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“Labour from a cross-cultural perspective”

Paper for the global discussion series WORLD WIDE: WORK

The Goethe Institute Munich, Kammerspiele and Nemetschek Foundation are currently organizing a global discussion series WORLD WIDE: WORK from January to May 2014. It aims to connect discussants from eight world metropolises via live streaming. Perspectives from different work cultures, labour policies and migration regimes are merged, and public debates on working conditions, the gendered division of labour, distribution and justice compared. The aim of the series of events is to start a global debate that moves beyond national discourses. During each of the four events, scholars, artists, activists and audiences debate these issues in Munich and in two additional cities: Beijing and Johannesburg, Rome and Mexico City, Cairo and New Delhi, Tokyo and Madrid. Short films offer insights into personal life stories and the realities of work in the participating countries.

This paper provides substantial input into the discussion series from the point of view of the social sciences, especially Cultural and Social Anthropology. It strives to present the current state of research on the main topics under discussion, as well as offering ideas and suggestions for further transnational debates. My task has been to bring the international participants up to an equal level of knowledge concerning work-related issues in the three respective national contexts, as bringing out similarities and differences for each subject matter paves the way for cross-cultural comparisons.

Anthropology has the potential to offer interesting and fresh perspectives on work and labour. It does not only focus on politics, law or formal market mechanisms as in other disciplines, but also looks closely at diverse social and moral arrangements. Moreover, anthropology acknowledges that in many societies waged work is less dominant than it has been in the Western world. It opens up a less dichotomizing way of thinking about economies and labour, questioning the suitability and usefulness of analytical distinctions such as modern-traditional, formal-informal or work-leisure. Recently, historian Andreas Eckert has issued a call to overcome thematic and regional limitations and dichotomies in order to develop a novel, global perspective on labour (Eckert 2009). Anthropology is especially suited to contribute towards building this perspective, as it has examined economic processes as social processes and phenomena that reach beyond national borders for decades, and has provided studies into the meanings, manifestations, institutional settings and representations of labour in its diversity and societal interconnectedness. Moreover, notions of work in relation to personhood, identity-building, and daily processes,

techniques and skills are subjects worth studying regardless of whether it is focused on rural West Africa or on employees of Sony or Siemen's headquarters.

However, such a more microscopic perspective needs the time and budget to conduct ethnographic research which in this case I did not have. My overall task was to review existing literature. I have therefore looked at macro-sociological data and resources, combining them with insights from selected qualitative studies¹.

1. Peking – Johannesburg – Munich: Work without a Homeland?

Geographical mobility for economic reasons is a universal human trait and has been present in different types of societies reaching far back into history. Traditional ways of meeting subsistence needs include seasonal and cyclical movements, nomadic pastoralism and inter-regional trade, forms of mobility that are still very important and widespread today, but do not normally draw our attention as they occur in regions at the margins of the Euro-American world (Hahn/Klute 2007). However, European expansionism and the creation of a colonial World System in the 15th century (Wolf 1986) has reshaped regional mobility patterns and structured the emerging transatlantic migration system, including various forms of slave trade and coercive human displacement. In turn, transatlantic mass migration in its modern, not directly coercive form can be said to have arisen in the 19th century along with Free Trade policies and technological innovations: around 52 million Europeans went seeking new opportunities in America between 1870 and 1914 (Page Moch 1992: 149).

There is an ongoing debate about the pace and scale of contemporanean international migration in comparison to earlier movements. As both a component of, and catalyst for globalization processes, the majority of scholars believe that the international labour force has increased as the integration of product and capital markets grow, and information on national and local labour markets becomes available through communication technologies. The rise of neoliberal policies has further accelerated global economic integration. Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller (2009) speak of an *Age of Migration* and "transnational revolution" that has reshaped societies and polities, and numbers confirm the idea of a rise of "global labour nomads", although this has occurred at a slower pace than often assumed. The percentage of the world's population that work and live outside their country of birth has increased only moderately from 2.9 to 3.1 per

¹ I am very grateful to Daniel Rees for proof-reading and to my colleagues Ursula Münster and Verena Zimmermann for their commentaries on the respective parts on India and China. Any lack of accuracy concerning these regions is, however, my own responsibility.

cent in the last decade (IOM²). However, in absolute numbers the *migration stock* (people living outside their country of birth) has grown considerably, as it has doubled over the past quarter-century (Castles/Miller 2009: 7).

Scholars agree that labour migration has been globalized and diversified. This means that the motives and forms are more heterogeneous than before. First, worldwide opportunities have increased for professionals so that transnational high-status migration has become the norm in some sectors of international business, politics and science. Secondly, virtually all countries in the world are simultaneously countries of origin, transit and destination for labour movements. Emerging nations have become important regional poles of immigration. South Africa, for instance, is the economic powerhouse of the African region, at the same time an emigration country of highly skilled labour. Another aspect to be stressed here is that one third of international migration now occurs within the “Global South” (*south-to-south migration*)³. Another one-third of migrants who were born in the South now live in the North; one-quarter of the global migrant stock was born and still live in the North (UN Population Facts 2012: 1). However, classical immigration countries still host the majority of all international migrants. Between 2000 and 2010, nine countries gained over one million people each, accounting for 67 per cent of the overall increase in the migrant stock over the last 10 years⁴.

Now, why do people migrate and what is their impact on sending and receiving societies? Scholars agree on the fact that every migration decision is socially and culturally embedded, and it is not the result of individual decision-making as assumed by neoclassical theory, nor does migration bring national wages into line. Push- and pull-factors (global wealth disparities and the demand for cheap labour in the receiving countries) are still relevant in order to understand the causes of migration, but must be evaluated by considering the impact of social relationships, cultural practices and values as well as unequal access to information. Accordingly, the examination of transnational social ties between persons at home and migrated relatives can offer explanations as to why certain individuals or families migrate who are in similar societal positions and material conditions to others that do not migrate. Transnational kinship and social ties facilitate access to vital information, capital and contacts. This approach offers insights into the

² International Organization of Migration, Global Estimates and Trends,
<http://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/about-migration/facts--figures-1/global-estimates-and-trends.html>,
 17.07.2013.

³ South-to-south movements are especially strong in the case of refugees: 90 per cent of refugees worldwide are hosted by developing countries, mostly neighbouring states and countries on the same continent (Population Facts 2012: 3). This paper does not comprise refugee movements, though it is significant within the wider context of the movements of the global work force.

⁴ United States (8.0 million), Spain (4.6 million), Italy (2.3 million), Saudi Arabia (2.2 million), the United Kingdom (1.7 million), Canada (1.6 million), the Syrian Arab Republic (1.3 million) and Jordan and the United Arab Emirates with one million each. Germany is positioned no. 13 with 777.000 arrivals (International Migration Report 2009: 2f.).

fact that labour migration and certain migration systems often continue to exist despite unfavourable legal and economic changes in the host countries (Gurak/Caces 1992). Looking at migration as a dynamic system makes us aware of the limitations and possible counterproductive outcomes of policies wanting to control immigration and national borders.⁵

Furthermore, *migration systems theory* studies the interrelatedness of sending and receiving countries, along with special regions within the countries, in historical, economic, political and cultural terms. Migration systems normally last for decades so that locally specific social relations and institutions develop to organize migration. Telecommunication and the internet have increased the speed and scope of information exchanged between migrants and their families. The media, politicians and people in both the sending and receiving country constantly debate the causes and consequences, motivations and possibilities of migration. Migration might be portrayed as something culturally desirable and socially expected for certain young men and women, but heavily contested by other age groups. The term “cultures of migration” thus refers to this ongoing process of negotiation regarding the sense and purpose of migration decisions (Hahn/Klute 2007).

Another pertinent aspect of current transnational migration is the strong presence of women workers and employees. The “feminization of migration” (Han 2003) is driven by the global restructuring of industries towards the service sector. Migration of women exists in regional south-to-south migration but is more visible in south-north-movements. Women from developing countries leave their children in the hands of female kin in order to care for other families’ children in the North. This "global care chain" (Ehrenreich 2003) forms part of the unequal developments of global neoliberal policies. Increased air travel and the internet facilitate the maintenance of social relationships, however the emotional costs for globally dispersed transnational families can be high. In spite of this, women often stress relatively better living conditions and higher wages in precarious labour segments of host societies than in their countries of origin, allowing them to sustain their family and provide their children with the opportunity of a better education. The meaning of childcare and parenthood can be very diverse, as childcare by social rather than biological parents is widespread and not as problematic as has been supposed.

However, both male and female migrant labourers are more vulnerable to exploitation than the average non-migrant population, especially in the case of irregular migrants. Since the beginning of the 21th century, “illegal” migration has presented a problem that remains as yet unsolved.

⁵ Laws to restrict cross-border movements between Germany and Turkey have actually accelerated settlements of Turkish workers and their families contrary to the original political intent behind this restrictive legislation (Wilpert 1992).

Irregular forms of migration are very difficult to determine; Castles and Miller (1998: 162) estimated that one-fourth of all international migrants were irregular and therefore deprived of social security guarantees, labour protection regulations and other human rights. Official labour recruitment agreements were cut after the oil crisis of the 1970s. Although migration became more politicized as governments realized that it required cooperation between sending, transit and receiving countries, receiving countries remain hesitant to sign agreements. International policies such as the EU legislation on border controls under the Schengen process have been designed to prevent immigration rather than to really shape processes (Castles/Miller 2009).

In South Africa, immigration from the rest of the continent has increased after the end of apartheid; here as in Europe the country faces tension between governments' juridical and rhetorical commitment to regional integration and human rights on the one hand, and a lack of political will, policy implementation and changes in administrative practices on the other (Segatti 2011). Emphasis is put on recruiting highly skilled people, although labour recruitment of temporary foreign workers for mines and farms continues. South African mines provide employment for young men from sub-Saharan countries although these workers face a high risk of injury and death (Castles/Miller 2009: 155). To regulate regional migration in southern Africa, it is essential to consider the widespread practices of circular and temporary migration within the whole space of the sub-Saharan region and to adjust policies to these realities.

China is a huge country with high numbers of internal and international migrants. Ethnic Chinese reside in 130 countries around the world (Li/Li 2013: 25) and are more inclined than every other group to be entrepreneurs and transnational merchants. Official statistics place internal migrants within China at over one-tenth of the whole population (Scheineson 2009: 1). They face major inequalities and discrimination on the housing and labour market as well as in health and education because they don't have full citizenship rights in the cities. This is due to the household registration service (*bukou*) implemented during the 1950s that ties people to where they are born and grew up (Scheineson 2009: 2).

The impact of international labour migration on the sending and receiving countries must be assessed separately for each specific case. What can generally be said, however, is that some sending countries welcome out-migration (mainly as a release for the domestic labour market and because of remittances) whereas others provide incentives for migrants to return. The majority of receiving countries, especially in the Global North, welcome immigrant workers for economic reasons as they are generally younger (and in many cases better educated) than the average native population; the host country profits from lower wages and/or technical skills and professional knowledge. These arguments in favour of immigration are challenged in many national scenarios

by narrow concepts of ethnic identity and xenophobia, but also by anxieties over downward competition on the labour market. It is a constant challenge for society and politics to shape labour migration and resulting ethnic diversity and transnational lifestyles in a favourable way for both the mobile and the more static population. This leads us to the topic of the second debate: labour conditions and workers' dignity.

2. Mexico City – Rome – Munich: What is Humanised Labour?

Issues such as difficult employment circumstances, unequal income, and inhuman working conditions are discussed in all three national contexts. “Precariousness” is an especially strong issue in Italy. For left-wing parties and intellectuals, the term stands not only for flexibility in the labour market (short-term, subcontracted and atypical contracts), but for the “precariousness” of a des-integrating society as a whole at the beginning of the 21th century (Molé 2012). Public debates on precariousness started early on in the midst of liberalizing policies of the rather rigid labour regime and high unemployment rates during the 1990s, and these debates appear more politicized than in the north of Europe. The Communist Party and trade unions used the trope of precariousness to mobilize demonstrations and strikes against the Berlusconi government, in particular its Biagi Laws (or Law 30) from 2003 that were interpreted as a violation of main achievements of the 1970s, i.e. the protection of workers in the case of unjustified dismissal (*ibid.*: 26). Therefore, in the Italian context, precariousness can be considered as a key symbol for discussions on questions of decent working conditions and a “human society”, and it rests on historically embedded work ethics and notions of economic justice.

While labour market changes associated with neoliberal policies provoked discussions in Europe, in Latin America, especially Mexico, the shift from import-substitution to export-oriented production and the opening of national markets within the North American Free Trade Area (Mexico, US, Canada) since 1994 has sparked controversies regarding unfair working conditions and abuse of workers. Scholars and activists criticise the decay of small farms and firms, accelerated rural-urban migration and the rise of the informal sector. They denounce the unfair working conditions prevalent in US-corporations and Mexican state-dependent firms. Topics that recur within the social sciences of labour and international labour relations include Mexico's sweat shops (*maquiladoras*) affiliated with trans-national corporations at the Mexican-US-border, exploitation of workers in sub-contracted firms as well as migrant day labourers in agriculture and low-skilled manufacturing and service jobs in Mexican cities and the U.S.. Experiences with U.S. agrobusiness enterprises in Baja California (Zlolniski 2010) and Mexican migrant work in the U.S. (i.a. Zlolniski 2006) suggest that the implementation of better working conditions, living wages and health care systems largely depends on the power of political mobilization of workers not

only to integrate an ethnically and socially heterogeneous work force, but also to develop transnational political strategies. Where such cross-national mobilization exists, it often takes the form of a coalition between local organisations and national unions with global justice NGOs.

Formulating constructive criticisms of the status-quo of global economic interdependence is one thing, developing alternative models for “humanised work” is another, no less important concern. Contemporary scholars and activists invite us to imagine what “human” labour might look like. This form of thinking is encapsulated in the concept of a “Human Economy” – the title of a recent book that unites the work of social and cultural scientists (including scholars from the non-Anglophone and non-Western world) who share the common aim of developing a new understanding of the economy in the light of an interconnected world and the persistent crisis of neoliberalism. Their aim is to rescue the economy “from the economists” so that we stop thinking in terms of *homo oeconomicus* and overcome the Western cultural notion that self-interest and mutuality, or the economic and the social are irreconcilable⁶. The authors search for principles that will guarantee plural economies within democratic frameworks, and to democratize the economy and labour relations themselves. The model of a “mixed economy”, distinguishing “capital economy” (private enterprises) from “public economy” (state firms and public policies) and “labour economy” (worker-owned factories, cooperatives) is a proposition formulated by Argentine scholar José Luis Coraggio (Coraggio 2010: 119). He draws on the distinction between *instrumental rationality* operating in “capital economy”, where the labour force is in constant danger to be substituted and wages suffer downward competition, as opposed to “labour economy” that is based on the principle of maintenance of society and culture (*reproductive rationality*). This resonates with notions put forward by economic anthropologist Stephen Gudeman (2005) regarding the necessity that every society should count on a *base* – institutions, social ties, cultural resources – outside the market. Both concepts were developed from experiences in Latin American countries where waged work did not have such a strong normativity and normality as in Western Europe between the Industrial Revolution and the 1970s. Scholars from the Global South acknowledge the parallel existence of a variety of economies with different production objectives, organizations of labour, and logics of exchange.

What is at stake here shows similarities and difference with respect to the more Euro-American centred-discussions on an “basic income guarantee” and the need for a Third Sector of social volunteer work or “*Bürgerarbeit*” (Dettling 2000). Whereas the latter concept primarily aims at revaluing those activities of benefit to the society (to be payed by “social currencies” as honours and recognition, only the most needed people are supposed to receive a salary, for this reason the

⁶The authors propose a new "new institutional economics" to be formed by anthropologists, sociologists, political economists, economic historians and philosophers (Hart/Laville/Cattani 2010: 7).

approach is criticized for substituting waged work), the first one claims an unconditional basic income for all citizens. This rests on the assumptions that it reduces stigmatization of unemployed, increases wages, and/or reduces social costs because of de-bureaucratization. Both kinds of dividends are thought to be financed and/or incentivized by the state (Dettling 2000) which reflects specific historical processes and an overall systemic trust in European societies. In this regard, Mexico's history of the 20th century (roughly speaking: one-party rule and political co-option) might provide a different setting. Scholars tend to think more in terms of self-organization and grass-roots movements such as credit unions, co-operatives, and neighbourhood associations to partly compensate for a lack of basic social security provisions. These forms do not emerge under the tutelage of Western development agencies only, for what they have been criticized, but are embedded livelihood strategies in many parts of the world.

On both sides of the Atlantic, ideas of restricting labour rest on the notion that the economic should not be separated from the social, from reproduction and reciprocity. The underlying idea of José Luis Coraggio is to imagine “how we recognize, reclaim, foster, invent and develop other forms of active life, other ways of motivating and co-ordinating human actions [namely work] (...).” (Coraggio 2010: 123). This includes the issue of renaming what we consider work and socially re-evaluating other forms of activity that are indispensable to human reproduction and production: caring, family and household work. This leads us to the next topic that addresses labour from the perspective of its gendered division.

3. Cairo – Delhi – Munich: Men's Work, Women's Work

Inner-household distribution of labour is currently a highly discussed issue in Germany. The debates are mostly concerned with the distribution of waged work and household duties by gender, but also address legal reforms in social policy such as the “parental allowance” (*Elterngeld*) passed in 2007. The *Elterngeld* compensates for wage losses providing 67% of the medium income of the last year; it is paid for 12 months while the father or mother is on parental leave, but for 14 months if the other partner takes at least two months as well. The law explicitly aims to create incentives for higher income parents to reconcile professional careers with family life and to elevate the percentage of men taking care of their baby. First assessments of the impact of the law, however, confirm the popular expression of “*Vätermonate*” which means that fathers take the obligatory two months that otherwise would remain unused (Pull/Vogt 2010). This means that child care is far from being divided equally between the sexes, although fathers spend roughly more time with their children than doing housework, cleaning or cooking (Blättel-Mink et al. 2000). Therefore, Germany faces the recurrent problem of an unequal distribution of different activities between men and women, actions that all comprise “work” in a broad sense (including

waged work, care work and housework), but are not all understood and remunerated as such. The stable burden of household and caring goes along with women's integration into the labour market on a part-time basis. 60 % of women in Germany who are of working age actually have a job, though numbers are rising. However, only 46% work full-time, so that the aggregated hours performed by women in the labour market have not increased in the last decade (Gender Datenreport n.Y.)

In order to take a cross-cultural approach to the discussion of a gendered division of labour, I suggest to relate household work to waged work and labour market opportunities. From an anthropological standpoint, we should distinguish analytically between an economic, household-centred perspective with the social realm of kinship on one side, and the more emotional term „family“ on the other. A “household” is a pragmatic site that provides the material means and “work” for reproduction. It is made up of people, who are either related or not, that contribute to the maintenance of the domestic unit. To do so, households, especially in agrarian societies and rural areas of modern nation-states, often rely on extra-household relations such as those of kinship, neighbourhood and the wider community. Kinship structures are therefore interrelated with the provision of material goods and the distribution of work by gender⁷. “Family”, however, is best understood in a narrower sense as being made up of those relatives who care for one another, and seek to uphold the value of family life and the home. I am mainly concerned with “kinship” rather than “family” in my approach to the household.

It is very difficult to review the case of India because of the cultural, religious and caste-based diversity of the country, and regional differences between the South and the North. Literature is scarce concerning inner-household division of labour, rather it is focused on women's social and emotional role within the family (Fruzetti/Tenhunen 2006), and the difficulties they face participating in the labour market. Authors have observed greater physical mobility and public respect towards women in the South because of stronger matrilateral ties in the kinship system, the importance of female labour in traditional rice agriculture and the predominance of Hinduism and Christianity (Lessinger 2001: 74). However, Lessinger points out that female participation rates in the labour market in Chennai (capital of the Southern state Tamilnadu) remain low. Authors present aggregated numbers of the female workforce based on the National Social Survey (NSS) that range between 30% (José 2007: 1) to only 15% (John 2013: 180). Only (30 or 15?) percent of women receives a salary or other kind of material remuneration, a number that

⁷ Kinship structures regulate the allocation of property within the household, i.e. in marriage transactions. Property, an addition to subsistence and waged work, is an important asset of women's economic security and independence (Moore 1988: ch.3)

seems extremely low⁸. In spite of India's economic boom phase with increasing levels of investment in manufacturing, technology and the service sector, there is no clear feminisation tendency of salaried labour observable as in other countries (John 2013: 179f.). There is evidence, on the contrary, that women's participation in economic activities outside the household has fallen along with rural-urban migration. The 2001 census reveals that 80% of women were found to be working in agriculture and related activities in rural areas (José 2001: 6). Although local NGOs and developing agencies support female self-empowerment strategies in the cities, instances of women's self-employment and participation in urban, informal petty trade remains scarce (Lessinger 2001: 95: ff.). This is striking, as in cross-national comparisons petty trade is a feminized sector of the urban poor (Seligmann 2001). John (2013) stresses that in India female waged work takes the shape of a "U", being of considerable quantity only at the lower and upper end of the social ladder (*ibid.*: 184f.).

One explication for these abnormal trends in female employment in India is a labour market segmented along gender lines which is strengthened in a situation of competition for jobs in the metropolis, and by conservative gender roles and identities (Lessinger 2001). Women's work in publicly visible and manual occupations tends to be seen as degrading and dangerous. Ideals of gender separation and the identification of women with the home have been identified by Lessinger for Tamilnadu, Tiengtrakul (2006) for the northern city of Varanasi, and the Calcutta Metropolitan area (Tenhunen 2006). Upper class and high caste values that consider manual work as a stigma, especially when performed by women, have spread to the middle and working classes (John 2013). However, female employment is more likely to be legitimate when it is non-manual and hidden from the public eye, and when it offers decent pay and regulated working conditions as in the case of academically trained women.

Although in urban areas most occupations are not strictly caste specific (Lessinger 2001: 79f.)⁹, class stratification does rest on a hierarchy of castes (John 2013). High status is confirmed by the seclusion of wives who have female employees at their disposal. In contrast, urban middle class women entering the labour market face a double workload. So do women of lower castes and the Dalit who perform paid household and family work for others (John 2013). As mentioned above, no explicit data has been found regarding the division of work inside the household; the extended family is supposed to offer possibilities to distribute household and family work among women,

⁸ Indian gender and feminist scholars have voiced criticism over statistics they regard as based only on paid work, whereas they aim instead at making visible the "hidden" unpaid work women perform in the home and for their families.

⁹ Ahuja (2000: 124f.) stresses that labour relations in India have partly relied on capitalist structures and contractual work relations since the 18th century when crafts and agriculture were commercialized.

although these are criss-crossed by power relations between elder and younger, consanguineous and in-law female kin.

Unfortunately, there is very little research internationally available for Egypt on the topic. The anthropologist Soheit A. Morsy is highly critical of what she terms “the idealist socio-culturalism” (Morsy 1990: 88) which has characterized research on Arab women. She opts for an “anti-orientalist stance” that rejects speaking of *the Islamic culture*. Islam is used as a pretext to restrict or widen women’s autonomy according to context and the interests of the people involved (Morsy 1990: 123). A political-economy approach stresses the impact of labour migration and the regional petro-economy on the division of labour by gender. Similar to scholars in India and feminist and development anthropologists (i.a. Moore 1988: ch.3), she blames the invisibilization of women's work, a process strengthened by international development programmes that rest on the male “breadwinner” model although, especially in the countryside, women are engaged in both domestic and agriculture tasks. Women in Egypt traditionally participate in a variety of income generating activities such as inter-household cooperation and craft production. The domestic sphere of rural and peri-urban poor households is seen as a domain of economic action and productive work, a material dimension that is partly lost in the city (Morsy 1990: 92). Moreover, women from the lower strata are often drawn into the capitalist labour market by necessity, a process that is still repeated in areas of strong male out-migration¹⁰.

In spite of women's factual contribution to production and income generation in Egypt, their part is, however, only seen as a complementary one. The authority of women does not rest on economic capital, but on social relations, motherhood and their position within the family. However, labour opportunities and social status of women depend, as mentioned above, to a high degree on their class background. In rural areas, as agricultural production has been devaluated, they face the general constrained of peasants. In the cities, upward social mobility is reached through education and white-collar jobs or through marriage into business families where women's status is additionally marked by veiling, i.e. the influence of the Gulf-states (Morsy 1990: 138).

In conclusion, subsistence agriculture and additional income generating activities are widespread among rural women in both India and Egypt. With urbanization, productive activities of women decrease backed by gender ideologies concerning separate spheres and identities. Limited opportunities in official labour markets and poor working conditions and salaries in urban

¹⁰ Internal and international labour migration and the formation of trans-national households clearly influence the inner-household and gender distribution of work in all three national contexts of India, Egypt and Germany. Some related issues were mentioned in chapter 1.

informal economies disincentivize women's waged work and strengthen the moral rejection of women's labour outside the home. A comparison could be made with Germany where low wage rates and prestige as well as part-time occupations endure in feminized sectors such as primary education, health care and household services, as well as the arts and culture-related industries. Income disparities between partners discourage an equal distribution of all kinds of work and reify traditional gender roles.

Whereas this chapter has dealt with the presumption of that a remunerative occupation (or another type of material base) is essential for individual autonomy and agency of both men and women in the contemporanean world, the last part of this working paper asks something quite different: Is work fulfilling?

4. Tokyo – Madrid – Munich: Does Work Make Us Happy?

The issue of the value of work (not to speak of the idea of personal happiness), and labour as alienation or self-fulfillment, is deeply rooted in European intellectual history and political economy, and is only starting to be explored for non-Western societies within a comparative framework (Eckert 2009). In Western thinking, the meaning of the term “work” continuously oscillates between burden and struggle, creation and accomplishment¹¹. In this same tradition, Karl Marx proposed a model that analyzes the opposition between alienated work in capitalist societies and the prevalence of “free activities” among pre-capitalist groups and in a Utopian post-capitalist society where work would be transformed from a burden into a pleasure (Spittler 2008).

Current European and German debates on work-centered personal identities and work-related illnesses must be contextualized within this history of ideas. It might be fruitful to draw comparisons with Japan, where ongoing debates have taken place since the early 1980s concerning questions of cerebral/cardio diseases and mental fatigue due to work overload (*karoshi*) (Kanai 2008). As a reaction to increased cases of “suicide by overwork” (*karo-jisai*), approval standards for these illnesses, especially “mental disorders”, have been relaxed in Japan (Kanai 2008: 209). Although the strong work related identities and illnesses apply to middle-aged men in top private and state positions in particular, the work-loads in part-time, short-term positions, typically occupied by women and older men, has increased as well (Kanai 2008). Expectations of corporate loyalty and responsibility of the individual employee towards the firm are high in both contexts. In Germany as in Japan, the work-load of white-collar professionals

¹¹ This double-sided definition is well exemplified etymologically. Many Indo-European languages have two verbs and respective nouns that express this dual conceptualization of human necessity versus human creativity: *travailler* (fr.), *lavorare* (it.), *labour* (eng.) and *Arbeit* (dt.) on the one hand, *ouvrir*, *faire*, *work* and *Werk* on the other (Kehrer 1993: 10). Other languages do not make this distinction.

seems to gain far more public attention than over-work (and the subsequent health consequences) of people in lower industrial and service positions.

However, is it the right question to ask if work is a source of happiness or illness when so many people strive to find a job at all? I think that there are arguments to defend this debate even in the midst of the economic and financial crisis that currently affects Southern European countries? First, and with respect to the value of work, it seems obvious that in Karl Marx' definition of work as the product of the worker's labour power, unemployment means the highest form of alienation. People are not only deprived of the surplus of their efforts, but the human factor seems entirely unnecessary for generating this surplus. People's work experiences and skills are devaluated.

Similar questions regarding the economic devaluation of peoples' competences (and processes of social disintegration) have been addressed in discussions on precarious labour and living conditions. These debates are older than the topical crisis, but seem even more pressing in the current situation. Robert Castel has spoken of a shrinking of the *salariat*, of wage and salary owners. He conceptualizes current French society as divided into three "zones": that of "integration" (meaning labourers with secured working contracts), that of "disaffiliation" (long-term unemployed) and that of an intermediate zone of "vulnerability" (Castel 2000). As a result of intermingled political, economic and technical factors, the percentage of the middle classes engaged in precarious, in-between positions has grown throughout the last decades. In Spain since 2008, unemployment rates have largely increased among professionals and technicians in administration, industry and the service sector (INE 2012: 6). Japan has rather low unemployment rates, but since the recession in Asia in the late 1990s it faces a growing social polarization and inequality due to the dualization of the labour market. An estimated 10 million "working poor" can hardly live from their income (Obinger 2009: 164). So-called *freeters*, unmarried young men and women, increasingly with a university degree, work low-paid and fixed-term in the service sector. Unlike internships in Europe, these jobs do not improve their employability for better paid and more secure jobs. 20% of the people under 34 (more than two million) are estimated to work in these conditions (Obinger 2009: 169).

If the economic value of the commodity "labour power" has dropped for so many people, does it mean that they construct their sense of self differently, or on the contrary, are people even more work-centred as they move from one formation course and vocational training to the next? Is the social value given to different kinds of work changing?

If we look at Spain and high unemployment rates among professionals, we observe common solutions that have been offered and taken: emigration, advanced vocational training and

retraining, and business foundation. It is no paradox that start-up companies in the media and IT sectors have been founded in the last years in the midst of the economic crisis (Valenzuela García/Molina 2013). Spain is not the only country where knowledge based, cultural and new media businesses are thought as a solution to necessities of structural change and unemployment. They are conceptualized as a new type of firm that promotes horizontal relationships and creative processes. As debatable as ideological notions of “creative” entrepreneurs as ideal citizens are (Götz/Lemberger 2009), discussions on entrepreneurship (and social entrepreneurship¹²) seem important as they show us that people who face some kind of crisis are not passive bearers but agents of their situation. In this sense, political-economic shocks can make people less risk-adverse and more imaginative. They might engage in political protest, social and community work, and/or start a business.

To sum up, considering the value of work cross-culturally means discussing and comparing particular institutional settings, identity-building aspects of work as expressed in public discourses, as well as internal differences according to, for instance, gender and social stratum. The role of work for personal identities and social inclusion is a current topic in all three countries under consideration as is the low economic value of manual activities, lower and middle-range service and caring jobs. Japan and Germany publicly discuss over-work of professionals in higher positions, they share a history of ideas and representations that stress intrinsic work ethics and the role of the firm for the national economy; both face a polarization between those who work many hours and those who are unemployed, or work at an underpaid part-time occupation. In Spain, which has faced very high unemployment rates since the end of the real estate bubble in 2008, more seems to be at stake. In this regard, local economic systems of exchange such as the “*bancos del tiempo*” might be an alternative “labour economy”, based on a *reproductive rationality* that binds people together on a neighbourhood level (see chapter 2). These “time banks” are growing all over Spain¹³, where people exchange “work” (personal services, competences and skills) for things of everyday necessity. These forms of mutual exchange cause us to re-evaluate individual experiences and knowledge, and might continue to persist within a “mixed economy” even when macroeconomic figures finally improve.

¹² Social entrepreneurship defined as a commercial activity with social ends (as in Non-Governmental-Organizations, Cooperatives and Foundations) has become a growing sector in all OECD-countries since the 1990s. Two competing scenarios dominate: that of a replacement of public welfare and that of a new terrain for civil society (see Hulgard 2010).

¹³ See f.e. “Ecolocal” (http://www.ecolocal.es/banco_del_tiempo.html) and “Banco del Tiempo Triana” (<http://bancodeltiempotriana.blogspot.de/>, 18.10.2013).

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