

## **Emotions at Work: Intimacies, Labor, and Urban Space in the 20th Century**

**Veranstalter:** Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Center for the History of Emotions, Berlin

**Datum, Ort:** 23.10.2019–25.10.2019, Berlin

**Bericht von:** Rukmini Barua / Stephanie Lämmert / Esra Sarioglu / Julia Wambach, Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin

The workshop was conceptualized as a dialogue between the history of emotions, urban studies, and labor history. It began with a roundtable discussion on the theme of „Emotions, Labor, and the City: A New Paradigm“. The intention behind the roundtable was to initiate a conversation between scholars of different temporal and geographical specializations. They reflected on a set of questions that centered around emotions pertaining to: modernity and its associations with urban life; rural/urban dynamics; pervasive shifts in the economy, including deindustrialization and the growth of the service sector; urban working-class lives, community making, forms of solidarity and conflicts; and gender hierarchies.

UTE FREVERT (Berlin) read ambivalence in the title of the workshop. „Emotions at Work“ could signify the role of emotions in the work process but also the work that emotions are „doing“. She then referred to Arlie Russell Hochschild to highlight forms of emotional labor which are, more often than not, gendered. This form of emotion work is not just a consequence of capitalist demands on women, but an integral part of women's own expectations. If these feminine forms of emotion work become models of working behavior for men, Frevert contended, we are perhaps moving towards a new paradigm of emotions at work.

CHITRA JOSHI (Delhi) drew on her research on working-class experience in India to highlight the paradox of increased circulation of migrant labor accompanied by shrinking possibilities of employment in both rural and urban contexts. Mobility in such a situation becomes a way of coping with the anxieties and insecurities that underlie the precar-

ity of contemporary working lives. She suggested that we are witnessing a collapse of earlier imaginaries of the urban as a zone of endless possibilities, a space where feelings and desires were produced to disrupt social hierarchies. Instead, we see the emergence of an urban space for the poor that is marked by an erosion of trust and an exacerbation of suspicion. The workers' sense of self is being crushed in daily encounters with their employers as feelings of fear, humiliation and loss of dignity become a part of their experience of work. Echoing Walkerdine's work on deindustrialization and affect, Joshi foregrounds masculine pride as central to the experience of industrial work, as well as the affective relations of community as providing a source of sustenance after factory closures. At the same time, she highlighted the variability of emotional responses to deindustrialization along caste lines.

VALERIE WALKERDINE (Cardiff) addressed the questions drawing on her research on industrial landscapes in Wales. Understanding emotions through the lens of affect – which she takes to mean embodied sensations and energies flowing between people and bodies – she focused on feelings that may not surface or be named as emotions. For both Walkerdine and Joshi, nostalgia is critically interrogated – with Walkerdine emphasizing how hardships of the past were inherent in the formation of affective relationships of the present. These affective relations emerge most explicitly as practices and as forms and modes of doing and living, both in terms of mutual support as well as a collective awareness of and reluctance to articulate pain. With the onset of deindustrialization, fragmented affective relationships began to surface, especially around changed gendered divisions of labor and intergenerational discord. Walkerdine views this fragmentation as evidence of deeper trauma and suffering. In this way, communities form a „second skin“ to negotiate the difficulties of changed industrial conditions, while also containing and shrouding the anxieties associated with this experience.

LYNN THOMAS (Washington) emphasized the continuities and ties between the rural and the urban, complicating the ideolog-

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ical mapping of rural/urban onto the realms of the traditional/modern. This distinction, she argued, operated more as a popular idiom and as a way of questioning national and gendered politics. In particular, mission schools in colonial Africa confounded these easy binaries by contributing to circulatory regimes of media and cultural products that went beyond the urban/rural divide. Being modern had much more to do with making political claims than a particular geographical location. Similarly, emotional states such as „modern love“ were not spatially located in the city, but were instead phenomena built around circuits of schooling, media, and cultural formation. She foregrounds consumption and the aesthetic fashioning of the body as central features in the „democratization of desire“ by which working populations construct an aspirational future in opposition to histories of subjugation.

The four roundtable panelists took a fresh perspective on themes that have long been discussed in labor history and urban studies through the lens of the history of emotions. In the conversation that followed, the dynamics of nostalgia and its role in scholarly and popular understandings of the past was the subject of a vigorous and challenging debate that raised crucial questions about the craft and practice of history writing. To what extent do we as historians and academics project our own ideas of the past, especially in the writing of histories of deindustrialization? Which forms of remembering and the emotions embedded therein are privileged in the narratives constructed by scholars? The roundtable thus critically engaged with older topics and paved the way for discussion during the following days of the workshop.

The papers presented over the next two days were organized around three thematic panels. The panel „Urban Intimacies,“ as the discussant KATRIN BROMBER (Berlin) observed, complicated the relationship between the urban and the rural while addressing the production of possibilities that the urban afforded. RUKMINI BARUA (Berlin) presented a paper on romantic love and family structures in an industrial settlement in contemporary Delhi, thereby highlighting aspects of emotional labor involved in expressions and

performances of love. SERAWIT DEBELE (Göttingen) addressed questions of politics and agency in queer love in Ethiopia in drawing out ambivalences between the notion of love as a redemptive force and that of the impossibility of love due to the present legislative and societal proscription of homosexuality in Ethiopia. STEPHANIE LÄMMERT (Berlin) focused on the moral panics around the figure of the „sugar daddy“ and the „good time girl“ from the 1980s to the 2000s, relating the anxieties and social responses to these figures to broader economic, political, and religious developments in Zambia.

In his comment, RAZAK KHAN (Erlangen) suggested that the papers in the panel „Emotions of Industrial Work“ show that emotions were not only constituted in the workspace, but they are forms of temporal, spatial, and material practices of working lives. JULIA WAMBACH (Berlin) explored forms of solidarity in the context of deindustrialization in Western Europe. She argued that workers' solidarity did not disappear with the collapse of industry and the attendant decline of political activism, but shifted its locus to sites of leisure. CHRISTIAN STRÜMPPELL (Hamburg) examined feelings associated with the building and subsequent transformations of company towns and their use in postcolonial India. JACKIE CLARKE (Glasgow) addressed the salience of objects and workers' relationship to them as a way of transcending the moment of rupture brought on by the closure of the Moulinex factory in western France in 2001. JAMES MUSONDA (Liège) focused on the role of women's work in the Zambian mining industry and interrogated spousal relations and notions of the family in the changing work practices in the mines.

The papers of the final panel „Feeling the Hierarchies“ were discussed by JOSEPH BEN PRESTEL (Berlin). He highlighted questions of global, colonial, and comparative history and underlined the role of modern women that brought the three papers together, which spanned diverse geographical and temporal locations such as Turkey, South Africa, Nairobi, and Beijing. BRIDGET KENNY (Witswatersrand) explored lifts as affective spaces, connecting issues of technology, urbanity, and modernity with racialized labor

regimes and gendered politics in South Africa in the 1960s. SARAH BELLOW-SBLAKELY (Berlin) addressed global discourses of empowering the girl child against the backdrop of neoliberal capitalism and feminist advocacy from 1945 to the present day. ESRA SARIOGLU (Berlin) presented the final paper of the workshop, on embodiment as a mode of viewing women's agency in contemporary Turkey, relating changing forms of gendered embodiment to shifts in legal codes and labor regimes.

The workshop concluded with an open discussion that reflected on the methodological and disciplinary commonalities and divergences in researching emotions in urban life. During the discussion, Valerie Walkerdine shared her theoretical approaches to affects, emotions, and the lessons learned during her fieldwork in Wales, which were very much appreciated by all participants. Despite the broad geographical, temporal, and disciplinary scope of the workshop, the papers spoke to one another: gender and emotions were the recurring themes of the workshop as was the navigation of urban spaces templated by emotions. The focus on emotions helped to bridge the gap between individual and collective experience of urban working life and constitutes a promising field for future research.

#### **Conference overview:**

##### *Public Roundtable: Emotions, Labor, and the City: A New Paradigm?*

Ute Frevert (Max Planck Institute for Human Development Berlin)

Chitra Joshi (Delhi University)

Valerie Walkerdine (Cardiff University)

Lynn Thomas (University of Washington)

##### *Panel I: Urban Intimacies*

Discussant: Katrin Bromber (Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin)

Rukmini Barua (Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin): Love, Intimacy, and Family Structures in Postcolonial Delhi

Serawit Debele (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen): The Politics of Falling in Love among the Zega in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Stephanie Lämmert (Max Planck Institute for

Human Development, Berlin): Sugar Daddies, School Girls, and City Nights: Intimate Encounters in Urban Central Africa

##### *Panel II: Emotions of Industrial Work*

Discussant: Razak Khan (Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

Julia Wambach (Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin): Losing Work, Losing Solidarity? Repercussions of Deindustrialization in France and Germany

Christian Strümpell (Universität Hamburg): Angst and Anger in an Eastern Indian Steel Town

Jackie Clarke (University of Glasgow): Emotions, Objects and Memories of Working Life after Factory Closure

James Musonda (University of Liège): Women in the Underground Mines: Changing Role of Masculinities, and the Impact of Female Wage on the Concept of Families in the Zambian Mines and Communities

##### *Panel III – Feeling the Hierarchies*

Discussant: Joseph Ben Prestel (Freie Universität Berlin)

Bridget Kenny (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg): Lift Stories: The Labor of Affective Relations in Johannesburg's „Intimate Publics“ of Elevators and Shops in the 1960s

Sarah Bellows-Blakely (Freie Universität Berlin): Empowering the Girl Child? The Neoliberal Turn in Development, from Nairobi to Beijing

Esra Sarioglu (Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin): Feelings of New Woman: Gender, Morality, and Politics in Contemporary Turkey

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