

Work in a Globalising World: Gender, Mobility, Markets. 5th Annual Seminar of the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology

Veranstalter: Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology, Bielefeld University
Datum, Ort: 08.04.2013–10.04.2013, Bielefeld
Bericht von: Lili Zhu / Ramy Youssef, Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology, Bielefeld University

Different forms of work and their effects on society belong without any doubt to the most important and fundamental objects of sociological research and are closely linked to the origins of the discipline. Also in modern historiography, concepts of work in its various historical manifestations have found a place as a key topic. However, fundamental sociological concepts were challenged with developments in the past decade: increasing transnational mobility and the emergence of border-crossing labour markets are undermining established notions of work, class, nation and society. New approaches in „global history“ have shown, that processes of worldwide work-related migration started earlier than initially thought. So in both disciplines there is a growing demand for a new understanding of work, which not only can describe worldwide heterogeneous phenomena of commodifying human workpower, but also considers their global interconnectedness and their effects on gender relations. In this context, the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology at the Bielefeld University organized its Annual Seminar from 8-10th April 2013 with the title „Work in a Globalising World: Gender, Mobility, Markets“ with the objective of facilitating transdisciplinary exchange on this topic and to test new combination possibilities between historiographical and sociological approaches.

As keynote speaker MARCEL VAN DER LINDEN (Amsterdam) was invited, who gave his lecture „The World Working Class: A long View“ – a very suitable access to the topic of the conference. By means of a wide-ranged longitudinal section of history, he offered a sociologically informed overview over entirely different forms of work. His com-

prehensive notion of work included slavery, as well as new forms of „You Inc.s“. Scrutinising the common use of the distinction between free/unfree labour and widespread eurocentric biases, van der Linden went on to discuss phenomena of gender-based labour division, which he conceived to be globally omnipresent and should, according to him, be considered in theorizing about work. After his keynote speech, van der Linden’s concept of a world working class was discussed controversially, because participants in the plenum raised doubts as to the analytical viability and the theoretical „surplus“ of such a broad understanding of a working class.

In the first panel session VIRGINIA AMOROSI (Naples) argued that social unrests between migrant workers of different nationalities in the late 19th century caused a growing demand for the regulation of labour law, which was initially done in the form of bilateral agreements and later with the foundation of the International Labour Organization in 1919. The discourse which was triggered by these events not only dealt with the protection of migrant workers, but also with the competition on the international labour market, the preservation of public order, and female workers. PHILIPP REICK (Berlin) analysed the emergence of the eight-hour day movement with reference to Karl Polanyi proposition of a „double movement“, where interests of a free market competed with the struggle for worker protection. Supported by Nancy Fraser’s critical examination of Polanyi’s work and her assumption of a „triple movement“ by adding the emancipation movement’s interests to Polanyi’s equation, Reick presented the hypothesis, that female work in the late 19th century was not only under the pressure of a self-regulating labour market, but was also a target of discrimination by the social security movement.

In the second panel session LISA BERNTSEN (Groningen) and JUNCHEN YAN (Bielefeld) presented their papers in panel A with the title „Labour Markets in the Globalisation Process“. Berntsen gave an insight into results of her empirical research of the employment conditions of migrant workers. Analysing case studies of migrat-

ing Polish construction workers, Berntsen showed how they acted strategically and used their social networks to get information on attractive job offers in the European labour market. Facing unfair working conditions they, fearing retaliation measures, usually did not directly challenge their employers. Junchen Yan explained how the implementation of flat hierarchies in foreign invested companies in China proved to be incompatible with the career strategies of highly qualified Chinese managers. These white collar managers were usually raised in a cultural environment in which it is important to reach a certain presentable status, but flat hierarchies entailed frustration for the ambitions of these managers, who reach very soon the ceiling of their career opportunities.

In panel B concerning the topic „Work and the Family“, participants presented their current research on the effects of the changing economic structures on the family relationships. PAUL AKTINSON (Huddersfield) commented on the proposals of Karl Ittman and David Levine about the gender and family relationships in the Bradford woolen industry while the Bradford firms were involved in new challenges of international competition. He pointed out that Bradford's female woolen worsted weavers gained new power over family relationships through the globalization process and those roots deserve further examination. CHARLES DUBE (Zimbabwe) on the other hand focused on the „Gender Dynamics in Cross-border Women Trade in Zimbabwe“. He argues that the deeply entrenched androcentric ideological values have muted women's conspicuous financial endowments which resulted in multifaceted husband-wife power asymmetries.

In session III, HEIDI BLUDAU (West Long Branch) depicted the way recruiters created a migration chain for Czech nurses to work in the Middle East. Recruiters convinced these nurses by manipulating realities, for example in glossy brochures with prospects of money and the benefits not only for themselves but also for their nation and their profession. In the gendered arena of health care migration these female nurses have to take a loss of their individual freedom in countries, in which women are still suffering from

various forms of legal discrimination in a „golden cage“. In contrast to these examples, PAULA PUSTULKA (Bangor) depicted how migration can also offer the opportunity to escape from gender-biased discrimination in the home country. Looking at Polish women who migrated to Germany and Great Britain, where the conditions for female workers are comparatively better, Pustulka presented case studies in which female migrant workers were able to achieve a measurable success by mobility and agency, which contradicts common gender-biased role ascriptions.

The panel session IV was dedicated to „Career Development in a Globalising World“. MELANIE STEINER (Bielefeld) pointed out that the new career expectations are emerging through the globalization of organisations. She used empirical results from her qualitative case studies of careers in traditional organisations to examine whether the „Kaminkarriere“ has shifted to the „boundaryless career“ in which national and organizational borders are insignificant. This was followed by a presentation by JULIA GRUHLICH (Paderborn). She spoke about ROSABETH KANTER's definition of „token women“ and discussed explanations for the under-representation of women in management in transnational enterprises based on her case studies.

„Work and Masculinities“ was the topic of session V. DANI KRANZ (Erfurt) described the fate of two love migrants, both of whom were highly-skilled, black, British „Oxbridge“ graduates. They left their home countries to follow their wives to Israel, where they were confronted with gender issues and limited career options in a labour market, which is rather closed off to non-Jewish foreigners. Under these circumstances they had to create a space for themselves by dealing with unscripted roles in a flexible way. RALPH SUSEWIND (Bielefeld) related the story of young Muslim men in provincial India, who invest their time and effort to building up and using networks to seize any job opportunity, while simultaneously dreaming of marrying women from Western Europe and developing high ambitions of economic success.

In the last session in panel A, JACOB DIGGLE (Oxford) and MELE YAMOMO (Mu-

nich) followed the traces of worldwide touring artists during the late 19th/early 20th century. For the case of travelling theatre groups in the British Empire, Jacob Diggle gave insight not only into the structures of the theatre business at that time (which were formed by informal networks as well as by professionalized managerial organization), but also into their effects on family ties and individual fates. At the same time period, as Mele Yamomo (Munich) showed, „Musicos“ from the Philippines, trained in Spanish church missions and colonial military bands in Manila, and then toured through the world. Performing a repertoire consisting of mainly Western music, they not only blurred cultural borders, but were also an example of early professionalization und uniformization in an early globalizing cultural industry.

On panel B there were two speakers who gave an insight into the research field „Women and Migration“. LUCIANA PONTES (Barcelona) performed a content analysis of non-fiction programs about international migrations on the Catalanian channel TV3, especially the representations of migrant women. She came to the conclusion that those women are often mute and associated with traditional gender roles, related to maternity, religiosity and submission. The other speaker of this panel, FUNDA USTEK (Oxford) focused on the invisible women workers in informal economy in Turkey. In her observation, women do not consider themselves as workers despite the fact that they are already making contributions to the changing family structure in Turkey as well as to the global economic restructuring process. According to Ustek, a new understanding of the elusive relationship between globalization and gender needs to be taken into account.

In the plenary discussion the participants provided a positive summary on the interdisciplinary cooperation that was achieved during the conference and voiced excitement for utilizing the experience and new ideas resulting from the discussions in the panels. Despite the excitement generated by the conference, the plenary discussion ended with cautions and a call for new directions in research. URSULA MENSE-PETERMANN (Bielefeld) argued that within the common differentia-

tion between organization, market and network, the latter could contribute to a better understanding of the globalization of work. KLAUS WEINHAUER (Bielefeld) pleaded for a critical history of the knowledge of labour history. Marcel van der Linden called the still controversial debate on structure vs. agency to mind. And finally, Thomas Welskopp demanded the consideration of consumption as a missing link between capital and labour.

The conference showed, that the methods to analyse work in a globalising world seem to be well developed and sufficient to contribute to a better understanding of the subject. Also, from an interdisciplinary point of view, the Annual Seminar provides some evidence, that a new generation of sociologists and historians has no fear of interacting with the respective other discipline. Yet despite this success, the Annual Seminar also demonstrated that both sociology and history need to move past national boundaries as frames of reference. A truism of the seminar quickly became that national borders are losing their importance, yet the presentations still maintained a focus on specific geographic regions. Generally speaking, the central concepts at this seminar have quite a long history themselves, namely „class“, „capitalism“, „nation“. The scientific community has reacted to the growing complexity and interconnectedness of global economic processes of the last decades not by developing new concepts, but mainly by diluting established ones. Both history and sociology have a lot of catch-up work to do and the best way would be to continue working together.

Conference overview

Welcome Address

Thomas Welskopp, Director of the BGHS

Opening lecture

Marcel van der Linden (IISH, Amsterdam, Netherlands): The World Working Class: A long View

Panel Session I

Panel: Labour Law and Labour Struggle

Chair: Ulrike Schulz

Amorosi, Virginia (Naples): International Labour Law in the early XXth Century. Constructing a new discipline between Legal Dis-

course and Migration Question

Reick, Philipp (Berlin): The Double Movement at Work: Karl Polanyi and the International Struggle for an Eight-Hour Workday in the late Nineteenth Century

Panel Session II

Panel A: Labour Markets in the Globalisation Process

Chair: Klaus Weinbauer

Berntsen, Lisa (Groningen): Marketised Employment Relations under (Re)construction in the European Construction Industry

Yan, Junchen (Bielefeld): The Chinese White Collar Managers in Foreign Invested Enterprises and their Habitus

Panel B: Work and the Family

Chair: Felix Brahm

Atkinson, Paul (Huddersfield): Gender and Family Relationships in the Bradford Woolen Industry, 1861-1914: Globalising Markets, Transnational Challenges and German Migration to Bradford

Dube, Charles (Masvingo): Gender Dynamics in Cross-border Women Trade in Zimbabwe

Panel Session III: The Globalisation of Work

Chair: Ursula Mense-Petermann

Bludau, Heidi (West Long Branch): From the Golden City to the Golden Cage: How Recruiters re/create a Transnational Labour Market between Eastern Europe and the Middle East

Pustulka, Paula (Bangor): Escaping Workplace Gender Discrimination through Mobility? - Labour Market Experiences of Polish Female Migrants in UK and Germany

Panel Session IV: Career Development in a Globalising World

Chair: Marcel van der Linden

Steiner, Melanie (Bielefeld): Careers in a Globalising World: Insights from Changing Careers in the Old Economy

Gruhlich, Julia (Paderborn): Questioning new Career Options to token Woman Managers in Transnational Enterprises

Panel Session V: Work and Masculinities

Chair: Marcel van der Linden

Kranz, Dani (Erfurt): A View from the Minority Position: Male, Highly Skilled Migrants who followed their Wives

Susewind, Raphael (Bielefeld): Working towards Love Marriage: Longing and Belonging of Young Muslim Men with Large Aspirations in Provincial India

Panel Session VI

Panel A: Global Artists

Chair: Bettina Brockmeyer

Diggle, Jacob (Oxford): All the World's A Stage: Theatre Touring Networks in the British World (1870-1914)

Yamomo, Mele (Munich): Global Currents, Musical Streams: Manila Musicos and the Professionalization and Globalization of Musical Practices in the Age of Empire

Panel B: Women and Migration

Chair: Margit Fauser

Pontes, Luciana (Barcelona): An Alternative Gaze? Migrated Women in Catalonia's Public Television Programs on International Migrations

Ustek, Funda (Oxford): Between the Global and Local: The Invisible Women Workers in Informal Economy

Closing plenary session

Tagungsbericht *Work in a Globalising World: Gender, Mobility, Markets. 5th Annual Seminar of the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology*. 08.04.2013–10.04.2013, Bielefeld, in: H-Soz-Kult 21.06.2013.