

creating path dependency where repeat migration is needed to ensure economic survival.

This analysis is timely in a context where remittances have exceeded official development assistance and, in some instances, direct foreign investments. As such, this is a book that deserves to be widely read and is suitable not only for migration scholars, honours students but also policy makers involved in the management and creation of temporary labour migration programs. It fills a gap in current debate where risks and adverse consequences of temporary labour migration tend to be overlooked.

Tom Slee

What's Yours Is Mine: Against the Sharing Economy

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Reviewed by Thomas Klikauer

One of the prides and joys of the sharing economy is a company called Uber that offers inexpensive transportation similar to the standard taxi service. But Uber's aggressive expansion into virtually every major city of the globe is not welcomed everywhere with open arms. In 2016, the British GMB union (General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union) accused Uber of misleading its drivers. In a long-awaited judgment, an employment tribunal agreed with two drivers for the ride-hailing app that Uber drivers were not self-employed and should receive the 'national living wage', annual leave, and other benefits.

In *What's Yours Is Mine – Against The Sharing Economy*, Tom Slee examines the sharing economy's great Uber-con. He starts his nine chapters by defining the sharing economy as a wave of new businesses that use the internet to match customers with service providers for real-world exchanges such as short-term apartment rentals, car rides, or household tasks' (p. 9), with Uber and Airbnb being the most prominent examples. He then goes on to consider the view that the sharing economy – or, better, the companies that are its centrepiece – offers people to 'take control of their lives by becoming 'micro-entrepreneurs [while applying their] egalitarian vision built on peer-to-peer exchanges rather than hierarchical organisations' (p. 10). Beyond these fluffy pronouncements, he points out

that the sharing economy is in reality governed by ‘corporate juggernauts [often establishing] a new form of surveillance where service workers must live in fear of being snatched on’ (p. 10). In other words, there are real ‘contradictions built into the name sharing economy’ (p. 11). Rather than its idyllic image, its corporations create ‘a new form of precarious work’ (p. 13), comprehensively ‘failing to deliver on their promises of democratisation and equality’ (p. 15).

As Slee writes, ‘strangely, considering the language of altruism and generosity that is so often used to describe it, the sharing economy is overwhelmingly made up of commercial organisations rather than non-profit; [overall] three kinds of services dominate: hospitality (43%), transportation (28%) and education (17%)’ (p. 23f.). In his chapter on ‘A Place to Stay with Airbnb’, Slee notes that there are three types of accommodations offered by Airbnb: a) shared rooms; b) private rooms; and c) entire homes/apartments. In New York, for example, 60% of all rentals are entire homes, not rented out by people occupying a house and sharing a spare room with strangers, as the idyllic hallucination of Airbnb likes to imply. These are commercial activities akin to online mini-hotels.

Unlike regulated hotels with proper fire exits and sanitary standards, however, these online mini-hotels are deregulated and may even represent ‘a movement for [even greater] deregulation’ (p. 26). Deregulation allows corporations such as Airbnb to make their own rules, issuing, for example, ‘30,000 words contracts suiting mostly the corporation rather than those renting rooms’ and, above that, Airbnb ‘knows rules when it suits them’ (p. 41). These contracts are written against people while protecting the corporation and fitting in with a general quest for deregulation. Airbnb steams ahead even when ‘smaller independent hotels and B&Bs complain that they have to register’ (p. 42) while Airbnb is not obligated to do so. Virtually the same applies to Uber’s domination of ride-sharing. For room sharing, as for the ride sharing business, virtually the same trajectory applies: the ‘original motivation based around community and around an interaction that [was] not primarily economic’ has been replaced with a ‘hunger for growth [and a] rapid expansion’ (p. 54). This led to an ‘erosion of the original model’ (p. 54). What we see now is profit as the ‘end game of a large company’ (p. 54). These corporations are ‘successful in economic terms [but they have] completely failed to challenge current economic models’ (p. 54). Beyond that, they have also failed ‘to deliver on sustainability or community ideals’ (p. 54). This is what defines the companies of the sharing economy.

Uber is largely free of standard regulations, for example, those requiring taxis to have mandatory 'quotas for child-friendly vehicles, suitable for disabled passengers, accommodate service dogs, and meet other universal access requirements' (p. 61). On top of that, Uber claims that its drivers can earn up to '\$90,000 in New York and \$74,000 in San Francisco' while usually not mentioning that this presumes 'working over 40 hours per week' (p. 63). In reality, however, typical annual earnings are closer to \$45,000 (NY) and \$37,000 (San Francisco) with some earnings are as little as '\$30,000' (p. 64). When a journalist looked to find a \$90,000 Uber driver, Slee notes that, he 'came up empty handed [while Uber] never backed up its claims' (p. 64). In addition, 'over time, Uber has taken a larger and larger slice of every fare' (p. 64). Costs such as 'vehicle operation, repairs, insurance, maintenance, petrol, depreciation [...] were not factored in' (p. 66) when Uber claimed drivers can earn \$90,000. When the journalist Emily Guendelsberger took to the road as an Uber driver, she made \$9.34 per hour (p. 66) which is below the US minimum wage.

As Slee notes, all this remains camouflaged behind the prevailing ideology of being a 'partner, self-employed entrepreneur' (p. 72) or a 'micro-entrepreneur' (p. 79). The micro-entrepreneurs of the sharing economy are not only exposed to stifling contracts written by well-paid corporate lawyers and starvation level wages, they are also exposed to a relentless 'reputation system' (p. 100). On this, a *Wired* magazine journalist commented, 'I've ridden with a 4.7 star driver who wears gloves and opens passenger doors and a 4.7 star driver who couldn't pass a road test' (p. 100). Based on numerous examples and studies, Slee reaches the inevitable conclusion: 'the sharing economy reputation systems are broken' (p. 100), adding that 'reputation systems are no substitute for regulation. Instead, they are a substitute for a company management structure' (p. 101). But what about being rated as a company rather than using ratings against its (semi)employees? One finds, not surprisingly, that 'Uber has had an F rating from the Better Business Bureau for some time, primarily because of its persistent failure to respond to customer complaints' (p. 104).

In short, 'terrible things happen to people in hotel rooms and taxis too but there is a mechanism to hold hotels and taxi companies responsible' (p. 105). Instead, the sharing economy relies on its self-invented ratings system that has mutated into a 'denunciation system [...] a form of surveillance [that is] turning us into a society of snitches' (p. 108). Historically, snitching may date back to when Facebook started as a 'hot or not' web site (p. 110) invented to spy on and rate female students.

Today, a much more advanced corporate ratings systems does it for them, supporting large corporations but not employees. The same corporations also insist that the internet, hyper-individual self-employment and 'entrepreneurship [...] is the right way to solve social problems' (p. 140). It is not surprising that one of Uber's founders is a 'follower of Ayn Rand' (p. 143): Rand was a writer of crypto-philosophical novels fancying über-individualism, neoliberalism and the free market, and an admirer of disgraced former US president Richard Nixon.

A market-driven approach can go badly wrong. As Slee notes, 'Uber had to back down after a 2014 hostage crisis in Sydney's central business district, a tragedy that left three people dead. During the confusion of the early stages of the crisis, as people fled the centre of the city, Uber hiked prices by up to a factor four, at one point charging a minimum fare of \$100' (p. 143). Uber's motto might well be 'there is money to be made from other people's misery'. Quite conceivably, 'Uber has no idea about sharing and community' (p. 144). All this leads Slee to the conclusion that 'in a few short years the sharing economy has gone from the generosity of *what's mine is yours* to the self interest of *what's yours is mine*' (p. 163).

Overall, three features of the corporations of the shared economy remain noteworthy. These are that they avoid the expenses of: a) ensuring safety, b) providing universal access, and c) paying decent wages, trying, instead, to classify their employees as so-called independent contractors (p. 168). Yet these features may increasingly be problematic, given the British court case mentioned above and a rising awareness that the sharing economy is not much more than a great 'Über-Con'.

Slee's book on this topic is insightful and well-crafted, making a significant contribution to understanding the political economy that lies behind the shiny announcements of corporate public relations. It highlights the hidden costs that come with the mass media engineered idea of just getting a 'cheap ride' and a 'cheap place to stay'. As in the case of cheap (and even designer) clothes that we buy at high street shops, Uber and Airbnb come with a hidden cost, not unlike the sweatshops that make much of that clothing. Beyond that, Slee also unmasks the façade of a 'sharing economy' that is no longer linked to the idyllic image of 'sharing a room' and 'sharing a ride', showing that those offering rides and rooms have long mutated into ruthless multi-national corporations solely dedicated to profits.