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Aramayona, B. orcid.org/0000-0002-4687-8500 and Guarneros-Meza, V. orcid.org/0000-0002-4147-147X (2023) The 'in/formal nocturnal city': updating a research agenda on nightlife studies from a Southern European perspective. *Urban Studies*. ISSN 0042-0980

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980231188512>

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The 'In/formal Nocturnal City': Updating a research agenda on nightlife studies from a Southern European perspective

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Urban Studies

1–15

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DOI: 10.1177/00420980231188512

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Abstract

During the last three decades, nightlife policies in Southern European cities have been directed towards promoting the night as a space–time for tourism-oriented promotion. At the same time, highly precarious, often racialised migrant actors performing informal activities during the night have been (re-)criminalised, put under surveillance and persecuted by public discourse and policy-making. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the centrality of 'the night' as a fundamental cornerstone for urban governance. However, analysis of how debates on urban nightlife dialogue with frameworks on urban in/formality, security and governance during the day require a more systematic analysis. In this commentary, we call into question the role of the in/formal urban night in ordering neoliberal cities in Southern Europe. By focussing on informal workers during the night as exemplar cases of how in/formal nocturnal governance is produced, we propose an approach to incorporate deeper explorations in future nightlife studies along three avenues: (i) contradictory public discourses encompassed by 'the night', and how they are affected by long-term cultural, neo-colonial legacies and 'darkness' archetypes; (ii) survival and resistance strategies conducted by precarious/subaltern nocturnal actors during the day and night; and (iii) urban governance arrangements shaping and being shaped by the in/formal night in contemporary 'Fortress Europe'. The research agenda suggested in this critical commentary aims to be a provocation, not only for nightlife scholars, but also for broader urban studies to take into deeper consideration how the criminalisation of 'In/formal Nocturnal Cities' is used in governance processes in contemporary (post-)pandemic cities.

Keywords

inequality, informality, governance, migration, nightlife, precarious workers, race/ethnicity

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摘要

在过去的三十年里，南欧城市的夜生活政策一直致力于将夜晚作为旅游宣传的时空进行推广。与此同时，在夜间从事非正式活动的高度不稳定的，往往是种族化的流动行动者被（重新）判定为不合法的，受到公共言论和政策制定的监控和迫害。新冠疫情揭示了“夜晚”作为城市治理基石的核心地位。然而，关于城市夜生活的讨论如何与白天的城市非正规性/正规性、安全和治理框架进行对话，还需要进行更系统的分析。在这篇论文中，我们对非正规/正规城市夜晚在南欧新自由主义城市秩序中的作用提出了质疑。通过重点关注夜间非正规工作者，将其作为非正规/正规夜间治理是如何实施的范例，我们提出了一种方法，在未来的夜生活研究中沿着以下三个途径进行更深入的探索：(i) “夜晚”所包含的相互矛盾的公共话语，以及它们如何受到长期文化、新殖民主义遗产和“黑暗”原型的影响；(ii) 不稳定的/底层夜生活参与者在白天和夜晚所采取的生存和抵抗策略；以及 (iii) 在当代“欧洲堡垒”中，影响非正规/正规夜晚，并受其影响的城市治理安排。本论文提出的研究计划不仅是对夜生活研究学者的研究提出质疑，也是对更广泛的城市研究提出质疑，以更深入地考虑“非正规/正规夜生活城市”的非合法化在当代（后）疫情城市的治理过程中是如何被使用的。

关键词

不平等、非正规性、治理、迁移、夜生活、不稳定工人、种族/民族

Received November 2022; accepted June 2023

Introduction

In this commentary, we call into question the role of the in/formal urban night in ordering neoliberal cities. Particularly, we aim to shed light on how the governance of the informal nightlife helps to build Southern European cities. The main argument of this critical commentary relies on proposing how the criminalisation of what we call the ‘In/formal Nocturnal City’ is used as a cornerstone to understand broader processes of governance in many cities that follow the ‘(il)logics of neoliberal urbanism’ (Theodore, 2020). During the last three decades, and especially after the great financial crisis in 2008 (GFC hereafter), nightlife policies in Southern European cities have been directed towards the commercialisation, branding and hyper-regularisation of the night as a space-time for tourism-oriented promotion. At the same time, highly precarious, often racialised migrant actors performing informal¹ labour activities during the night, or nocturnal users and partygoers using the night beyond formal nocturnal venues, have been (re-)criminalised, put under surveillance and persecuted by public discourse and

policy-making. Paradoxically, whereas informal activities (during both the day and the night) have exponentially grown since the GFC in the Southern region as a result of the loss of (formal) jobs and the retreat of welfare policies (ILO, 2014; Perez and Matsaganis, 2018), new, more sophisticated forms of punitive containment strategies have been designed against actors inhabiting those spaces of ‘urban relegation’ (Wacquant, 2016). Indeed, the growth of advanced marginality in polarised metropolises (Wacquant, 2019) is, particularly in Southern Europe, fully embedded within a broader context of European restrictive (migration) and criminalising (securitising) policies against a poor migrants’ workforce, who are forced to live and work under precarious conditions to survive.

Despite their contextual diversities, since the 2000s, cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Lisbon and Rome have experienced an intensification of punitive containment strategies against street sex workers (Mottler, 2020; Olcuire, 2019), informal street vendors (Espinosa, 2021; Harney, 2004) and, more

generally, precarious users who live the night to work, play, rest or escape. A set of local regulations has been designed in these cities to prevent ‘uncivil’, ‘indecorous’ or ‘immoral’ behaviour in public spaces (Tulumello and Bertoni, 2019; Vartabedian, 2011). Building upon these local regulations, national security policies have amplified the capability of the police force as well as bureaucratic sanctions against these ‘deviant’ practices in both public and private spaces based on a reified securitised discourse. One example is the application of the Spanish National Law 4/2015 for the Protection of Citizen Security and Conviviality (popularly and paradoxically known as *Ley Mordaza* [the ‘Gag Law’]), created in the aftermath of the massive *Indignados* movement, which despite its name has been indistinctively used to displace and sanction informal night workers and users. Under the premise that their practices may disrupt the social order in public spaces, massive economic sanctions have been applied against these precarious actors during the last decade, accompanied by an orchestrated media and institutional narrative that tends to reify criminal representations of these populations. As part of a broader European migration policy, similar national coercive legislation, cutting across migration and security matters, has been used in other Southern European countries (see King et al., 2000).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdowns and public restrictions to mobility during the night in many cities enormously affected the situation of these precarious actors, aggravating their already hazardous situations: informal vendors and sex workers were unable to work in the streets or to apply for social benefits, due to their unregulated legal or labour conditions (NSWO, 2021). Yet these nocturnal and informal work activities performed on the margins of legality/normativity did not disappear; on the contrary, they were made (more)

invisible, (more) clandestine and, based on a new socio-sanitary narrative, more easily punishable and sanctionable by public discourse and policies. Therefore, ‘In/formal Nocturnal Cities’ – here defined as the imaginaries, practices and policies on the urban night conducted by precarious/subaltern people and criminalised by public discourse and policy – occupy now a central position in understanding the governance of Southern European neoliberal cities.

Persecution, surveillance and moral discourses against these informal nocturnal actors are not new: they build upon long-term historical and cultural legacies that criminalise the ‘obscure’, the ‘dark’ and the ‘unknown’. For centuries in European cities, evocations of the night as a space indistinctively time in which romantic, rebel, clandestine and perilous activities are carried out have co-existed with narratives framing the night as the enemy of light, modernity and progress (Edensor, 2015). However, the accentuation of these legacies brought by the pandemic merits a more systematic analysis of how debates on urban nightlife dialogue with frameworks on in/formality, security and governance to shed light on how contemporary (post-Covid-19) neoliberal cities are reconfigured and reproduced during both the day and the night. By focusing our attention on the current situation of precarious (often racialised migrant) workers using night-time spaces to survive in Southern European cities, we propose some key directions for the debate on how their survival/resisting strategies are produced and impacted by public (securitising) policies that force them to inhabit informalisation, while labelling them in criminalising ways. Critically, throughout the research agenda suggested, we argue that criminalisation of the ‘In/formal Nocturnal City’ is used to reproduce neoliberal governance in Southern European cities, particularly evident during

post-pandemic times. Through the articulation of the in/formality and day/night analytical continua, we develop this agenda, hoping for it to be a useful provocation not only for nightlife scholars but also for urban scholars more broadly.

Unpacking the ‘In/formal Nocturnal City’: Three topics to update the nightlife urban research agenda

Although there is a tendency in nightlife policy and overall narratives to understand the ‘night’ or ‘dark hours’ as ‘what happens when the light is gone’, in line with other nightologists (Dunn, 2016; Edensor, 2015; Nofre and Eldridge, 2018) we argue for a more dialectical and relational-oriented approach to the link between light and darkness. The ‘Nocturnal City’ (Shaw, 2018) and its imaginaries, practices and policies intertwine in complex, contradictory and sensitive ways with the Diurnal City. Nocturnal actors on the margins of urban normativity are equated to perils of social order and used to justify broader urban changes in favour of land speculation and urban regeneration processes in ‘tourist cities’, during both the day and the night. Hence, we argue that changes on nocturnal enclaves (or implemented during night-time hours) might be useful to produce certain changes during the daytime. In other words, they are not isolated dimensions: the Nocturnal City can be used to reproduce certain governance arrangements of the Diurnal City, and vice versa.

The same could be said about in/formality – a dimension not yet fully explored by nightlife studies. The binary informal–formal has been traditionally understood as a categorical dimension, but recent formulations around the ‘informalisation’ (Boudreau and Davis, 2017) of the urban sphere underline a complex (non-dichotomic) relationship that helps to understand in/formality as a continuum

and as a ‘site for critical analysis’ to unpack power relations (Banks et al., 2020; Roy, 2009). Hence, the dialectical relationship between formal and informal (represented by terms such as in/formal, in/formality and in/formalisation) has been said to better represent how informalisation is embedded inside formality, meaning that both public and private (state and non-state) actors not only contribute to informalisation but also act in informal ways (e.g. police forces and bureaucrats acting outside the rule of law or navigating through the ambiguities of the law). Nevertheless, the label ‘informal’ has still been used by policy-making discourses to stigmatise, criminalise and persecute people at the margins of urban normativity.¹

By building upon these previous works, we argue that focusing on the conceptual intersection of ‘urban informality’ and ‘the night’ – taken in their relational/dialectical (in/formality and the night/day continua) nature – can help urban scholars to better explore the complexities, ambiguities and controversies around the governance of (post-)pandemic European cities. Particularly, by focusing on how night/day, as well as in/formality, co-determine each other, we want to draw attention to: (i) the multi-dimensional nature of in/formality that cuts across different aspects of social and urban life (e.g. housing, work and leisure practices) and its actors (public and private, state/non-state actors) during the day and night; (ii) the active role of the state and public policies in placing these actors and their practices on the margins of legality/normativity; and (iii) the need for problematising traditional dichotomies on what are considered ‘formal’ or ‘informal’ (nocturnal) actors/practices and their close interrelationship with (paid or unpaid) labour along gender and racial lines.

Throughout the following sections, we explore the different dimensions involved in the criminalisation of the ‘In/formal Nocturnal City’. By combining insights from

different disciplinary fields of urban and nightlife studies that touch upon governance and security/securitisation theory, we aim to shed light on how in/formal nightlife is reproduced by public discourse and policy as a moral threat to the ideal of modernisation and progress, as well as how they reproduce neoliberal orders in Southern European cities. In line with recent calls to understand urban nightlife as much more than its economic dimension (Shaw, 2014), the research agenda proposed here invites more in-depth academic discussions about the relationship between in/formality and nocturnal life. The value in doing so challenges the separation between formal and informal and between paid and unpaid labour. This agenda also focuses on another type of nocturnal actor, the so-called ‘informal worker’, who are often overlooked by evening and Night-time Economy (ENTE) debates. By doing so, we recognise that these types of actors (together with other ‘informal’ nocturnal actors, such as party-goers performing/reproducing informal nocturnal spaces or homeless people) have been central in the overall governance of the in/formal nightlife, particularly as the targets of stigmatising and criminalising practices by neoliberal nocturnal regimes. In this sense, discussions about the disciplinarian policies and public discourses affecting party-goers or homeless people can also contribute to the research agenda we are proposing. Although our discussion only focuses on the securitising strategies implemented against ‘informal’ nocturnal workers, our call also invites researchers to explore how governance of ‘In/formal Nocturnal Cities’ encompasses other ‘informal’ actors.

Our proposition invites incorporation of deep explorations in future research along three avenues: (i) contradictory public discourses encompassed by ‘the night’, and how they are affected by long-term cultural, neo-colonial legacies and archetypes around

‘darkness’; (ii) survival and resistance strategies conducted by precarious/subaltern nocturnal actors during the day and night; and (iii) urban governance arrangements shaping and being shaped by the in/formal night. The final remarks summarise the advances that our suggested agenda will bring to nightlife and urban studies more broadly, aiming to shed light on how the criminalisation of ‘In/formal Nocturnal Cities’ is used in governance processes in contemporary (post-)pandemic cities.

Contradictions of the informal night: From historical and situated legacies to current nyctophobias/philiias

Urban nightlife in European cities encompasses constant tensions. Contradictions within the perception and public treatment of ‘the night’ constructed by scholars, the media and public opinion/policy are reflected in different forms to understand the role, potential impact and future prospects of urban nightlife in different contexts. The night is usually framed as a space–time for recreation and leisure-seeking, as well as embedding multiple risks. It can also be described as an enclave for economic and cultural profit and community-building, as well as an enclave of disruption, commodified place-making and exclusion; a space–time to generate innovation or a space–time to be criminalised and demonised through nyctophobic (fear-of-the-dark) narratives (Edensor, 2015). All these co-existing and conflicting perspectives about the urban night compete to receive attention from urban scholars and policy-makers. However, many of these contradictory visions about the night are embedded within previous long-term historical and cultural legacies that take the negative connotation (the night as a source of crime, vice and perils) with higher prominence. At least in Southern European countries, this tends to be more

easily activated by policy-makers and the media, especially under times of stress and emergency.

All these contradictions about the night have been manifested especially since the GFC, and accentuated by the Covid-19 pandemic in cities. As a mode to overcome the financial crisis, ambiguous and contradictory public narratives – often in coalition with actors of the ENTE, such as nocturnal entrepreneurial associations, traditionally classified under the formal economy – were characterised by effusive nyctophiliac (love-of-the-dark) celebrations about the ‘vibrant’ (touristified, commercialised) nightlife. They became a source of profit and city branding, while enhancing nyctophobic narratives against popular, ‘bizarre’ informal actors and practices, which have become less suitable for city branding (Aramayona and García-Sánchez, 2019; Nofre, 2021c).

However, the Covid-19 pandemic radically changed public discourses about the positive social value of the night. The public measures implemented during the Covid-19 socio-sanitary crisis – often lacking empirical-based arguments – comprised restrictions to any nocturnal activity except for the most essential medical services and transport, a policy approach described as a ‘noctacide’ (Nofre, 2021b). By equating the night as a potential time-space in which sanitary protocols could be threatened by disorder, city governments reproduced existing stigmatising assumptions about the night, and gave central stage to nyctophobic narratives during the Covid-19 conjuncture. This is especially true when we talk about the ‘In/formal Nocturnal City’, as evidenced by the criminalisation of practices conducted by precarious/subaltern nocturnal actors. Examples are the hyper-intensification of surveillance strategies in Lisbon against racialised party-goers coming from ghettoised peripheries (Nofre et al., 2020); the intensification of moralising discourses against informal nocturnal leisure practices, such as *Botellón*²

in Spain (Aramayona et al., 2020); and the re-criminalisation of street and indoor sex workers in night clubs (NSWO, 2021). However, we argue that not only have these public measures revealed the centrality of the night as a biopolitical tool for the securitised governance of many ‘tourist cities’ (Aramayona and Nofre, 2021), but they have also fundamentally unfolded previous controversies and nyctophobic attitudes against nightlife which need to be better explored in future urban research.

The demonisation of the night responds to a long process of construction in European cities. Edensor (2015) argues that the negative aspects associated with the night needed to be combated during the Enlightenment as a representation of the antithesis of the Modern ideal, based on ‘light’ and knowledge. Many of the underlying representations of the ‘night’ were criminalised, as the representation of old, obsolete and even demonised urban characters. As Federici (2004) brilliantly remarks, certain old, community-based practices that used to be conducted by women, many times at night (e.g. rituals to heal or conduct abortions), were forbidden and persecuted as part of Modern state formation. Converted into ‘witches’ or ‘allies of the demon’, nocturnal rebel practices and actors received the whole punitive apparatus of the Inquisition and Enlightenment. Moreover, the relationship between the modern European Enlightenment and ‘the (dark) unknown’ led to the ‘luminosity’ that Evangelisation reified through colonial relations. The ‘new discovered world’ compelled hopes of both progress and profit for European imperialist expectations, and the desire of ‘instructing’ and disciplining racialised (dark and blackened) dispossessed human bodies (Federici, 2014).

We argue that negative, long-term constructed imaginaries around the night prevail over positive ones in European legacies. This is expressed in a twofold way: in the scarcity

of academic studies about the positive effects of nightlife as a source of community-building, social well-being and mutual psychological support, as recently argued by Nofre (2021a); and in the easiness by which punitive and criminalising discourses and policies against the night are implemented, especially during critical times. The latter point is crucial, as it calls into question how ‘In/formal Nocturnal Cities’ are used to produce the overall governance of (diurnal) cities: for example, favouring stigmatising versions of certain nocturnal informal actors and practices (e.g. homeless, noisy party-goers or street sex workers) may help to produce a favourable public opinion towards the need for punitive strategies against certain ‘undesirable’ actors, favouring class-based displacement (during both the day and the night) in certain urban spaces (Aramayona and García-Sánchez, 2019; Aramayona et al., 2020; Nofre, 2013).

We suggest that current representations of the ‘night’ are also connected with racialised (and probably also feminised) representations of ‘Otherness’. Following Tyler’s (2018) argument, the ‘racist crisis’ lived in contemporary Europe since 2015 critically reanimates old/historical spectres of race and spectral geographies of racism, including the collective figuration of an invader ‘Other’. Hence, nocturnal landscapes in many Southern European cities, especially when they involve central processes concerning urban informality, are often imagined (and confronted/used by neoliberal urbanism) in terms of danger, dark and a racialised ‘Other’. Not surprisingly, many precarious nocturnal workers are often racialised people who experience the powerful apparatus of state surveillance, police persecution and legal deportations spearheaded by ‘Fortress Europe’. Ironically, this model has primarily led the Southern region (Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece) to become the ‘wall’ against global migratory flows, while forcing

thousands of immigrants to stay in Europe under irregular or precarious conditions for decades. This situation underscores our emphasis to pay attention to these historical cultural legacies in the reproduction of contemporary criminalised/demonised versions of the in/formal nocturnal life.

(Un-)planned resistance and survival tactics of the informal night

Understanding the survival practices of those inhabiting the ‘In/formal Nocturnal City’, as well as how this city is imagined, negotiated and confronted, should be a core objective in a future nightlife research agenda. Survival tactics are exerted by precarious actors in neoliberal cities as a mode of both overcoming material obstacles imposed by hostile environments and resisting cultural representations that stigmatise them. In following Lees et al. (2018), we argue that the art/act of surviving of informal nocturnal workers is a way of resisting/challenging the neoliberal policies.

Based on their deep knowledge about territories and their social (informal) interactions, precarious nocturnal actors exert different strategies and tactics to survive and find space for their activities during the night. Although ‘informality’ – and ‘nocturnal life’ – is often associated with disorder by public discourse, there is a whole social order based on negotiation and flexibility embedded in in/formal settings during dark hours. Knowing the underlying rules and codes of social interactions is necessary for precarious actors to live, play, work and escape during the night. For example, nocturnal partygoers organising *Botellón* in Spain know where and when they can buy and consume their drinks avoiding alcohol restrictions/laws and police surveillance. They find the urban social interstices beyond formal and legal frameworks useful to fulfil their objectives – for example, how to negotiate and create confidence-based

relationships with local shop owners or hide the ‘booze’ in bags before paying to avoid police sanctions (Aramayona et al., 2020). An ‘intimate knowledge economy’ (Harney, 2004) has been found in the survival strategies of informal workers: from *lateros* who keep optimally fresh beers in plastic bags full of ice in public garbage bins in Madrid (Aramayona et al., 2020), and Barcelona’s *manteros* who sell informally bought merchandise and whistle to each other when the police approach (Espinosa, 2021), to *commerciantes ambulanti* (street informal vendors) who know how to avoid police surveillance and the Camorra’s *pizzos* (extortion payments) in Naples (Harney, 2004).

However, for these transnational migrants, the risk is not only of being apprehended by the police but also the decommissioning of their goods while facing stricter deportation measures. Since the 2000s, especially after the refugee crisis in 2015, anti-migration laws have been tightened in the Southern European region (e.g. the 2000/4 Spanish Law on Migration and Social Integration or the 2018 Italian ‘Salvini Decree’ on Immigration and Safety). At the same time, alongside the contradictions embedded in nocturnal governance, activities carried out by many informal workers are also permitted, tolerated and obviated by police and other state actors, as there is both: (i) a common understanding of the economic necessity of both informal workers and consumers to carry out those activities – for example, a sense of ‘letting them be while they do not cause trouble’; and (ii) a self-interested desire of police/State actors who take advantage of these workers’ precarity to either obtain bribes or, based on some workers’ privileged positions, force them to become police informants. All these examples show how flexibility, fluidity and ambiguity are all necessary attributes for informal workers to develop survival

tactics during the night, but also how their creative and spontaneous acts of survival are also subjected to precarity, temporality, surveillance and bureaucracy. Critically, they also highlight the importance of understanding the intersection between in/formality and day/night continua: formal actors not only contribute to the informalisation of the poor during the day and night, but also act in highly informal ways to take advantage of those experiencing underprivileged conditions.

Individual acts of contestation are exerted by subaltern actors during the night, but they also show different collective strategies to inhabit the night as a space–time to be conquered. Bayat’s (2000) ‘quiet encroachment’ is useful to understand the silenced complicity between actors inhabiting precarious situations during the night. Examples of spontaneous solidarity between consumers of the night (often White, middle-class Spanish people) and *lateros* (often racialised migrants), or inter-sectional subaltern workers (petty dealers, informal food and drink vendors and street sex workers) during police raids show this quiet survival strategy (Aramayona et al., 2020). These apparently non-planned/non-organised examples of solidarity from below conducted by the urban subaltern during night-time hours are indicative of how precarious actors under surveillance build the ‘In/formal Nocturnal City’ based on their consciousness about ‘the dark’ as a space–time to be re-appropriated. Moreover, these survival strategies may potentially lead to more ‘structured’ or long-term planning of collective resistance, in which ‘the night’ might be reclaimed as a central, explicit time-space dimension to be appropriated by the workers’ public discourse and everyday practice. This already happens in other global regions (e.g. the sex workers’ alliance *Organización de Trabajadoras Nocturnas de Bolivia* (Bolivia’s Nocturnal Workers’ Organisation)).

The day/night continuum is important here. Diurnal surveillance affects how the night is perceived as an opportunity for these informal workers. Critically, the night has become for many of these informal workers a space–time to work, escape and struggle against the more ‘visible’ conditions of diurnal hours. Since the 2000s, an increasing number of independent organisations of informal/precarious workers have emerged. Despite not taking ‘the night’ as a central premise of their political agenda, they use dark hours as a space–time to work, play and resist. Examples are the popular labour unions of street vendors in Madrid (*Sindicato Popular de Manteros y Lateros de Madrid, Valiente Bangla*) and Barcelona (*Sindicato de Manteros de Barcelona*), and of street sex workers in Southern European cities (Spanish *OTRAS* or Barcelona’s *Putas del Raval*, Portuguese *Movimento pelas Trabalhadoras do Sexo*, Italian *Ombre Rosse*). These novel ‘popular unions’ are formed by precarious workers in collaboration with activists and social and urban grassroots organisations defending their human rights and fighting against institutional racism and everyday precariousness. Their political activities have not only been an example of how precarious/subaltern actors can organise themselves, but also an inspiration for other labour organisations and urban movements. Indeed, these popular unions challenge the hegemony of traditional (White) trade unions, by incorporating the demands of more radical, multi-dimensional workers. Their ‘Right to Work (in safe conditions)’ – claimed by traditional labour movements – has intimately intertwined with the ‘Right to the City’ (often associated with the urban grassroots) and the ‘Right to Migrate’ (claiming the elimination of migrant laws and condemning the cruelty of ‘Fortress Europe’ policies, while also denouncing police abuse and violence). We think nightlife scholars should address these topics in more

detail in future research, with an emphasis on deeper explorations of the individual and collective strategies conducted by nocturnal informal workers, the intersections between diverse typologies of workers and their collective demands, the multi-level and intersectoral policies affecting them and the practices of state and non-state actors that interrelate with these workers’ survivability.

Urban governance of the informal night

Building upon the rich and exhaustive literature on urban nightlife/ENTE and urban governance, this section identifies parameters and new key directions in the exploration of contemporary ‘In/formal Nocturnal Cities’. Given their highly empirically oriented nature, nightlife studies can benefit from public policy debates in order to generate more sophisticated theorisations on nocturnal governance. At the same time, public policy debates can gain new insights from the exploration of the (real) complexities and sensorial and emotional ambiances emanating from nightlife studies. Furthermore, debates on in/formality can add centrality to how precarity is generated, experienced and navigated during everyday and every-night life.

From the perspective of public policy, we understand urban governance arrangements as those processes of decision-making that establish order and distribute power across different policy areas and the space in which a specific city or city-region develops (Jessop, 2002; Theodore, 2020; Ward, 2006). When addressing the Nocturnal City, governance arrangements are particularly significant in policy areas such as planning, health and safety, trading standards and culture. Through these policies, people encounter regulation in their daily and nightly work and leisure as well as the rules that provide order to a city. These policy arenas converge particularly around programmes on

regeneration, gentrification or touristification, and impact directly the work and everyday life of people, with negative effects on those encountering precarity (Nofre and Eldridge, 2018).

Debates on urban nightlife recognise the importance of privatisation and public–private partnerships in gentrification and touristification. They have been a conjunctural driver of urban governance in diverse cities around the globe. In particular, the privatisation of public services and its confluence with the privatisation of space has been underlined as a gateway to securitise the in/formal night (Hadfield, 2015; Hae, 2011; Nofre and Eldridge, 2018). Important to our discussion is Hadfield's (2015) emphasis on the extent to which law, regulation and urban design are predominant in delineating the activities that are permitted or prohibited, and which in turn define the experienced space of the city at night.

At the same time, urban governance debates acknowledge the multiple levels of the state (national, regional and local), their (un)coordinated action and their different responses to international pressures in the policymaking process (Bache and Flinders, 2004; Brenner, 2004). In Southern Europe, urban governance has been accentuated by the conflictive multi-scaled policies behind the 'Fortress Europe' model, an aspect that has tended to be overlooked by nightlife studies. The challenges posed by the current migration crisis and restrictive European policies against (racialised) newcomers force nightlife and urban scholars to explore in more depth how political pressures on an international scale are affecting migrant bodies and pushing them towards informality, and how the night has become for many of them a liminal space–time when/where anonymity, surveillance and opportunity cut across in multiple and complex ways.

Debates on nightlife governance tend to focus on urban design and policy-making

impacting nocturnal entertainment venues in downtown areas. However, suburban spaces are often overlooked or understudied (for an exception, see Giordano et al., 2019), which are precisely the places where most migrant people often live. The debates also tend to obviate the reality of precarious (increasingly migrant and racialised) actors moving, enjoying, working or escaping in both central and peripheral neighbourhoods at night. Hence, we find a disarticulated analysis on the multi-scalar and multi-sectorial regulations and policies (e.g. migration, work/leisure, housing, domestic abuse) affecting the daily and nightly reality of those experiencing precarity.

We argue that the day/night and in/formality continua allow us to articulate these elements, while understanding the material conditions (work, housing) in which precarity is based throughout the day and night, as well as the institutional (legal and administrative) framework that reifies or challenges such precarity through the relationships between bureaucrats, politicians, residents and businesses. The advantages that the in/formality continuum brings can unveil how and when state actors contribute to the informal nocturnal life of the city (e.g. relaxation of rules), when they relate to other non-state actors and in what circumstances informality is tolerated or criminalised to develop urban policy more broadly. For example, exploring how sanctionable practices are tolerated (or not) in certain areas or moments (e.g. consumption of alcohol in certain public spaces, extending closing hours of certain venues) has been part of the 'precarious, unsustainable and non-participative' liminal governance of the night, characterised by the 'public-led interplay between privatisation of urban space, leisure (...) and public safety' (Nofre et al., 2020: 40). However, the ways that urban restrictive regulations (e.g. prohibition against mini-markets selling alcohol at night, anti-

noise pollution policies) can push or force some businesses and individuals towards informality at night is still underexplored (for exceptions, see Aramayona and García-Sánchez, 2019; Walker, 2015, 2017), hence they are crucial to include in future nightlife research.

Another aspect that is key in understanding urban governance arrangements in contemporary 'In/formal Nocturnal Cities' is the complexity of central–local government relations. These are an ever-present challenge in urban governance debates, especially when political and elite groups formulate economic policy beyond the administrative boundaries of cities or a city-region, or national approaches are used instead (Pike et al., 2017). The relations between tiers of government are relevant to nocturnal studies around informality insofar as housing, migration and employment policies emerge in tension between municipal authorities and higher levels of government. As explained by Janoschka and Mota, 2021a, 2021b) for the Madrid case, these tensions are generated when legal and administrative frameworks provide the upper hand to regional and national governments which are keen to follow market logics to promote economic growth through, for example, real estate and transport infrastructure. This is clearly manifested in the case of policies affecting precarious nocturnal workers, with the intersections between trade regulations (often made at national and regional scales), alcohol licencing (regional scale) and the use of public space (often dependent on local/municipal policies).

Finally, we would like to stress an aspect important for in/formal night governance, well recognised by nightlife studies (Hadfield, 2015; Nofre and Eldridge, 2018) but until recently overlooked by urban governance debates: the affective ambience. This ambience is generated through feelings of welcoming or exclusion/discrimination

that individuals or groups encounter in moving throughout the city and in changes to planning that give way to regeneration and gentrification projects. The affective ambience is a source of identity formation among precarious workers (e.g. night street markets or street festivals organised by immigrants), which through links of solidarity can give way to entrepreneurial aspirations (Dewey, 2020). These aspirations can propel community organising and political lobbying, as in the examples mentioned above on popular unions. Identity formation can either challenge gentrification or become immersed in the dominant discourse of leisure, renewal and regeneration of neoliberal cities. When this identity challenges the dominant neoliberal discourse, it catalyses stigmatising tactics reflected in the policy process and broader governance of the city. Hence, informal nocturnal actors (street sex workers, petty dealers, homeless people or 'annoying' party-goers) become the target of displacement policies necessary to 'clean up' the space for regeneration purposes, sometimes catalysing resistant processes of collective action. For example, the *Mercadillos Rebeldes*, an anti-racist and squatting movement, in 2004 opposed the gentrification of *La Rambla* avenue, in the popular and working-class neighbourhood of Raval in Barcelona, where many informal (and nocturnal) workers live and work. We think that exploring the affective ambience and government relations with state and non-state actors is important for unpacking in/formality in diurnal/nocturnal governance, and how it is both developed and resisted.

Final remarks: Towards the post-pandemic In/formal Nocturnal Cities

Although previous nightologists have repeated for decades how the night has been dismissed or even forgotten in urban studies, the recent

Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated how the night is central in producing governance of contemporary neoliberal cities, while revealing existent controversies and nyctophobic attitudes against the night. At the same time, urban in/formality debates have shown over the last two decades how urban scenarios are embedded in processes of ambiguity and flexibility, reproducing inequalities at a global scale (Stevano et al., 2021). Throughout the previous sections, we compiled an agenda articulating lines of thought for nightlife studies in more comprehensive ways. We have addressed how cultural and genealogical legacies around nyctophobic/philliac representations of the night are used to produce broader processes of urban governance of (diurnal) cities, and how surviving tactics exerted by subaltern nocturnal actors, either in their unplanned/spontaneous or organised versions, might challenge current neoliberal orders and racial stigmas against ‘the (dark) Other’ in Southern Europe.

By articulating the in/formality and day/night continua, this commentary has suggested a research agenda for the ‘In/formal Nocturnal City’ that focuses on how urban policies, practices and imaginaries interact during the day and night and are intersected by processes of in/formality. Hence the importance of focusing on processes of ambiguity, flexibility and tolerance by both state/public and non-state/private actors. For these purposes, we suggest some methodological tools to help with research on these topics. We believe that ethnographic approaches such as participant observation and in-depth interviews to understand everyday and every-night experiences in complex urban scenarios are adequate, in particular, ‘shadowing observation’ of state and non-state actors and their changing discourses and practices against informality through time. In order to engage with informal (often called ‘vulnerable’) participants, we believe that co-productive research practices – such as participatory action and

collaborative research – are ideal in enabling the research framework to overcome hierarchical relations on knowledge production and academic extractivism. Contrasting documentary reviews of reports and multi-scaled, multi-sectorial policies, together with analysis on the changing public discourses in media and parliamentary debates, may be useful in teasing out the contradictions, ambiguities and tensions across different tiers of government and between types of actors during the day and night.

Analysing how cities are imagined, ordered and contested during the day and night and through in/formal means opens new opportunities to understand the controversies, contradictions and processes of resistance against neoliberal cities. This critical commentary has aimed to problematise the ‘night-time economy’ concept (Shaw, 2014); we think that an excessive centrality has been taken by market-driven public discourses celebrating nightlife as a source of city-branding, innovation and regeneration, blurring the exploration of other potential topics for researching ‘the night’ beyond its economic dimension. In particular, White, male-dominated scenarios in nightlife research have prevented the incorporation of other important aspects of nightlife; for example, those associated with (mostly feminised) work or care-giving activities conducted in private or semi-private spaces during the night, either paid (e.g. domestic and sex workers) or not. In this sense, the precarious (nocturnal) workers discussed here are a privileged object of study to problematise the ‘blurred lines’ between public and private life, labour and social reproduction at night.

Although some relational approaches to the study of the night and in/formality have been made (e.g. Walker, 2015, 2017), we observe a general tendency to take both social phenomena as separated: nightlife scholars studying night-time spaces and events on the one hand; urban in/formality

scholars describing informal settlements and precarious conditions on the other. Instead, by focusing on the intersection of nightlife studies and urban in/formality, scholars might enrich their insights about (post-)pandemic urban scenarios in at least three different ways: (i) by helping to unpack the positive (as well as negative) aspects behind the (often unquestioned) stereotypical definitions about ‘the night’ and ‘urban informality’, and how both affect the governance of (diurnal) cities; (ii) by overcoming the implicit reproduction of hierarchical classifications in social and urban research, observed in the priority of diurnal activities over nocturnal practices in urban planning and research, or the tendency to regularise/formalise informal activities and overlook the informalisation of formality; and (iii) by critically examining – as recently suggested by feminist approaches (see Stevano et al., 2021) – the usefulness (or not) of maintaining traditional dichotomies in social science, such as the division between public/private spaces, state/non-state actors or productive/reproductive practices. In sum, the research agenda suggested in this critical commentary aims to be a provocation, not only for nightlife scholars but also for broader urban studies, to take into deeper consideration how the criminalisation of ‘In/formal Nocturnal Cities’ is used in governance processes in contemporary (post-)pandemic cities.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Dr Paula Meth for her comments on a previous draft of this publication, and to the three anonymous reviewers whose suggestions helped to clarify and improve our final argument.

Declaration of conflicting interests


The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research & Innovation Programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Grant Agreement No 101028867.

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Notes

1. For clarity purposes, we will use the label ‘informal’ (e.g. ‘informal workers’, ‘informal party-goers’, ‘informal practices’) to refer to actors/activities carried out under: (i) illegal circumstances based on national legislation (e.g. people petty-dealing illegal drugs, migrants lacking work/living permits to sell merchandise on the streets); (ii) alegal circumstances based on ambiguous/restrictive national legislations (e.g. sex workers whose labour activity is not illegal but neither fully regularised); or (iii) highly sanctionable circumstances based on municipal/regional regulations (e.g. party-goers conducting night-time leisure practices beyond formal venues). All the realities covered under this ‘informal’ label are highly criminalised and persecuted, and often under very precarious living circumstances. By no means we want to (re-) stigmatise these actors. Instead, we use the term ‘in/formal’ or ‘in/formality’ (e.g. ‘in/formal nightlife’) to highlight the relational nature of the dyad in these time-spaces.
2. *Botellón* is a self-made informal party, consisting of drinking and partying in the streets, parks and abandoned urban spaces. Party-goers buy their own (cheap) drinks at supermarkets, avoiding expensive bars and venues. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, *Botellón* has become a sanctionable practice by many local and national regulations in Spain.

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