

Book Review: The Migrant's Paradox: Street Livelihoods and Marginal Citizenship in Britain by Suzanne Hall

In The Migrant's Paradox: Street Livelihoods and Marginal Citizenship in Britain, Suzanne M. Hall draws on interviews with migrant shopkeepers in five UK cities to explore the formation of street livelihoods and edge economies in the urban margins. Through the process of 'writing the street as world', this book brings the migrant experience – and the migrant's paradox – to life for readers, writes Yasemin Karsli.

The Migrant's Paradox: Street Livelihoods and Marginal Citizenship in Britain. Suzanne M. Hall. University of Minnesota Press. 2021.

In [The Migrant's Paradox](#), Suzanne M. Hall examines everyday life and livelihoods within the very complex system of migration by looking at five different peripheries of British cities. Examining global, national and urban spaces over the last century, she shows us how colonisation changed and evolved into the form of precarious migrant movement. By conceptualising 'edge territories' and 'edge economies', she reveals how important migrant economies are for capitalist economies, but at the same time, how growing migration is seen as a threat by states. This book is a culmination of six years of research involving interviews with 500 shopkeepers in the streets of Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester, London and Manchester between 2012 and 2017.

Hall acquaints the reader with how the current conjuncture of migration changed after the 2008 financial crisis turned into a political crisis that brought with it 'increasing inequality, emerging forms of immigration control, and racial biopolitics' (25). This change had a visible impact on the street and affected the UK's marginalised groups by shifting policy and politics away from an idea of 'what matters' to 'who matters'. This period led to 2014 and 2016 when two immigration acts were passed, ramping up a punitive and anti-immigration atmosphere within the global trend of right-wing populism. For Hall, this amounts to a political commitment to bordering, which has in turn, in the city context, generated peripheries inhabited by racialised outsiders.

The author effectively unpacks how the city excludes, pushing edges further outward, creating an insecure life for migrants and producing their own 'contested urban economy'. This perspective allows us to understand the UK's colonial history as it intersects with global displacement and creates urban marginalisation. The book opens by stating that a 'migrant is a person required and refuted by Western sovereignty' (8). As the book goes on, Hall unpacks the complexity of this definition. She moves to discussing the relation between migration as a system (governed by states' regulation) and everyday practices on the street, showing how the dynamics of daily life shape migration and give more layers to it. To be able to understand and make sense of the migration phenomenon, we need to look at these different layers. These layers artfully break into 'the migrant's paradox'.

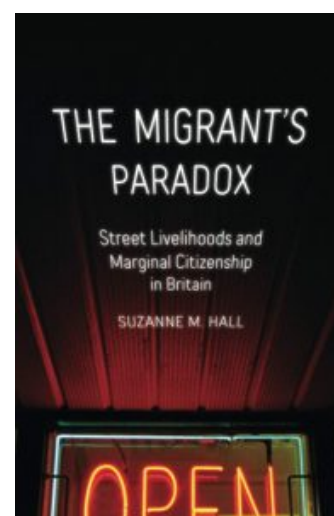




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This paradox is one of the migrant stuck between the liberal economy system of austerity governance and the politics of border control. The multiple logics of bordering, such as restrictions on the border for migration, stand in contrast to opening/removing the border for economic movement, and serve to limit and control migrant life. The migrant's paradox is that their citizenship status, legal rights and presence are constantly called into question by the state's policies. The paradox constitutes the unstable stability of displacement and emplacement across urban, national and global levels in advanced capitalist societies. But unfortunately, this 'consistent production of inconsistencies' through frequently changing policies only beclouds migrant life. The book shows how migrants' attempts to make something of what is available to them in the street, in the context of fragile, changeable, citizenship status, become leaps in the dark. The migrants who make life in the street vivid, despite this precarity, are the centre of the book.

The book is divided into five chapters that look, respectively, at the scale of the migrant, edge territories and economies, everyday practices of life and livelihoods on the street and the possibilities and limits of a citizenship of the edge. In 'The Scale of the Migrant', Hall addresses a more humanised perspective that looks at migration in ways that contrast with states' narrow understanding of migrants in terms of numbers and statistics. She discusses what it means to bring the scale of the migrant back to the scale of the human.

In the edge territories chapter, Hall lays out very well how space-making/claiming the streets for racialised bodies occurs in marginalised urban space. She discusses how the processes by which migrants are displaced and where they are emplaced are shaped through colonial and racialised state-building, which generates social sorting in the city context. Looking at this state configuration of managing, restricting, allowing and displacing migrants through the street allows us to understand how edge territories are shaped. Hall focuses on the streets' dynamics, such as the economy, the racially bordered peripheries of the cities and their relationship with the 'whiteness' of the centre.

Moving from 'edge territories' to 'edge economies', Hall looks at the street economies that migrants establish within the brutal process of urban marginalisation. She examines what we can learn about the city and citizenship by walking around edge territories and seeing day-to-day life. Edge economies are structurally different and more complex than the official economy in terms of how capital circulates. Transactions are neither simply local nor global, and street livelihoods depend as much on social care and cultural prowess as 'economic savvy'. She shows how edge economies shape and are shaped by place.

Urban centres entail segregation with respect to their margins. Developers and planners perceive centres as successes and margins as failures. Using a case study of the Peckham regeneration process in London, Hall examines how these failed margins are to be dismantled and pulled into the centre, while permitting substantial human costs. Emphasising the agency of migrants, she shows how the residents of the margin resist the state and market's enthusiasm for regeneration. Finally, in Chapter Five, Hall challenges our understanding of making space and citizenship by looking at the everyday life of these streets, showing the city as unknowable and citizenship as unfinished.

Throughout *The Migrant's Paradox*, the author 'write[s] the street as world' through walking, looking, listening and talking in the streets of Birmingham, Manchester, London, Bristol and Leicester. Hall invites the reader to enter into the world of migrants and residents of edge territories. These are brought to life by Julia King's maps, which neatly capture street diversity in visual form. Readers visit the urban rooms of shops, local planning offices, conference halls in the street: the streets on the edge where political economies connect with multiple displacements under the sovereign constitutions of power enacted through everyday life. This approach to research really brings the migrant experience – and the migrant's paradox – to life for the reader.

Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics and Political Science.

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