

47. The meaning of work in shifting global contexts: Contracts in time and space

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In this workshop our goal is to focus on how to better understand the meaning of work and the identities as a worker, as the arena of workplaces and work itself has undergone major changes over the past 20 to 30 years. Factors contributing to changes are, among others, the increase intensification of competition due to the internationalization and globalization of economic activity, and the technological advances in telecommunications which have accelerated the speed with which companies can operate in geographically dispersed market. Public services are changing in terms of mechanisms of accountability. Tangible structures of command and control are being dismantled, and in their stead 'audit' has become a mechanism whereby workers police themselves in their attainment of centrally set standards. These changes have contributed to the downplaying of face-to-face interactions, tangible organizational structure and geographical proximity in working life, but also to an increase in the movement of workers, management concepts and values across national and organizational borders creating other forms of proximity. Likewise, the once known "boundaries" from the Fordist or industrial form of working life are challenged in that former regulations, laws and contracts are given way to more fluctuating, boundless and disembedded forms and arrangements. The trend seems to be towards more individual-based working contracts, more flexible working hours and a de-skilling of employees. The disembedding and breaking of boundaries creates other notions of commitment and social contract and therefore impacts the meaning of work. In this workshop we will focus on how these changes related to aspects of time, space and contract influence the identity and experience of work and the everyday realities of work for employees as well as managers. Our goal is to focus on different aspects of this topic and how anthropology can contribute ethnographically and theoretically to this field.

Images of Life at Work: Making People, Capitalising Knowledge, Re-Scaling Relations

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This paper builds on the insights of some classic and recent organizational ethnographies to develop a critical vocabulary with which to examine the space of work in people's lives, and the varying ways in which people work their lives out. The modern world of work is an exemplary space where the forces of political

economy make themselves present. Categories of political economy – such as choice, efficiency, rationality, transparency – cascade down onto the everyday world of offices, receptions, corridors and waiting rooms. People recast and redefine such structural formulas by integrating and making sense of them within their own life-projects. People’s biographical orientations become the space where political economy is reportioned and proportioned out, and where new ethical and knowledge imaginaries are deployed and mapped out.

The paper explores how our images of life/lives at work rescale our notions of personhood, the limits of the knowledge of the social to which these are associated, and the ethical mandates through which we try to make sense of everything and bring everything under control.

Accounting for people in business integration processes: entanglement, indeterminacy and the power of the intangible in the age of ERP

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In this paper I explore the relationship between technology and changing experiences of work in light of the widespread use of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems in large corporations. ERP systems claim to provide a means of transforming businesses into more efficient entities through data gathering, information generation, and the integration of previously disparate systems, all leading to increases in managers’ understanding of organisational processes necessary for global competitiveness. Drawing on the ethnography of a UK manufacturing firm, this paper explores how ERP systems reorganise regimes of knowledge in institutional contexts and the far reaching implications they have for people’s experiences of work. The ethnography explores the tension between the notion that ERP systems are supposed to define ideal forms of business practice and organisation, and the fact that people who manage these systems frequently argue for an ongoing need to configure them to the specific requirements of particular business contexts. It is argued that the prescriptive potential of such systems, and their ability to embody certain ways of knowing in the form of ‘best practice’, represents a threat to the people who implement and manage these technologies as their local and collective knowledge risks being reduced to abstracted and dislocated forms of technical expertise and in the process commoditised. The very real danger that their jobs might be out-sourced to cheaper contractors requires that people find novel ways of decommo-difying their roles in the business, entangling themselves in organisational processes in ways which challenge the ontological categories of technology and business. The paper explores this process of entanglement and in doing so argues for the role that anthropology might play in contributing to a greater understanding of the ways in which the meaning and value of people’s jobs is ‘worked out’ in contemporary organisations.

Comparative cultural aspects of work in multinational enterprises

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Cultural differences among salaried employees in multinational enterprises, brings important difficulties to productive and administrative activities. Geert Hofstede and Philippe d’Iribarne developed this idea in their works. The research I propose hereby compares the perceptions of work conditions related to the speeding of globalisation process and is based on several interviews with salaried employees in French and

Romanian multinational enterprises. France is confronted with anti-globalization movements (ATAC) and de-location of factories in favour of lower wage countries, like Romania where foreign direct investment is rejected by “old-fashioned” workers. The research’s main object is to present the way in which an MNE employee sees his/her professional and social position and future related to the cultural adaptation of work habits to foreign managerial styles and imported technologies.

The main hypothesis is that depending on decisions and innovations brought from abroad, can give an increased sense of employment insecurity, unacceptable to some people even if it means efficiency, profit and bigger incomes. The employment analysis in MNE-s touches several dimensions as cross-cultural interactions, resistance to innovation, educational adaptation, State’s authority, unions influence, and consequently firm’s prestige, organisational pressure, individualism and adjustment to corporate and business culture.

Functionality and Sociality at work: Identity Constructions in Two Dutch Public Organizations

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Currently, many factors and trends intersect in workplaces in The Netherlands to produce highly dynamic arenas in which both work itself and those who do this work are (re)constituted. Globalization entails the influx of increasing numbers of migrants who apply for jobs and push for careers. The workplace has become the dominant space in which social ties are established and basic social needs are satisfied. Driven by popular management discourses a wide range of ‘techniques of power’ are developed to capture the ‘hearts and minds’ of both co-workers and managers. Encouraged by governmental pressures, existing accountability procedures are tightened and new ones are installed. Most organizations face mounting competition.

Based on fieldwork in two Dutch organizations, this paper will show how these trends result in increasing tensions between functionality and sociality. On the one hand, at all levels in the urban police district and the provincial governmental organization, co-workers and managers face reinforcements of contractual demands. For example, since 2003 police officers are to meet challenging targets, e.g. numbers of crimes solved and of people fined in categories of offences, stipulated by performance contracts. Since 2002 provincial civil servants have to meet targets set in year plans defined by their superiors. Payment rises and the continuation of the employment contract will depend on results evaluation. On the other hand, personal trust and social safety of the team is vital to police officers as a bulwark against increasing insecurity in the street. Social life at work and the qualities of work itself compensate for pressures at home and render overall life meaningful to provincial civil servants. Cherishing good relations with colleagues is an indispensable aspect of work itself. The tensions between functionality and sociality demands constitute a crucial framework in which both work itself and those who work and manage are rendered meaningful. It will be demonstrated how various employees within both organizations identify both their work and themselves in distinctive ways. Especially the different ways in which those of foreign and those of Dutch origins rework these tensions and try to deal with them provide illuminating insights into these tensions. It will be demonstrated that anthropology may contribute in a fruitful way to compensate for the

imbalances that mark most of the, mainly sociological and psychological literature on 'identity' and work.

“Nobody wants to go”: Meaning of work, expatriation and delocalization in intermediate executive managers of Spanish and Latin American multinational companies

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Executive managers are considered generally as an impelling force of globalisation and internationalisation. In fact, executive expatriation is a necessary condition for international expansion. Nevertheless, a great part of expatriations finishes in failure, because the decision of managers of not to go away or to return to his country of origin. A two years fieldwork in Spanish and Latin American multinational companies and an extend questionnaire from intermediate executive managers shows a great resistance to expatriation and relocalization of intermediate managers. Executive managers, considered *global*, usually are and “feel”, *local*, and they construct a strong identity as workers particularly linked to locality and space. This work discuss the possible relationship between delocalisation and meaning of work from the executive managers experiences and presents an initial discussion of how this attitude can reinforce many companies decision of delocalisation or relocalisation.

“Run, Fraga, Run” Women’s work and power relations in a Roma Kalderash community in Romania

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Women's work, and the sexual division of labor more generally, is intimately connected with patriarchal relations. Marxist feminists consider women's work as the material basis of the oppression of women. Using ethnographic material from fieldwork among a Roma Kalderash group from Romania, this paper focuses on the cultural aspects of women's work. The Roma group in question rapidly transformed its main activities of copper still production and fortune-telling into the new business of the salvaging of aluminium enabling families to earn significant amounts of money. Among people who became very wealthy in the space of only a few years, women are being transformed exclusively into a reproductive force and into a displayed marker of ethnic identity. This transformation is connected to the shifting of the idea of “run” (work, agitate, go around) mentioned by female informants: previously, a good woman was the one who “ran” enough to feed her family; today, however, a woman who “runs” is potentially considered a prostitute.

I argue that in this specific case, patriarchal gender relations are reinforced when women's work is transformed into futile activities. This happens because the financial relations within the informal indigenous credit system (sustained by legal salvaging societies connected to the international metal market) are almost exclusively masculine. Thus, money from credit system amounts - and no longer work as according to the Marxist approach – appears as the material basis of oppression. Financial aspects of globalization find in traditional patriarchal gender relations and the independent work of Roma a good basis for development, Reciprocally, the finance issues amplify the gender inequality.

Family Business: Maids and Migrants in the London sex industry

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Increased female migration into and within Europe is reflected in the composition of the workforce in certain sectors of the London sex industry. This paper draws on fieldwork conducted as part of a Wellcome Trust project exploring changes in the London sex industry (1998-2001), as well as research conducted for my PhD (2002). I present fieldwork conducted within flats where the majority of managers ('maids') are English but the workforce has come primarily from outside the UK since the mid-1990s.

Focusing on relationships between maids and prostitutes, I explore the use of stereotypes from the perspective of both managers and workers. I examine images of race and kinship and show how these can be both enabling and controlling. For example, the stereotype 'Thai' was adopted by Thai women (prostitutes) as a marketing technique, but was employed by maids and local (English) women in a derogatory way as part of asserting their authority or superiority.

There has been extensive debate about 'trafficking' in prostitution, especially within feminism. There are those who argue that prostitution is violence to women and that all migrants in the UK are victims. On the other side are those who see prostitution as work and look at these debates in particular as emanating from a colonial racist discourse denying agency to third world women. This suggests that sex work needs to be understood in wider context where I argue that this ethnography contributes to an understanding of family firms in the context of a largely migrant workforce.

Need, Deed or Greed? Swedish Consumption of Black Market Work

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Buying black market work is commonly viewed as unethical and motivated by greed. Despite Sweden's reputation as a just and incorrupt society, various authorities express fear of the perceived growth of black market work and the seemingly widening acceptance of it. In Swedish society today, citizens have to volunteer not only in leisure activities (selling everything from hot dogs to Christmas trees for the local sports clubs and scouts) in order to finance the kids activities, but also help out with painting or making lunches at kindergartens as their finances do not meet ends permitting professionals performing these tasks. Simultaneously, work is making demands on employees' free time, exemplified with the supply of mobile phones, subsidised or free home-PC's and intranet connections from home but work also provides entertainment (conferences and social occasions), fringe benefits and help for employees exemplified by health care, insurances and pension plans etc. This paper aims to explore how a group of Swedish people justify their consumption of black market work by constructing a border zone between society's idea of formal and informal work respectively.

