

Book Review: Neoliberal Capitalism and Precarious Work: Ethnographies of Accommodation and Resistance by Rob Lambert & Andrew Herod, eds

Misty Luminais

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Lambert, Rob, and Andrew Herod, eds. *Neoliberal Capitalism and Precarious Work: Ethnographies of Accommodation and Resistance*. Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2016. xii + 336 pages. Hardcover, \$145.00.

The editors of *Neoliberal Capitalism and Precarious Work: Ethnographies of Accommodation and Resistance*, Rob Lambert and Andrew Herod, have pulled together a collection of articles focusing on precarious work through the lens of ethnography (interpreted broadly). The contributors hail from sociology, geography, anthropology, and labor relations. Most are academics in Europe, the United States, or Australia, and one comes from a place of practice in the Homeworkers Worldwide labor movement. This breadth of discipline and geography facilitates the anthology's meta-narrative about the need for labor movements to expand beyond localized concerns to combat the global nature of neoliberalism.

The Global North means of organizing labor might have worked well (for some people) with the Fordist model of production, but it is insufficient to counter neoliberal capitalism's fracturing of the workforce as it seeks ever greater profits. Labor is moved to countries with the cheapest workforce or with the least number of labor restrictions, and in cases where labor cannot be displaced geographically, such as the service sector (including cleaning services and construction work), services are subcontracted in many layers so that the relationship between the employer and the employee is obfuscated and diffuse. The majority of workers worldwide do not have continuous, predictable employment with wages that meet their needs to survive, much less thrive. Work depends on the vagaries of the market as companies attempt to meet the just-in-time model of production in order to increase profits as much as possible. As a response to neoliberal capitalism, the editors frame the book in such a way as to "stretch the political imagination as to the nature of such a movement [to reimagine social and economic relationships] and strategies to build such a force" (p. 305).

The anthology's backbone is its ethnographic perspective that allows the reader to follow the articles not only from the particular circumstances of specific workers to international webs of relationships, but also to the impact of neoliberal capitalism on the very Earth itself. This switch in perspective is necessary for ethnography to expand beyond a collection of local experiences to highlighting similar conditions upon which to build solidarity. Geographically diverse, representing research from five continents, the authors do an outstanding job of relating how precarity impacts workers in a myriad of ways that are both relatable and situated in their own contexts. Many of the articles focus on innovative responses that go beyond typical union organizing, including Hattatoğlu and Tate's article highlighting the organization of homeworkers in Turkey. This union recognizes all work done in the home, including work performed by women that reproduces the labor force and brings in financial resources to the household (traditionally discounted as wives' 'pin money'). The gender of the workers, almost entirely women, has influenced the structure of the union. It reflects the lack of hierarchy desired by the women and the expansiveness of issues that affect the women, such as opposition to war taking

place along their country's borders. Cock and Lambert bring environmentalism into their theory of labor and capital, linking the exploitation and poisoning of the earth directly to the experience of workers and their families who live in the surrounding area. Garvey and Barreto also include environmentalism in their work, although from a different perspective—that is, the green economy does not escape the practices of neoliberal capitalism. Cane workers in Brazil suffer exploitation and precarity even as corporations congratulate themselves for shifting from fossil fuels to ethanol.

By utilizing a broad definition of precarious work, the editors have created a framework in which disparate labor conditions can be linked and analyzed. The ghosts of Marx and Engels (*The Communist Manifesto*, 1848) haunt this book: 'The growing competition among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crisis, make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The increasing improvements of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious.' At times, the book feels like a relentless account of horrendous conditions; however, there are glimmers of hope as the authors explore how people are resisting neoliberal capitalism (some more successfully than others). Labor has been slow to catch up with capitalist leaders. As the cold logic of capitalism reduces everyone and everything to profit margins, solidarity across borders, languages, and job titles may be the only response that does not resemble an organized retreat for a few protected workers by sacrificing their less-protected brethren.

All social scientists and students can benefit from this book, as its multidisciplinary nature calls us to remember that there is no discreet geography without economics, labor, or sociology, and vice versa. The judicious use of ethnography demonstrates that complex phenomena cannot be reduced to numbers. Policymakers in government, union organizers, and workers can benefit from the theories presented here that encourage people to look beyond profitability and expand their perspectives beyond their nation or industry. Finally, as academics, we are forced to examine our own institutions. As more universities outsource integral jobs, such as custodial and information technology work, not to mention the tenuous existence of adjuncts and researchers funded through soft money, we are not immune to this phenomenon. The implicit question is "How complicit are we in the neoliberal capitalist enterprise?"

Misty Luminais, Ph.D.
Senior Research Associate
Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education
Jack, Joseph & Morton Mandel School for Applied Social Sciences
Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, Ohio