from the diurnals' consciousness, out of political debates, and last but not least, from migration scholarship and from globalisation and critical labour studies.

Traditionally and in colonial contexts, anthropologists studied the 'other' in societies different from the western civilisation. The research behind this podcasts series aligns with the efforts made by social scientists who study the 'other' in our own, western societies. These 'other' are more often than not labelled as migrants or marginalised groups from the majority group and invisible from the eyes and minds of the latter. This kind of research emphasises on entering and portraying the world from the own perspective of the people inhabiting the night, facing struggles or simply living on the opposite hours with fellows living and working in the same hemisphere or on same time zone. Guests invited on the NightWorkPod talked about their experiences, which I grouped in three themes. First, is that night shift workers, migrants or locals, do something together but not with one another. Second, I found that night workers became bio-automatons whose physical resources were depleted by the precarious working conditions. And third, by and large, the 'other workers' who keep the city going round-the-clock are migrants invisible from the mainstream societies.

In the first episode of this series, anthropologist Ger Duijzings, explained that there is an emphasis on diurnal methods in social science research. For this reason, he founded the nightlaboratory - a research blog interested in the political economy of the nocturnal city. The method that he and I used is reversing the classical approach to capture the lives of those awake and alert at night. For months at a time, I have been exploring since 2012 how night workers live on opposite rhythms in a nocturnal city that never sleeps. Workers that I spoke to, shadowed and performed with whilst working in the New Spitalfields night market describe something that is at the same time universal and unique. Their stories share to a degree a sense of being invisible. A hotel auditor in East London, for example, could never attend the Christmas dues because the day staff always arranged these events in the evenings when he prepared for the night shift. His night manager, however, preferred to work at

night because he was able to take care of their children, take them to and pick the kids from school in the afternoons. He saw his wife for two hours a day when she returned from work, and was able to take a few hours sleep before the night shift. We heard in episode two a similar story from Phil, a fire fighter born and bred in London. He was also involved in the upbringing of his two boys, though due to the nature of his job he was unable to be present at all important moments of his children's lives, like school parents' meetings or birthdays.

I found across the board that night workers were not equally concerned about the impact of night shift work on their health. Though they spoke about how little sleep they got before a night shift, they did not see it as a cause for depleting their bodily resources. I begun to form an idea that is best illustrated through the model of a bio-automaton. Human bodies travelling at night to work, and often commuting when the rest of the city sleeps, have limited routes of transport and modes of travel through the city. Besides long hours of travelling, the night shifts often extend beyond the legally allowed eight to twelve hours per night. Yet managing authorities do not inspect as expected how many hours the workers travail on a particular site. They also do not intervene on sites where privately owned businesses exploit the bodies turned into bio-automatons. For example, in eight months of loading fruits and vegetables, I accumulated pains and soars in my body that would last long after I finished my doctoral fieldwork, in 2015. Many of my co-workers also complained of physical pains. I saw it as a consequence of intensified labour - long night shift hours that stretched into the day, and sometimes till noon. Combined, the physicality of manual labour would cause men and women to leave the market and take a break to rest. That strategy only worked as long as these workers had reserves. However, many were migrants and in most cases they were the only bread winner - the rest of family depended on their remittances, if abroad, or to cover household expenses if the whole family lived in the UK. These workers do not have health insurance, annual leave or sick pay to cover their absence from work. Soon, they would return to the bio-automaton life - 11-16 hour shifts, six nights a week, paid under the minimum wage, and without any contractual security. The latter however, is a very present theme among the precariat - a term coined by sociologist Guy Standing, describing a group of people in precarious working and living conditions alienated from the rest of society, living in anger, anxiety and despair. The four A's ascribed by Professor Standing are: A for anxiety, A for anger, A for anomie and A for alienation apply to many bio-automatons working the night shift I have met.

Precarious working conditions do not limit to night shift work sectors. White collar workers in many fields are subject to fragmentation into zero hour contracts, or flexi, short-term contracts and poorly remunerated. Hence, a lecturer in Budapest on a short-term, one-year contract cannot accept a teaching fellowship which en-

tails that she flies to the US every two weeks to teach when her salary does not even cover her kids' nursery fees. That is why, I think, we are living in a neoliberal context that invades the lives of precarious workers who cannot buy solutions, like in the example of the mother and lecturer that I have just given. Though precarious too, this type of concerns are of similar importance, but of different qualitative nature - that means in fragmented working environments you find fragmented workers, alienated from those working on long-term contracts, and whilst working together on short-term projects, they do not work with one another. Because working on short-term projects does not produce long-term relationships of cooperation. Some women working the night shift, told me that they feel isolated from diurnal society and find that working at the night market is more than making coffee sales, it has a social dimension. Because working at night is often thought for lonely persons, she says. She met many men working at night whose wives broke-up their marital relationships because their men were never at home. In her role, as a waiter, many men would come to her to talk about their intimate experiences. I too found that cleaners in Victoria station, a Tesco night manager, or a hotel receptionist would talk about their intimate lives in detail - more often than not, this was the rewarding part of doing research at night. Nocturnal research is a lonely experience.

In the second episode, Georgina Perry, a Public Health Practitioner, remembers that London used to sleep two decades ago. Not nowadays. London's rhythms beat 24/7. The beat is kept in tune by the night workers who ensure underground runs smoothly at night for the night-life goers and revellers travelling to the West-End entertainment venues where artists and bar tenders keep the shows going. These people who work on various shifts, like Phil the fire fighter, reported that they never got used to working the night shift. Though night work requires a greater investment by the workers awake and alert at night, Phil thinks that the remuneration often does not meet their expectations and sacrifices they do in order to better their lives to keep the city alive during the night.

I found during my doctoral research that there are gross inequalities thriving among night workers, which remain unaddressed by local authorities. The Greater London Authority has only recently commissioned research projects run by its Economics department to establish the issues around night shifters and their working conditions. But the research lacks in specific demographics about night workers. Questions such as why and who are these people up and working the night shift remain unanswered. Scholars like Dr Marion Roberts, Emeritus Professor in Urban Design has conducted many projects on London's Evening and Night-Time Economy. She brings to light many issues that are under researched, such as gender equality reporting, and health and pay gap inequalities.

Dr Roberts says that it is not only the doctors and nurses, but workers in other job sectors, especially if they are migrants, they suffer from the lack of regulation of the night

shift. She also talks at large about the gross inequalities and poor working conditions of Uber workers and other night shift workers trapped in the gig economy. This episode, contains only an excerpt of the entire conversation we had in Sofia. For full interview please go @nightsparkslab on SoundCloud. Also, An excerpt from the interview with our guest, Marion Roberts, Emeritus Professor in Urban Design at the University of Westminster offers insights into the problematics with night-time expansion in London. For the full interview go to @nightsparkslab on SoundCloud. Some of her important work on informed and shaped the Greater London Authority's policy and vision of London as a 24-hour City - 24-hour London - and subsequent publication, From Good Night to Great Night: A Vision For London as a 24-hour City. For full-text click http://bit.ly/LENTE_report2018

In making this series of podcasts about working the night shift I aimed to raise awareness of issues that need addressing in a 24/7 society relying on the workers trapped in its gig economy. The podcast series follows my efforts to disseminate the findings to the academic community, via conferences, working papers, and journal articles. I also used documentary making tool to reach out to political actors, policy makers and stake holders who have the power to improve the lives of night workers and the issues around isolation, health inequalities, fragmentation and lack of cooperation amongst night shift workers to unionise and demand their rights to decent work. As well as the two short films, this podcast series aims to raise awareness among the non-academic audiences, the critical public. The public needs to know that nightlife goes choosing to move across London at night with Uber paying only £30, it only happens because these drivers accept below fair and just working conditions and poorer pay. Equally, local authorities and larger institutions need to hire less agencies and bring in-house workers on direct employment contracts. For example, more campaigns like the one at Goldsmiths University to bring cleaners in-house on direct contracts that offer proper working conditions similar to staff university should follow suit. To redress the balance between the negative and positive aspects of night-time economy expansion in London, local authority needs to take lead in reinstating the rights of workers that keep the city going round-the-clock. Also, as Dr Marion Roberts says, expanding art house cinemas across London is terrific, but the negative side is that it happens at the expense of workers' pay, which is poor who are currently in dispute with the respective establishments.

Last, but not least, a positive message for London residents is that safety of the city is offered not only during the day, but also at night despite of some feeling uneasy during darkness. To all listeners of the NightWorkPod, London is an open city not only to the young night revellers and party goers, but also to other ages willing to venture into the nocturnal rhythms. To the day creatures listening to this podcast, I would like to close this episode and this series by reminding them of an old saying in the context of glocturnal cities. It is no longer the "early bird that catches

the worm, but the sleepless one". In this vein, the price paid by the armies of sleepless workers highlights grosser inequalities between day and night workers, gender gaps in both pay and access to job sectors commonly thought as male dominated.

You've been listening to nightworkpod, a podcast about working the nightshift. Nightworkpod is produced by me, Julius-Cezar MacQuarie. I created the first series of nightworkpod between London and Budapest. Please tune in for our next series in which the people working the night shift, meet the researchers and writers who explores those lives.

