

# **Undergraduate Research Assistantship Report 2024**

## **Project**

Through the Undergraduate Research Assistantship programme, I had the amazing opportunity to work alongside Professor Paul Apostolidis on his upcoming book on the dynamics of night time labour in contemporary capitalism. I assisted in the book chapter on the racial dynamics of night work, which analyses the experience of Latino Amazon warehouse workers in the Inland Empire in California through the lenses of racial capitalism. The logistics industry in the IE has been growing exponentially, and is now a major employer of the working class Latino population that live in the area. The exploration in the chapter is based on interviews that Professor Apostolidis conducted with workers in the logistics industry on their experience of working at night. The interviews focus on the workers' physical safety, mental wellbeing and their resources for social reproduction.

Workers' testimonies highlight the exhaustion they feel during their work hours and beyond them, which often leads them to use substances in a desperate attempt to stay awake. Their health often deteriorates as they rely on processed foods, caffeine or illicit substances for energy, while being unable to seek medical help as doctors appointments fall within their hours of sleep. As they try to counteract their natural circadian rhythms, many workers also expressed difficulties with sleeping at the end of a shift, even though they felt physical exhaustion. These circumstances put workers under a "zombie-like" state where work accidents are more likely to happen. Many discuss the injuries they incurred during their shifts and how dangerous warehouses can be, particularly if they are not in a mental state that enables them to pay close attention to their surroundings.

Most workers employed at the Amazon warehouses are young, and many are students. They report feeling prematurely old due to a lack of sleep and free time to enjoy the activities other college students engage in. A similar sentiment is highlighted by Marx on his analysis of the working day, in which he describes young workers as "prematurely old and short-lived".

Simultaneously, workers report an increasing sense of loneliness when working the night shift. They regret being unable to meet friends and family frequently due to conflicting schedules, and some report a deterioration of their social skills. Even the degree of socialization at work is reduced because tiredness inhibits conversation between colleagues, and workers opt for going on their phones and keeping to themselves during breaks.

## **My experience and research**

Professor Apostolidis ensured that I was involved in all stages of the process of research conduction, from data collection to interview analysis. I started by transcribing an interview of an Amazon warehouse worker partly conducted in Spanish, and preparing its transcript for thematic analysis.

As I demonstrated interest in the thematic analysis of the interviews, Professor Apostolidis taught me how to conduct this type of analysis and encouraged me to go through the interviews myself, even though this task was not initially stipulated as work for the project's research assistant. This experience exemplifies the Professor's willingness to teach and commitment to make sure the work assigned to students is compatible with their interests. So, I had the chance to analyse 10 interviews to find common themes that were paradigmatic of the experience of working the night shift in warehouses in California. Professor Apostolidis also provided me with resources and literature on racial capitalism so I could incorporate insights from this literature into the interview analysis. The inputs from this analysis were used by Professor Apostolidis in presentations about this project as well as on the book chapter draft.

In parallel, I collected empirical data published by government agencies and academic researchers to establish the main empirical trends in night work since the 1990s, primarily within the UK and the US. There are not many resources readily available on these trends, but I found questions on work schedules in representative population surveys. So, I used the data collected by the American Time Use Survey to create a dataset that documented the number of workers working during evening and night since the 2000s. This task involved data merging and cleaning using Stata, and allowed for a visualisation of the evolution of night work by year, industry and worker demographic in the US.

I also cleaned, collected and organized data on workers in the logistics industry in the US, California and counties within the Inland Empire. I found data on demographic indicators, including race, ethnicity, gender and age, as well as job titles of workers. This data showed that white workers are disproportionately represented in management positions in the industry, while workers of colour and Latino workers primarily occupy lower paid positions, which showcases the racial dynamics present in warehouses. The data concerning Amazon facilities mirrors these trends.

Finally, I conducted some literature reviews on the evolution of night work in agriculture as a strategy for workers to protect themselves from increasingly hot temperatures. This work will inform the book chapter on the dynamics between night work and climate change.

I greatly valued being involved in a variety of different tasks, thanks to Professor Apostolidis flexibility and encouragement. Very often, important RA work can be tedious due to its repetitive nature, but my work on the project remained exciting and stimulating all throughout the year because I could switch between different kinds of analysis, and practice both my qualitative and quantitative skills. The knowledge and experience I gained through the project will be invaluable as I progress in my academic career.

