

Regulating the Night: Race, Culture, and Exclusion in the Making of the Night-time Economy. Deborah Talbot. Hampshire, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2007. 156 pages. £50.00 (Hardback)

For more than a decade there has been a growing body of research focusing on the development of nighttime economies and their consumption spaces by local city governments and commercial actors as a means of urban growth and downtown regeneration and revitalization. Although much of this work focuses on the United Kingdom, these studies have greatly contributed to our overall understanding of the political economy of contemporary postindustrial cities. In her new book, Deborah Talbot highlights the impacts that reforms of nightlife regulation have on local subcultures, with major racial, cultural, and class implications. Talbot's book develops the overall fields of subcultural studies and urban regulation and provides urban scholars examining the nighttime economy with several important concepts upon which to build further analyses.

Talbot uses conditions within "Southview," a pseudonym for a black (Afro-Caribbean) area in London, to examine the dynamics of this strategy of regenerating urban spaces. Talbot's central aim is to show "the interrelationship between socio-cultural change and regulatory regimes" (132). In examining the politics of exclusion in the nighttime economy, Talbot uses the captivating concepts of the "outsider area" and the "front line." For several decades Southview boasted a strong black nightlife culture within a largely informal nighttime economy in the form of shebeens (parties in various spaces and places), squats, and working-class pubs. Representing an "outsider" subculture, this form of nightlife within spaces that were unregulated by the police or licensing authorities aided in "othering" the area. This "edgy" reputation of danger and transgression attracted bohemian residents into Southview in the 1980s. In the 1990s, however, the marginalized area became a site of interest for local developers and city planners who considered it to be a territory with a "front line" or center of illicit activity that must be fought over and won. The resulting gentrification created numerous cultural conflicts along class lines and saw the development of a "legitimate" nighttime economy that catered to the white middle-class and excluded the black nightlife cultures and activities that had existed in the area.

Regulatory mechanisms, namely policing and licensing, had to change in order to facilitate this nighttime development. In her two most convincing chapters Talbot outlines the deregulation of licensing and closing times and a standardization of the licensing process in order to regenerate the area's nighttime economy. The police, meanwhile, began to target venues that did not comply with new regulatory policies, such as spatial control through private security. Venues for black nightlife, which were already largely excluded from the formal nighttime economy, found themselves under investigation by the police. Black nightlife culture in Southview was the victim of continuous, exclusionary institutional racism while a new nighttime social order emerged.

Talbot furthers our understanding of the governance of urban nightlife and reveals the complexity and culturally damaging nature of such regeneration strategies. Rather than a top-down dynamic in which local governments and corporate entities consciously attempt to transform an area and impose a radically different sociocultural order, developments in Southview were much more complex. Southview's nighttime economy involved disparate actors who were often at odds with each other but nonetheless drove the area towards gentrification. Talbot's work also demonstrates the importance of viewing these processes through the lenses of race, culture, and class. Talbot champions alternative spaces and working-class nightlife cultures for their spontaneity and potential as spaces of political and cultural resistance and sees their criminalization and colonization as destructive and troubling.

Despite these contributions, the book suffers from some methodological flaws, beginning with an incomplete description of the area under study. The reader gets only a vague conception of the area and its sociospatial characteristics. We do not know its size or layout, its exact demographics (racial and ethnic composition, income levels, etc.), whether or not it is a neighborhood in the sense that residents see it as a "community," or what the main sites and spaces of contention such as venues, streets, and sidewalks look like and how they are arranged and where they are located within the area. This is especially problematic considering Talbot often states that Southview has a well-known notoriety as an "outsider area" and has a "front line" that is both conceptual and spatial. Also, Talbot says that she interviewed eight licensees from six of the area's venues, but does not say how many total venues are in Southview, whether or not they increased or decreased over time, or what types of venues they are (pub, club, etc.). We also get a limited picture of the shebeens and other "alternative" nighttime spaces and "outsider" nightlife cultures. This diminishes her discussion of the sociocultural environment of the reforms.

Secondly, although she conducted a significant amount of participant observation and even lived in the area on two occasions, Talbot does not explicitly mention any fieldwork in the text, leaving some of her claims without a foundation of evidence. She seemingly takes her informants' statements from her interviews at face value without any inquiry into whether or not they have any basis in the social realities of the spaces she is studying. Furthermore, she admits that her visitation of venues was limited by personal preferences, stating, "If the venues in Southview had been more interesting, however, sacrifices might have been made" (32). This judgment of Southview's consumption spaces does not just necessitate further explanations and analyses. It also reveals a moral position that impedes a complete examination of the area's nighttime environment. As a result of this decision, she does not take the reader "inside" the spaces of Southview's nighttime economy, leaving us without an understanding of how these cultural and regulatory processes play out in actual space and time.

Lastly, the book contains a number of grammatical and printing errors, which not only detract from the reading experience but more importantly weaken the overall work and its arguments.

On the surface these concerns may seem like minor quibbles. But they reveal how much more analytically complex this case is. A closer examination of the spatial dynamics of the area would illuminate these fundamental transformative processes of the nighttime economy and help guide the reader through what is already a complex and confusing scene.

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