
BOOK REVIEW

Marginalised lives, centralised topics

Hann, C. & Parry, J. (Eds.) (2018) *Industrial labor on the margins of capitalism: Precarity, class and the neoliberal subject*. Berghahn

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There is a connecting link between the chapters in this volume: the (neoliberal?) industrial worker in their different social, political, historical and cultural contexts. It is almost as if the authors agreed on telling the story of the same actor over and over again, drawing, however, attention to the 'ethnographies of the particular' by meticulously describing the variety of settings and storylines through which the particular circumstances and occasionally very different emotions and alternate possible outcomes become visible. Despite the particularities, however, the stories are inevitably connected by the central figure, the precariously (un)employed labouring subject, who is present through the miners of Zambia (Lee) or Kazakhstan (Kesküla), through the self-employed (women) workers of the Trinidad garment industry (Prentice) or the informal or regular workers of the Tiruppur garment region in India, through the steel workers (whether 'precariat' or 'salarariat') of Bulgaria (Kofti) or Egypt (Makram-Ebeid).

The volume contains fourteen ethnographic accounts in which the particular precarious experiences of workers in heavy and textile/garment industries are described in detail and analysed. We can read ethnographies of mining industries in Lee's and Kesküla's accounts, of steel industries in Trevisani, Kofti, Strümpell, Rudnyckyj, Makram-Ebeid, Sanchez's texts, studies about the ship-building and automotive industries in Schober's and in Morris and Hinz's chapters. The particular precariousnesses of the textile and garment industries are described in Craswell and De Neve's and in Prentice's analyses respectively, whereas Fang and Hoffmann's chapters focus on workers in general from their respective field sites in China and Nepal.

The chapters all touch on, analyse and challenge in varying degrees the three main concepts revealed in the subtitle, which are introduced in detail by Jonathan Parry in the Introduction, namely precarity, class and the neoliberal subject. Precarity is analysed in three respects: whether the regular (salary) worker is/was historically and cross-culturally the norm; whether the precariat can be understood as a class and whether the concept of class is useful at all in studying workers in precarious conditions; and whether the neoliberal subject is intrinsically precarious, or the precarious worker is a neoliberal subject if we accept the premise that 'in a world created by the neoliberal economy, most people are prevented from becoming anything like a "proper" neoliberal subject' (p. 33).

One of the main tensions felt in the increasing precariousness of industry workers is, in fact, the tension of the changing (often waning) relationships between the generations. This includes generations in the family and generations of workers, connecting points in lines of succession and (re)production. The change is important in its radicality, in its effect on the very fundamental aspect of continuity that is immanent to the concept (from the Latin *generatio*, going back to Latin *generare*, 'bringing into being'). Generations in the current (post)industrial, global capitalist, neoliberal contexts simply stop being the connecting point between past and future in a reality where fragmentation (another aspect of the new buzz-word *flexibility*) becomes the norm. Fragmentation – a main trait of neoliberal economies – however, produces precarious workers, 'and precarity', as Parry notes, 'is inimical to planning for the future, and encourages clientelism and dependence on family support' (p. 32). The tension, thus, is especially present in industrial and post-industrial settings, where the impossibility to follow in the footsteps of the previous (worker-class) generation creates loops of dependency, where the younger generation depends on the family for sustenance and education in hopes of a better future (Kesküla, Trevisani, Strümpell, Craswell and De Neeve, Hoffmann), but at the same time, the (older generation of) core industry workers depend on the strata of precarious, disposable workforce (who are often their own children) to strengthen or maintain their stable positions (Kesküla, Makram-Ebeid; Parry quoting Parry, 2009 and 2013, on p.7). I believe that youth in (post)industrial settings are often constrained by very different (fragmented, crumbling, often strikingly incoherent) experiences of the past and different understandings of the future than their parents and elders, and I believe that studies focusing on their views would add different understandings to *what* and *how* the precariat is.

Growing anthropological attention is turned toward industrial communities on the peripheries and toward the ever-more precarious industrial worker in a time when the economy is increasingly turning toward 'knowledge-based industries' (Goddard, 2017), and in a time when industrial realities are becoming *post*-industrial, i.e. mere memories of stable, wealthy lifestyles workers *could* and *did* have. This heightened interest now in these aspects of society and the economy can be an incentive to consider whether anthropology is intrinsically *salvage* anthropology in that it continues to focus on peoples and communities that are being lost or somehow radically changed, or whether anthropology is inherently a social science that strives to understand humanness, economics and social realities by focusing almost exclusively on 'studying down', on the ever-expanding and (re)producing margins and the marginalised.

It is interesting how this volume and the one edited by Susana Narotzky and Victoria Goddard (2017) do not seem to communicate with one another, when they both bring new insights to the conversation, for example about precarity, about the effects of the global capitalist economy on industrial production, and about understanding change and continuity in worlds increasingly dominated by neoliberal thought. I credit this to being published on dates so close to each other, but for a reader interested in industry on the margins of capitalism and in the precarious worker, I would suggest reading them interchangeably, in a conversation, or simply one after the other, and to read the vivid ethnographies through the lens of the two differing analytical approaches.

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