Work, Employment and Society
Annual Conference 2025

Abstract Book
Tuesday 9 September 2025

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Work, Employment and Society Annual Conference 2025 at University of Manchester. The theme of the 2025 conference is 'Continuities and Discontinuities in Work and Employment'. It is a pleasure to announce our two plenary panels:

Our opening panel 'Continuities and Discontinuities in Life, Work and Employment' will be given by Jean Jenkins and Miguel Martinez Lucio.

Our closing panel 'Rethinking continuities and discontinuities: work & employment futures' will be given by Manjo Dias-Abey, Eleanor Kirk, and Pratima Sambajee.

The programme also includes a variety of special events, journal events and PhD Showcase presentations.

This conference offers a rich and challenging programme and it is hoped that every delegate will find sessions of interest.

A conference of this breadth depends on the efforts of many committed individuals. Significant thanks are due to all those who have helped with the organisation of the conference, particularly the committee members:

Chris Chan, *Royal Holloway, University of London*

Susan Kirk, *Newcastle University*

Marti Lopez-Andreu, *Newcastle University*

Toma Pustelnikovaite, *Cardiff University*

Jenny Rodriguez, *University of Manchester*

SPONSORS

We would like to express our appreciation for the support of our sponsors and exhibitors. The Exhibition Area includes exhibitions from organisations that offer services and information for conference delegates. Please take some time between sessions to visit these exhibitors.

Main Conference Sponsor

Sage Publications

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The BSA would like to thank SAGE Publishing for funding a portion of the free places for this year's conference.

Sponsors and Exhibitors

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Bristol University Press is offering a 50% special pre-order discount for *UberTherapy: The New Business of Mental Health* by Elizabeth Cotton, which will have a launch event on Monday, Paper Session Two. Use code BUP10 on bristoluniversitypress.co.uk by 31 October 2025.

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IMPORTANT DELEGATE INFORMATION

Arrival and Registration

Please collect your badge promptly on arrival and step away from the desk to allow others to register. Feel free to grab some refreshments, explore the venue or take a moment to familiarise yourself with the programme.

Your badge must be worn at all times for security and meal access.

Registration will take place in The Drum, University Place:

Monday 8 September from 09:00

Tuesday 9 September from 08:00

Wednesday 10 September from 08:00

Venue Details

Venue address: University Place, 176 Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL

What3Words: ///parade.paint.washed

Directions:
- Interactive map
- Travel by train
- Travel by bus, tram or coach
- Travel by car
- Travel by air
- Travel by bicycle

Virtual Tour of University Place: https://www.conference.manchester.ac.uk/virtual-tours/universityplace/

Sessions will take place in various rooms at University Place.

Chairing

We are extremely grateful to all those who have agreed to chair one or more sessions. If you find yourself in a session without a chair we would be grateful if someone in the audience could volunteer to take this role. Chairing guidelines will be available in each room and a copy is also available here.

Meals and Refreshments

Tea and coffee	Throughout the conference	The Drum
Lunch	12:30-13:30 on Monday 8 September	The Marketplace Restaurant
	12:30-13:30 on Tuesday 9 September	The Marketplace Restaurant
	13:30-14:30 on Wednesday 10 September	The Marketplace Restaurant

Vegetarian and vegan options will be available as part of the standard catering provision. If you have notified us of any other specific dietary requirements, please make these known to the catering staff when collecting your meals and refreshments.

Your badge must be worn to access refreshments.

No breakfast or evening meals are included in your registration. Manchester offers a wide range of local dining options nearby.

Wellbeing and Reflection Spaces

We recognise that conferences can be full-on, and we want to support your wellbeing throughout the event. Whether you're looking for a moment of quiet, a space for prayer or reflection or time to recharge outdoors, a range of supportive environments are available during the conference.

Quiet Room
We have allocated a room for those seeking quiet time at the conference and this can be found in University Place Room 4.212.

Prayer Room
A dedicated prayer room is available in Room 4.213.

Mothering Room
A mothering room will be provided in Room 4.210.

Green space
There is plenty of green space to enjoy around the conference site as shown on this virtual tour of the university: https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/virtual/360-tours/parks-outdoor/

Cloakroom

A free cloakroom is available in The Drum, University Place. Please note items are left at your own risk. Opening hours are:

Monday: 08:00 - 20:00

Tuesday: 08:00 - 19:00

Wednesday: 08:00 - 18:30

Publicity

Share your experience using #wesconf25 on social media!

PAPER SESSION 4
09:00-10:30

Difference, Diversity & Social Justice – Room 3.210

From Research to Action: Developing a Decision-support Tool for EDI Interventions in the Screen Industries

Roxanne Bottomley, Anna Einarsdottir, Nina Willment, Jude Brereton, Jon Swords

(University of York)

As EDI efforts face increasing scrutiny (Newsinger & Eikhof, 2020; Hedström, 2023), ensuring interventions are strategic, evidence-based, and sustainable is critical. Despite significant investment, many organisations struggle with persistent bias (Schmader, Dennehy, & Baron, 2022), structural inequalities (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013), and limited coordination (McKinnon, 2020; Treffers et al., 2024). Research shows that while various EDI interventions exist, their effectiveness remains unclear. Many respond to well-documented inequalities but lack rigorous evaluation, making it difficult to assess long-term impact. Persistent inequalities suggest these initiatives often fail to drive meaningful change (Advance HE, 2020). Given the current backlash against EDI, organisations need robust decision-making tools to support informed action.

This study develops a decision-support tool to help professionals in the screen industries navigate EDI intervention design and implementation. Drawing on a literature review of EDI strategies across multiple sectors, the tool classifies interventions by motivations, effectiveness, and barriers. By synthesising insights into an interactive application, it helps organisations align interventions with goals and broader EDI frameworks.

The screen industries, particularly film and television, present unique challenges due to freelance-heavy employment structures, informal hiring networks, and historical exclusionary practices (Ozimek, 2021). Our tool categorises motivations behind EDI interventions under key themes: legal compliance, workforce representation, organisational culture, leadership development, and structural reform. It equips decision-makers to move beyond symbolic diversity efforts by deepening their understanding of systemic change. This improves decision-making and resource allocation.

The decision-making tool is informed by a broader, co-produced study on EDI interventions in the screen industries, which involves collaboration between researchers, industry stakeholders, and professionals to develop practical, scalable solutions to longstanding inequalities. Lessons from this broader study have shaped the tool's design and theoretical grounding, ensuring it remains responsive to sector-specific challenges and adaptable to evolving workplace structures. The wider project engages with virtual production (VP) companies, freelancers, and organisational leaders to test, evaluate, and refine EDI interventions through a participatory, iterative approach. This co-production model ensures that interventions are not imposed through top-down policies but are instead developed in ways that reflect real-world industry constraints and opportunities.

As anti-EDI narratives gain traction, this tool compiles research on how EDI interventions have been implemented across various organisational contexts. However, most interventions have not been rigorously evaluated, and there is a lack of longitudinal data on long-term impact. Instead of prescribing a one-size-fits-all approach, the tool helps decision-makers navigate existing research, highlight evaluation gaps, and identify where interventions fall short. Examining negative outcomes also uncovers structural and cultural barriers, enabling more informed choices.

Currently, the research is in the tool development phase, with the literature review and classification framework completed. Next steps include user testing with industry professionals to assess functionality and effectiveness.

This presentation will outline key findings, demonstrate the tool's functionality, and discuss its impact in screen industries and beyond. By bridging academic research and practical implementation, this tool mobilises knowledge to sustain and strengthen EDI efforts, ensuring interventions remain effective, scalable, and resilient despite economic, political, and social disruptions.

Fixing the Pipeline Before it Breaks: Assessing the Influence of Institutional Racism on Early Career Imagined Academic Futures

Rhianna Garrett

(Loughborough University)

The UK's academic landscape is currently suffering from a significant underrepresentation of racialised minority academic staff, emphasised by the increasing disparity between staff and growing racialised minority student populations. Primary reasons for this underrepresentation stem from racist practices being perpetuated in career progression and stability, where racialised minority staff are less likely to be promoted and are more likely to leave their institutions or be on precarious contracts than their white counterparts. Inequalities in careers also include emotional impacts on racialised staff who have reported feeling undervalued by their universities due to racist experiences. A stark disparity arises when tracking progression from undergraduate study to professorship, where racialised minority students progressing from undergraduate to professorship are significantly decreasing at the student to doctoral researcher (DR), and the DR to early career researcher (ECR) stages of academic career pipelines.

Thus, this presentation assesses the influence institutional racism has on DRs and ECRs imaginations of their academic career trajectories in the future. Imagined futures are defined as the perceptions and representations of the future that are yet to come to fruition and can be highly instructive for understanding present societies. Scholars have utilised imagined futures as a tool to understand projections, visions, and assumptions people make about the future, which, though grounded in uncertainty, play a crucial role in shaping career trajectories. By exploring how DRs and ECRs perceive the future, we can better understand how they situate themselves in the contemporary labour market, and how racialised minorities navigate such uncertain futures.

Using a mixed-methods approach of 27 semi-structured interviews and 185 online survey responses, the presentation combines theoretical resources from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectional feminism to centre the voices of racially marginalised DRs and ECRs, thereby transforming their narratives about career agency in the context of systemic oppression into tools to dismantle systems of discrimination in academic work and employment. My findings show that irrespective of institutional geographical location and generation, participants exhibited similar doubtful imaginations of the future of higher education, stemming from previous experiences of whiteness and discrimination in the workplace, and wider observations of inequalities in academia.

Individually, imagined futures can appear independent of racist structures and associated with the individual's self-efficacy, but as a collective, the research reflects a wider pattern of racial inequality in career-making influenced by whiteness built into the normative structures of the university. I argue that whiteness collectively influences imagined futures, which is translating into physical movement, and thus, perpetuating underrepresentation in academic roles. These findings contribute to wider discussions on the relationship between 'race', intersectional identities, and career-making decisions, articulating that practitioners must take a more preventative approach to fixing the academic career pipeline before it breaks.

A Multi-level Analysis of Challenges Faced by Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) as a Potential Voice Channel for Underrepresented Groups

Syed Imran Saqib, Isabel Tavora, Saleema Kauser

(University of Manchester)

Employee Resource Groups or Staff Networks are relatively new phenomena in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) scholarship. Employee Resource Groups ERGS are typically voluntary employee-led groups formed to address the issues and concerns of the particular group and can act as a resource for both employees and organizations to foster a diverse and inclusive workplace. These can be based

on race, sexuality, gender, religion or other source of commonality (Hastwell, 2020; Welborne et al., 2017). There is an increasingly recognition of ERGs as a source for employee voice (Mcfadden and Crowley–Henry, 2018; McNulty, 2018). However, the nature and the mechanism through which these groups function as well as the challenges they face as an emerging voice channel need examination for these groups to fully realize their potential (Welborne et al., 2017). Using the Macro-meso-micro framework as employed in EDI research (Pringle and Ryan, 2015; Syed and Obzilgin, 2009), in this study we aim to examine the barriers faced by these groups. Based on in-depth interviews with 36 EDI leads and ERG chairs, we find that we find that ERGs face multiples challenges which may prevent them for delivering voice outcomes. (i) at the macro level we see the diminishing interest in wider support for EDI policies impacting the sustainability of these networks (ii) the meso level we see a lack of formality and clarity in the status and position of ERGs preventing them for tapping into organizational resources, impacting their legitimacy and (iii) micro level challenges where intersectional identities may be disregarded and the interests of the majority within the group being superseded above the interest of other groups (such as interests of white women and more than women of colour). The paper makes a contribution by connecting the EDI and voice literatures by highlighting the challenges of that ERGs face. Mainstream voice channels such as unions and employee surveys and internal meetings have suffered from trust issues with ethnic minority employees. ERGs present a potentially powerful source of voice for these underrepresented groups, helping to expand the notion of employee voice as currently understood (Mobray et al 2015; Townsend et al., 2022). Organizations are increasingly looking for ways to engage with their broader constituents and harnessing the potential of their ethnic minority workforce, a goal to which ERGs can contribute. The paper is especially relevant amidst the backlash against EDI practices and highlights political and social process, in addition to organisational processes prevent an effective EDI tool from functioning effectively.

PhD Showcase

Navigating Power and Intersectionality: Diversity Consultants as Agents of Discontinuity in Addressing Institutional Racism in UK Workplaces

Jity Bajaj

(University of Essex)

This research investigates the complex relationship between external diversity consultants and senior leadership in UK organisations, focusing on how these collaborations influence organisational approaches to addressing institutional racism. Despite significant investment in equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives, substantial progress in addressing systemic inequalities remains limited, creating a critical discontinuity between organisational rhetoric and material outcomes.

Theoretical position: The study is theoretically framed by critical race theory, institutional theory, and postcolonial perspectives, conceptualising diversity consulting as emotional labour performed within contested organisational spaces where power dynamics and racialised structures intersect. This theoretical framework enables analysis of how colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary workplace structures and practices, manifesting through persistent hierarchies and knowledge systems that privilege Western epistemologies. The research examines how diversity practitioners navigate between transformative ambitions and organisational constraints while confronting these embedded colonial continuities.

Methodology: The research employs a sequential explanatory mixed methods design. The quantitative phase utilises a survey of diversity practitioners across multiple UK sectors, examining implementation challenges, organisational resistance, leadership engagement patterns, and success metrics. The qualitative phase will employ innovative narrative approaches including critical incident technique with visual mapping, reverse chronology methods, and parallel narrative construction to capture the tensions between public narratives and lived experiences of diversity work.

Stage of research: Data collection is currently in progress. The survey instrument has been developed and piloted, with full implementation underway. Preliminary survey data is being used to refine the framework for subsequent qualitative investigation, which will begin in autumn 2025.

Anticipated contribution: This research addresses three significant gaps in current understanding. First, it examines diversity work through the lens of continuities and discontinuities in organisational power structures, highlighting how institutional mechanisms reproduce inequality despite formal commitments

to equity. Second, it interrogates how colonial legacies manifest in contemporary EDI practice, revealing the ways organisational resistance to structural change reflects deeper continuities in power relations rooted in colonial histories. Third, it explores how diversity practitioners navigate between the competing demands of different stakeholders whilst challenging neo-colonial dynamics within professional contexts.

The findings will contribute to sociological debates about the efficacy of corporate diversity initiatives, questioning whether such efforts can meaningfully address deep-seated institutional racism or merely serve as legitimising mechanisms that preserve existing power relations. By centring the discontinuities diversity consultants seek to instigate against enduring colonial continuities, this research reimagines EDI work as a site of structural transformation rather than merely procedural change. It critically examines the conditions under which senior leadership must cede power, invest in sustainable consultant partnerships, and prioritise marginalised voices within decision-making structures.

This study sits at the intersection of work, power, and resistance in contemporary organisations undergoing contested change processes, offering both theoretical insight and practical implications. It provides a sociological framework for understanding how organisations might move beyond performative allyship towards substantive intersectional justice, directly addressing the conference theme of continuities and discontinuities in employment relations and organisational power dynamics.

Ecologically/Socially Sustainable Work & Employment – Room 2.220

Precarious Work, Insurgent Labor: Frontline Climate Adaptation in the Shadows of Elite-captured Futures

Ritwika Basu

(Durham University)

This paper, drawn from my doctoral research, examines the frontline labor of climate adaptation and resilience in geographies shaped by elite-captured urban climate futures. It explores how survival work, care labor, and community-driven adaptation efforts—though often invisible within dominant climate discourses—challenge and unsettle prevailing understandings of political labor. Rather than being mere exclusions from formal climate politics, these laboring bodies, struggles, and relational practices actively reshape what counts as politics, where it unfolds, and who enacts it. Situating these dynamics within Jason Moore's Web of Life—the entangled ecological, social, and political relations that shape planetary existence—this paper interrogates how contemporary struggles against climate-driven dispossession, displacement, and extractive emplacement reconfigure the geography and scale of political labor. Building on spatial case narratives, institutional ethnography, and labor life histories, it disentangles how climate-induced spatial reconfigurations shape emergent labor subjectivities and politics in the subaltern vein of climate politics. By centering the insurgent labor of climate adaptation, this paper argues for an expanded understanding of climate politics—one that acknowledges not only governance and activism but also the embodied, affective, and often invisible labor that sustains communities and more-than-human worlds. How might recognizing these alternative forms of labor reshape our understanding of climate action, solidarity, and resistance in an era of proliferating crises? In addressing this question, this paper contributes to ongoing debates on the political geographies of labor and climate adaptation, underscoring the urgent need to decenter state-sanctioned institutions and dominant sites of governance as the sole legitimate arenas of work toward resilient urban futures.

This research aligns with the following conference themes: Difference, diversity, and social justice; Work/place alienation, voice, and participation; theories and migration; and Labour agency, trade unions, and social movements. It explores how frontline climate labor intersects with these themes, shedding light on the relational autonomy, struggles, agency, and resilience of communities navigating climate-induced precarity, spatial rupture, and displacement.

PhD Showcase

Money Talks, But Do Workers Listen? Working Hour Preferences in a Post-Covid World

Chloe Dixon

(University of Southampton)

Working-time reduction has been gaining traction in research and mainstream media. Existing research demonstrates that a purposeful move to reduce work hours can yield social, economic, wellbeing and environmental benefits, contributing to more ecologically and socially sustainable employment (Autonomy, 2023; Burchell et al., 2024; Coote and Franklin, 2013; Schor, 2005). Exploring work hour preferences, and the individual, societal and organisational factors that shape them, is a practical approach to assessing the feasibility of working-time reduction policies. Existing work in this area has established certain patterns, such as women, older people, people with health conditions, higher earners and long-hour workers being more likely to prefer reduced hours (Antal et al., 2024). There is considerable focus on the structural barriers that can be very influential on work hour preference patterns, such as having a low income, or the 'part-time' constraint that many women face (Fagan, 2001).

This study goes beyond the well-established structural barriers by exploring what influences the work hour preferences of more economically secure, full-time workers, within the context of a "post-Covid" world.

Labour Force Survey data were analysed using multinomial logistic regression analysis, to identify key demographic and work-related predictors of a preference for shorter hours and a willingness to accept reduced income among above-average earnings full-time workers in the years prior to (2018-19), and "post-" (2022-23) Covid-19. This work comes from a broader mixed methods project that explores work hour experiences alongside preferences. This includes interviews with employers and employees from case study companies that explore the benefits and challenges of different work week lengths, and how work and life context shapes preferences.

The quantitative findings contribute to the debates on the potential of working-time reduction by providing an updated overview of the factors influencing the work hour preferences of more financially secure, full-time UK workers. Consistent with the existing literature, older age, female gender, higher education, higher incomes, working longer hours, and health conditions, are found to correlate with a greater preference in working shorter hours (Antal et al., 2024), as well as a willingness to trade income for them. Lesser studied factors such as being white, British, a manager, a homeowner, or hourly paid, also emerged as predictors. Our findings also show a significant "post-" Covid decline in the preference for shorter hours and the willingness to accept income reductions, while remote working had no significant influence. Ongoing interviews are exploring these patterns, with emerging findings highlighting the role of structural and cultural barriers, including financial concerns and workplace culture, in shaping work hour preferences (Fagan, 2001). While this study aimed to examine the preferences of workers with fewer structural barriers, the quantitative and emerging qualitative findings indicate that such barriers remain influential even among this group.

Historical (Dis)Continuities and Crises in/at Work & Employment – Room 3.211

Welfare to Workfare Economy: A Study of Self Help Groups in Kerala, India

Aditi Dey Sarkar

(School of Business Management, Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies)

Microfinance is a burgeoning area across the globe creating complex relations between Global North and South, not least in terms of financial relations but also impacting the micro realities of women in the form of 'unintended consequences.' The State Poverty Eradication Mission of Kerala, established in 1997, comprises a federation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) of women. The cornerstone of the movement are the microfinance activities conducted by members of the SHGs. In recent times, the Kerala model of microfinance has been hailed as an exemplary one by the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)

in India. This resulted in the creation of new job opportunities for rural women who were identified as skilled workers due to their years of experience in SHGs. Opportunity to move to rural villages in other parts of India, for establishing SHGs under the aegis of NRLM and earning high income (in comparison to their earlier income through microenterprises) to do so, resulted in a flow of outward bound movement of SHG women from Kerala. In this backdrop, questions on the intensity of labor work done by the women and the impact on gender equations in the household due to the (controlled) migration of SHG women emerge. Through this paper, I would explore and discuss the engagement of the State in the daily lived realities of the SHG women to understand the power structures that it generates within the family and the rural community. This paper is an outcome of my PhD dissertation, and looks at relevant case studies of the SHG women and other stakeholders, developed through ethnographic methods of research. Employing the framework of the precariat labour (Standing 2011), and exploring the narratives of the SHG women, I will be exploring the complex web of relationships that the SHG women share with the State (as citizens) and the market (as consumers and entrepreneurs). Furthermore, through this paper, I would explore the State regulation of work and employment, which in turn impacts the family, as the project is helmed by the State but has its roots in the neo-liberal political economy of development.

Between Set and Scaffold: Continuity, Discontinuity, and Crisis of Creative Labour in Bollywood's Art Department

Priyanka Das

(Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Mumbai)

Bollywood has long been an unrecognised prototype for contemporary gig, platform, and post-Fordist labour regimes. This paper examines the labour process within the art department—the first unit to operationalise a film script through material production—offering a grounded account of the continuities and discontinuities shaping creative labour in Mumbai's film industry. Through a focus on the recruitment networks, aesthetic regimes, and shifting hierarchies within this department, the paper traces how transformations in labour organisation have produced new vulnerabilities, particularly in the context of neoliberal restructuring.

The suicides of two prominent art directors, Raju Sapte and Nitin Desai, in 2021 and 2023 respectively, reveal the intensified pressures of a precarious work environment increasingly marked by workplace alienation, informality in finance and labour, inter-departmental fragmentation, and union belligerency. Trained art directors often find themselves structurally separated from semi-skilled and unskilled workers—such as carpenters, welders, and moulders—despite their shared dependence on informalised labour systems. The erosion of earlier solidarities and the rise of entrepreneurial self-fashioning have deepened material and symbolic hierarchies, even as digital platforms and new production technologies restructure the aesthetic and temporal rhythms of set-making.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2018 and 2023, including pre-and post-pandemic vignettes, this paper first delineates the division of labour and the craft processes involved in set construction and its evolution overtime. It then explores the affective and political lives of art directors, particularly those engaged in union activity and advocacy for dignified labour conditions. Their experiences illuminate the contradictions between aspirations for creative autonomy and the structural constraints of cultural production under market logics.

At stake is a broader inquiry into how continuity and rupture operate as lived conditions within the political economy of cultural labour. As the conference call notes, we live through "permanent, intolerable uncertainty: not knowing what comes next" (Le Guin, 1969/2017). The Bollywood art department becomes a critical site to understand how workers confront such uncertainty, navigating between tradition and transformation, solidarity and segmentation, exhaustion and imagination.

Caste and its Deep Economic Roots in India in Neoliberal Times: Caste Structure, Employment and Informal Sector

Dinesh Rajak

(Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Caste is deeply entrenched in Indian society, influencing not only social relations but also economic structures of human lives. While much of the scholarship on caste has approached it from evolutionary, social, cultural, and political perspectives. Materiality of caste and economic dimensions remain underexplored. These aspects are critical to understanding the persistence of caste in contemporary neoliberal India.

Initially, it was assumed that modernization thesis would make caste irrelevant. However, research on caste has consistently revealed a different kind of existing realities of caste system. The advent of economic reforms and the liberalization of markets, caste remain the equally relevant in the labour market and a few studies on caste has highlighted how caste continues to shape patterns of employment and work, particularly in the informal urban economy. As scholars like Harriss-White (2015) observe, caste plays an even more significant role in India's vast informal sector. Similarly, Jodhka (2015) argues that neoliberal capitalism does not eradicate caste but instead reinforces it by fostering network-based economic structures. These networks often depend on caste-based connections, which perpetuate social and economic hierarchies rather than dismantling them.

Understanding the economic dimensions of caste under neoliberalism is essential. It sheds light on how caste adapts to modern economic systems, subtly reproducing itself in new forms while maintaining its influence over labour, capital, and opportunities in the changing socio-economic landscape.

So while changes in rural occupational structures and shifts of rural households and individuals toward the informal urban sector not simply process. So it is important in this context to understand that what is happening in the labour market in both rural urban space with coming up of many new employment opportunities in the service and manufacturing sectors with introduction of modern technology and digital devices which has opened up new possibility of sources of livelihoods for population. When the rural population from Bundelkhand shifts to other kinds of employments how they engage and negotiate with it is interesting social realities to be explored.

It aims to understand the role of caste in shaping the rural non-farm economy in Bundelkhand, Central India. It specifically explores how privileged caste groups leverage their social, cultural, and economic capital to secure employment and business opportunities in the non-farm sector. The study further examines how landed caste groups perpetuate caste-based inequality by maintaining control over economic resources. While privileged groups have relatively easy access to employment in the non-farm sector, marginalized groups often face exclusion and discrimination in their transition to non-agricultural work.

This paper aims to address the following key questions:
1. How does agrarian distress, particularly climate change, impact rural livelihoods and drive out-migration in Bundelkhand?
2. What role does caste play in shaping access to the rural non-farm economy, and how do dominant caste groups leverage their socio-economic capital?
3. How do marginalized caste groups experience exclusion and discrimination in transitioning to non-farm employment?
4. How do neoliberal economic reforms and urban influences reshape rural occupational structures and economic opportunities?

(Im)Mobility & Migration – Room 3.214
Special Event

East-West Inequalities and Gendered Labour Mobilities within Europe

Aleksandra Lewicki, Roxana Barbulescu, Peter Birke, Ursula Probs, Anda Nicolae-Vladu

(University of Sussex, University of Leeds, University of Göttingen, Freie Universität Berlin, Ruhr University Bochum)

Initially celebrated as expression of the EU's freedom of movement, East-West mobilities within Europe are increasingly recognised as reflective and productive of structural inequalities. Rather than framing these asymmetries as effects of migration, this panel explores the gendered and racialised features of

labour exploitation and extractivism within Europe. The ambiguous racialisation as 'Eastern European' plays a distinctive role in justifying an asymmetrical division of labour in this context (Lewicki 2023). Notably, people from the east of Europe are inferiorised within Europe, but often positioned within global racialised categories of 'Europeanness'. This categorisation is not only internally stratified, but also gendered and classed: as a result, 'Eastern European man' is imagined as particularly suited to work in transport, abattoirs and construction, and 'Eastern European woman' as 'naturally' well equipped for reproductive labour, including domestic, care or specific types of sex work. Some employment settings, such as agriculture or warehouses, produce their own distinctive internal gendered and racialised labour hierarchies. As a result, people from the east of Europe are overrepresented in the lower ranks of professions classified as 'low skilled' – often despite their significantly higher qualifications. Their job profiles are also typically associated with precarious working conditions, low pay and limited access to social rights. This panel explores the wider macropolitical conditions that produce these precarities but also draws attention to their micro-dynamics in various segments of the labour market – including by tracing the ways in which values and the materiality of the body are invoked in different work environments. Specifically, speakers in this session investigate the gendered and racialised hierarchies that condition migrant labour in agriculture, abattoirs, care of older people, construction, logistics and transport, online retail, the textile industry and sex work.

Justice in the Fields: Whiteness, Labour and the Rights of Migrant Women in Farming

Roxana Barbulescu,

(University of Leeds)

Whilst farming has historically been a physically demanding occupation dominated by men, in the Global North where migrants make the majority of the workers in the area, migration is also a key driver in the rapid feminization of the agricultural workforce in the Global North. This paper examines the intersection of race, gender, and labour in the agricultural sector in an effort to shed new understandings on the situated racialised experiences of white migrant women.

Building on 40 in-depth interviews with Romanian and Ukrainian migrant workers in seasonal work in UK, the paper identifies the challenges experienced by migrant women and questions the role of race and gender in their motivation to migrate and argues that gender and whiteness are reproduced and reinforced systematically by their immigration status (precarious six months visa) and through their assigned roles on farm and on site. Finally, the paper then discusses in general how racialised migrant women encounter and overcome significant challenges, including precarious working conditions, a lack of legal protections in spaces prepared for men workers, and social isolation on remote farm locations.

Labour, Racism and Gender Divisions in the Meat Industry and Online Retail

Peter Birke

(University of Göttingen)

Based on qualitative research on work and migration in Germany, this paper shows how the gendered division of labor is developing in two sectors where often almost all workers do not have a German passport in their pockets: meat industry, and online retail (Amazon). The empirical basis of the paper are three encompassing studies by the Sociological Research Institute Göttingen that were conducted in 2017-2020, 2020-2022 or are currently being conducted: The focus of these qualitative-empirical studies was the question of how the connection between the growing labor market integration of migrants and often strong criticism of labor exploitation can be explained. The pandemic in particular has brought this area of tension into the public debate. The cases show that the social composition of the workers and the division of labor at the rank-and-file are shaped both by residence status and racist attributions as well as by the gendering of work. European centre-periphery relations are, in this context, a structuring element that is also of central importance for the challenges collective organization and trade unions are facing, especially in the case of the meat industry.

Sex, Care and the Working Body: Ambiguities of the Gendered Racialisation as 'Eastern European'

Aleksandra Lewicki, Ursula Probs

(University of Sussex, Freie Universität Berlin)

The concept 'cultural racism' is influential in grasping discrimination related to East-West mobilities in Europe. Balibar coined this term by observing that an essentialisation of 'cultural difference' has replaced the 'biologist focus' of historical racism. The dichotomy between 'biology' and 'culture', however, fails to address various bodily dimensions of racialisation. In this paper, we examine the ambiguous racialisation as 'Eastern European' in Germany - a positioning for which Whiteness is often reductively seen as its main corporeal feature. We explore its dynamics in two employment sites – care labour and sex work – in which women from Europe's East often are overrepresented in Europe's West. Drawing on qualitative research, we trace how 'Eastern Europeanness' is produced in the professional provision of sex and care. We find that shifting attributions of bodily and valued-based difference are mobilised in imaginaries of 'Eastern Europe' and its 'people'; these have sustained modes of the extraction of cheap gendered labour over generations. Physical and psychological 'qualities' are ascribed to 'Eastern Europeans' which imagine them as particularly suitable for precarious work. These professions, in turn, often are stigmatized and take a toll on the body. Thus, we argue that bodily features and values play key parts in the gendered racialisation as 'Eastern European'. We suggest that the body always matters in processes of racialisation, yet of course in different ways and depending on varying contexts, materialities and relations. We propose a research agenda that thinks racialisation not only from its dichotomies but also from its ambiguities.

Racist Divisions of Labor and Struggles of Migration: The Figure of the Young, Upper Silesian Female Textile Worker in the Context of the Company-wide Strike of the Nordwolle in 1927

Anda Nicolae-Vladu

(Ruhr University Bochum)

In public discourse and research, the current racialized division of labour in the context of East-West mobilities appears to be a relatively new phenomenon within EU-Migration. However, not only in Germany, we look back to a long history of labour extractivism and racialization of 'Eastern Europe' and its 'people'. In my article, I will develop a materialistic perspective which takes resistant practices of youth female* East (Central) European textile workers as a starting point of its analysis. From this perspective I would like to contribute to understanding the formation of Anti-Eastern European racism at the beginnings of the 20th century in Imperial Germany. I will discuss this mainly using the example of the Delmenhorst site of the textile group Nordwolle in and around the company-wide strike in 1927, that can be counted among the longest and toughest labour disputes of the Weimar period.

The textile industry in north-west Germany became a powerful and important economic sector after the foundation of the German Empire and the consolidation of its colonial activities. One of the biggest wool processing companies in the world, the Nordwolle, was founded 1884 in the town of Delmenhorst, near Bremen. The company owned several factories, enormous properties and ten thousands of sheep in Germany, Argentina and Uruguay among others. As at other factory sites and industries, East (Central) European workers made up approximately two thirds of the workforce in Delmenhorst during the German Empire. The employment of women* played a significant role in this. At the Nordwolle, women* initially made up 50% of the workforce; after 1894, when women's night work was banned, their share fell to around 38-42%. In the Weimar Republic, East (Central) European workers still made up around 50% of the workforce.

In the research literature on the German Empire up to the end of the Weimar Republic, resistant migrant labour practices in northwest Germany have not yet been addressed. When East (Central) European workers are discussed, they are usually only portrayed as 'cheap and willing' labour; and, thus, reproducing the contemporary racist imaginaries. In this way, they are removed from the history of labour struggles, as well as from the history of oppression and racialized division of labour.

In my article, migration, gender, racism, colonialism and capitalism are seen as intertwined and as social relations. In addition to critical migration research, intersectional theoretical approaches and transnational labour history, I refer in particular to the approach of the autonomy of migration, following Sandro Mezzadra and Manuela Bojadžijev. The aim here is to adopt the perspective of migrant / East

(Central) European women* and thus counteract a view in which they are merely seen as victims and condemned to passivity.

Embodied Effects of Socio-spatial Segretation of Eastern European Truck Drivers and Construction Workers in Germany

Ursula Probst

(Freie Universität Berlin)

The EU single market, reforms in labor and transportation laws, digitalization and other processes have significantly transformed the transportation and construction sectors in Europe. Yet, the physical labor in these fields is still mainly done by men, and particularly male migrant workers in often exploitative working conditions, as the above-mentioned processes have not only facilitated transnational mobilities of people and goods, but also allowed for an increasing precarisation of migrant workers. Possibilities for sub-contracting, reforms limiting access to social welfare services and similar developments provide a structural framework for the exploitation of migrant workers, particularly from eastern EU countries, who are simultaneously deemed particularly suitable for the hard physical labor due to the racialization of "Eastern European" men.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork at truck stops and workers' hostels in Germany, and on the road with truck drivers, this paper discusses the everyday living and working conditions of truck drivers and construction workers from Eastern European countries in Germany and beyond. Thereby, I highlight that the structural marginalization and precarization of male labor migrants in the field of construction and transportation is mirrored in sociospatial isolation and segregation of migrant construction workers and truck drivers throughout Germany. This segregation of non-German workers, reminiscent of Germany's historic labor exploitation of "Slavic" people, enables and legitimizes precarious conditions in mass accommodations or on the road detrimental to the physical and mental well-being of migrant workers, illuminating the embodied effects of racialized and gendered labor hierarchies and structural exploitation along European East-West dichotomies.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 1 – Room 2.217
PhD Showcase

The Nature of Workplace Conflict Management Systems in Chinese Private Enterprises

Boquan Hu

(Queen's University Belfast)

This study explores the nature of workplace conflict management systems in Chinese private enterprises and investigates the primary approaches to conflict management within these organisations. Existing conflict management theories have been predominantly developed by Western scholars; however, there remains a significant gap in understanding the prevalence, functioning, and rationale behind workplace conflict management systems in non-Western cultural contexts. To address this gap, this study adopts an emic perspective and conducts an empirical analysis of workplace conflicts in two private enterprises based in Shenzhen, China. A multiple-case study design is employed, involving semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including employers, line managers, HR personnel, employees, and legal professionals. The aim of this research is to provide new theoretical insights and perspectives on conflict management in this specific context, thereby contributing to the broader conflict management literature.

The study has three main objectives: (1) to investigate the nature of workplace conflict management systems in Chinese private enterprises; (2) to examine the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in the conflict resolution process; and (3) to assess employees' perceptions of the effectiveness and fairness of existing conflict management systems.

Queuing for Sufficient Hours: How Occupation-specific Shifts in Flexibilisation and Job Opportunities Change Risks of Underemployment in Switzerland (2004–2020)

Jan Mueller

(University of Zurich and University of Manchester)

In recent decades, Switzerland and other Western countries have witnessed labour market flexibilization and economic crises. Flexibilization can reduce workers' control over their amount of working time if it is centred around employers' and not workers' flexibility needs. During economic crises with limited job opportunities, workers often struggle to obtain sufficient working hours. This underemployment is disproportionately prevalent among lower-class workers, women, and immigrants. These groups could be especially vulnerable to labour market shifts as they are frequently confined to unstable jobs as flexible labour reserve, receiving sufficient hours only when it suits business needs.

Evidence on how these shifts affect different groups of workers remains inconclusive. Most studies focus on comparing national trends, for example, underemployment rates of women and men before, during, and after crises. However, economic crises and flexibilization do not unfold uniformly across occupations. Moreover, within occupations, those facing multiple disadvantages, such as migrant lower-class women, may be more severely affected.

To address these gaps, we analyse how underemployment risks for different groups change as occupations shift in job opportunities and flexibilization. Using a labour queue approach, we expect that, even after accounting for individual characteristics like education and occupational idiosyncrasies, men with citizenship face the lowest underemployment risk due to their higher rank in labour queues, while lower ranked migrant women from low- and middle-income countries face the highest risk. We further expect underemployment risks to rise, particularly for disadvantaged groups, when occupational labour queues lengthen with fewer job opportunities and increased employer demands for flexibility, leaving those lower in the queue with no choice but to accept employer-centred flexible jobs.

We use data from the Swiss Labor Force Survey (SLFS), the Swiss Job Market Monitor (SJMM), and the Swiss unemployment insurance (AVAM). From the SLFS, we use individual-level data on underemployment—defined as working less than 90% of standard hours, wanting more work, and being available for increased hours within three months—and controls. The SJMM provides occupation- and time-specific job vacancy data that is matched with jobseeker numbers from AVAM to estimate labour queue lengths. We extract employers' flexibility expectations from SJMM job ad texts using natural language processing and machine learning. We leverage variation between and within occupations over time using Random Effect Within-Between models with three levels: individual, occupation-time, and occupation.

Preliminary findings suggest that, compared to Swiss men and controlling for individual and occupational factors, Swiss women and immigrant women from high-income countries—and particularly women from middle- and low-income countries—face higher risks of underemployment. Overall, more occupational job opportunities reduce underemployment, while shifts towards employer-centred flexibility show no significant effect. However, for women from middle- and low-income countries, increased job opportunities do not reduce risks, and employer-centred flexibilization has negative impacts. These findings highlight the complex effects of economic cycles and flexibilization on a diverse workforce, calling for nuanced research and targeted policy solutions to reduce overall skill underutilization and the negative impacts of underemployment like financial hardship, health, and work-family conflict.

Public Procurement and Precarity under Outsourced Services: A Comparative Study on the Impact of Local Government Procurement Practices on the Experiences of Domiciliary Care Workers

Anna Baum

(Leicester University)

Public procurement is increasingly discussed as a tool for public authorities to raise employment standards under outsourced public services, including for example in the Government's recent paper laying out their 'Plan to Make Work Pay'. This research critically engages with this discussion by

comparing how four different English Local Authorities (LA) procure their home care services, exploring the impact of their commissioning approaches on the home care labour process.

Through interviews with LA commissioners, home care workers and care service managers I adopt a Labour Process Analysis lens to show how different competitive contracting models around cost and quality degrade the labour of home care workers to different extents. Competition for service contracts plays out differently under each LA; some have reduced the number of providers competing for care packages, others have moved towards fixed service fees and introduced competition based on quality ratings alone.

This study explores how the pressures of the market and performance targets are passed on to care workers in both intrinsic and extrinsic ways. For example, in cases where providers with higher Care Quality Commission ratings get first bid on care packages, employers with lower ratings don't gain enough packages, meaning workers must compete for less clients. This imposes a particular form of discipline over the labour of care workers, and leaves those who receive less clients with less pay.

This study critically evaluates how successful different procurement practices have been in improving working conditions by centering the experiences of workers, and explores how "ethical care" labour standards set by some LA are not necessarily reflected in the experiences of home care workers in reality.

God in Job Search: Faith and Employment

Susanna Adjei Arthur

(Geneva Graduate Institute)

This paper discusses the intersection of religion and job search practices among unemployed graduates in Ghana and, by extension, those in the diaspora. It highlights the pervasive presence of religion in the Ghanaian public sphere and how it plays a significant role in the lives of job-seeking graduates. Drawing on my one-year PhD ethnographic fieldwork that involved conducting in-depth interviews and participant observation, the paper argues that Ghana's public sphere is highly enchanted, reflecting a cosmology where material and immaterial aspects are intertwined. Graduates incorporate religious functionaries into their job search processes, seeking guidance through prophecies and directions (akwankyire). This phenomenon underscores the Pentecostalisation of Ghanaian Christianity, where both historic and Pentecostal churches emphasise the importance of pneumatic experiences in influencing material outcomes. The paper discusses testimonies that validate the effectiveness of prayers in securing employment, revealing the centrality of the transcendental in the job-seeking process as the "God agency."

(In)Decent Work & Employment 2 – Room 2.219

EDI in Russell Group Universities: Progress, Challenges and Prospects

Isabel Tavora, Susie Miles, Evelyn Oginni

(University of Manchester)

Women and ethnic minorities remain under-represented among UK's higher education staff, especially in senior academic and management roles, with this under-representation more pronounced in Russell Group (RG) Universities (AdvanceHE, 2023; Baltaru, 2023). Despite significant investments in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) over the past two decades, the persistence of these inequalities raises questions about the effectiveness of their strategies.

Our research aimed to improve understanding on why inequalities remain so significant in RG universities by exploring the following questions:
- How do universities justify their EDI goals and priorities?
- To what extent and how are EDI policies contributing to workplace equality in higher education?
- What challenges and tensions hinder progress?

To address these questions, we analysed the EDI policies of RG universities and conducted 23 interviews with EDI leads and key actors.

Our findings showed that while EDI initiatives are often based on both moral and business imperatives, overreliance on the business case can undermine meaningful action, as EDI's value is difficult to quantify using traditional performance metrics. Equality charters such as Athena Swan were seen as key drivers of institutional change, particularly for their external signalling to funding bodies. However, some participants expressed concerns that institutions approached these charters superficially, treating them as tick-box exercises. Applications were often resource-intensive, with an overreliance on voluntary contributions from the very groups the charters aimed to support.

The interviews revealed both progress and ongoing challenges to advancing EDI. Advancements included improved data collection, which enabled evidencing inequalities and justifying action. Recruitment and promotion practices became more transparent and inclusive, while the mainstreaming of flexible working policies supported improved work-life balance.

However, the growing reliance on "datafication" created new obstacles: under-representation sometimes meant sample sizes were too small to generate meaningful data, making it harder to justify interventions and risking to reinforce exclusion. Similarly, efforts to diversify recruitment and promotion were undercut by the continued use of precarious contracts, which disproportionately impacted ethnic minority and disabled staff.

Though flexible working policies were beneficial, they clashed with entrenched academic norms of long hours and hyper-productivity, disadvantaging those who relied on them.

Finally, although senior leaders expressed commitment to EDI, it was seldom treated as a strategic priority. As the EDI function grew in status and reach, institutional accountability increased. However, problems persisted in that responsibility was delegated to EDI leads but authority to produce actual change remained with senior leadership, many of whom saw EDI as someone else's responsibility. Despite limited power, EDI leads and officers played a crucial role in influencing culture and practice by issuing guidance on inclusive approaches and increasing scrutiny.

This paper contributes to critical diversity scholarship by highlighting the tensions and challenges of managing EDI in RG universities, where these efforts compete with performance targets in a highly competitive environment. By exposing these complexities, it calls for a shift in diversity research and practice away from superficial commitments and simplistic solutions towards deeper engagement with the real challenges of addressing entrenched societal inequalities from within organisations.

Outsourcing on Campus: The Case of University of California Service Workers

Kelly Quinn

(University of California, Berkeley)

Across national contexts, an erosion of state funding for higher education has led both public and private universities to implement cost-saving strategies. To this end, universities have begun to use outsourcing and subcontracting for many on-campus service positions, including custodial, security, and cafeteria services. Despite this broader trend, in 2019, the Regents of the University of California adopted a policy limiting the outsourcing of service positions and requiring equal compensation for outsourced jobs in response to advocacy efforts led by AFSCME Local 3299, a union representing nearly 40,000 campus workers.

Against this backdrop, my research uses the University of California policy change as a case study to examine the efforts by unions and worker advocates to secure better compensation and protection for workers. To do so, I rely on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 25 workers and AFSCME staff to detail the employment conditions before and after the policy change, as well as the advocacy strategies deployed to pressure the University. I am also interviewing university officials to understand their role and perspective in shaping the policy. I supplement the interviews with a review of documents like meeting minutes, collective bargaining agreements, and news articles to detail employment terms before the policy change.

This research is part of a larger international research partnership studying coalitions and strategies for advocacy by workers, unions, and students that have emerged on university campuses in the UK, USA

and Canada to support decent working conditions for service workers. This includes understanding the aims of these campus strategies and evaluating the outcomes for campus workers, for universities, and for campus communities. Because very few workers and advocates at universities have been able to successfully pressure decision makers to insource service workers, this case study has the potential to identify strategies for improving workers' lives, as well as for unions and other labor groups to organize. Through this work, I contribute to the body of knowledge on advocacy efforts to address working conditions for low-wage service workers in a university setting.

Scut, Hustle and Fear: The Precarisation of Medical Work in Ireland

John-Paul Byrne, Jennifer Creese, Niamh Humphries

(Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, University of Medicine & Health Sciences)

Introduction: Medicine represents continuity and discontinuity within work and employment. Professional stability is evident in the continued control over clinical autonomy and training, and the dominance of medical expertise in healthcare. Yet, the experience of medical work has significantly transformed, evident in the labour and mental health crises identified by the WHO due to high rates of resignation, workforce attrition, burnout and moral distress. Qualitative research has depicted doctors' work experience as one of profound disconnect; between professional expectations and organisational realities (Byrne 2023), and between imagined and lived futures (Laverty, Checkland and Spooner 2023); pointing to a breakdown in the professional social contract of medicine (Jenkins 2020). Drawing on Alberti et al.'s (2018) implicit precarisation, we explore hospital doctors' experience of uncertainty, insecurity and unpredictability via the work time, roles, and futures that comprise the modern-day medical work.

Method: We draw on data from the Hospital Doctor Retention & Motivation (HDRM) project (2018-24), which explored the working conditions and lives of hospital doctors in Ireland to inform medical workforce policy. This paper analyses qualitative data collected across three work packages; open-ended survey responses (N= 469, 2019), online semi-structured interviews (N= 48, 2020) and a remote ethnography (N= 28, 2021) entitled Mobile Instant Messaging Ethnography (MIME). MIME involves the use of WhatsAppTM to hold a 12-week conversation with hospital doctors, and was developed by the authors to provide a 'live', digital connection to a hard-to-access group during the pandemic.

Results: Our analysis indicates a work-life permeated by a profound sense of spatial and temporal uncertainty. Doctors described the destabilising effects of not knowing when work would end, the unpredictability of daily task demands, and what futures would bring. Porous work time and boundaries were shaped by intensified and extensified temporal demands leading to instability within, and postponement of, non-work-life spheres. Temporal demands were driven partly by the "scut" and "hustle" of medicine. "Scut" work denoted the constant pressure to perform duties perceived to be outside their role (e.g., portering, calling patients, and fixing printers). The "hustle" described the need to meet expected career progression milestones (e.g., research, papers, qualifications) within the demands of frontline care. Finally, the future brought fear. Participants described their uncertainty regarding career sustainability in terms of opportunities in their specialty and the ability to sustain extreme working conditions over the long term.

Discussion: In highlighting the experience of precariousness within a high-status profession, the paper contributes to debates on the widening effect of precariousness across modern forms of work and employment. The findings add to current evidence on extended temporalities within public service care work (Pulignano and Morgan 2023), the liminalities of professional careers (Zhao et al. 2024), and the unpromising futures of medicine (Laverty, Checkland and Spooner 2023). By drawing out the interconnected organisational and professional drivers of precaristaion, we illustrate how high rates of attrition and psychological distress (burnout, alienation, moral distress) among hospital doctors may be underpinned by a deterioration in the legitimacy of this uncertain and unstable professional social contract.

Using Job Quality to Understand Unhealthy and Healthy Jobs

Chris Warhurst, Gill Dix, Carla Toro, Jamelia Harris, Rebeka Balogh

(University of Warwick, Institute for Employment Research)

This paper uses measures of job quality to identify those aspects of work and employment practices that create unhealthy jobs and healthy jobs – the latter intended to protect, even promote good health (Siegrist et al. (2010). The analysis goes beyond the traditional focus of occupational risks and hazards of trips, slips and bumps (Baum et al. 2022).

This lens of job quality has been suggested by Marmot et al. (2002) and is needed. The inference is that good job quality provides good health and poor job quality poor health (Marmot at al. 2022). With higher fatalities and sickness rates amongst essential workers, the Covid pandemic was a reminder of the continuing health risks of work. HSE regulations remind employers of their responsibilities for ensuring the health and safety of workers in their employment. However the extent of job-related ill health in the UK has become a 'national crisis', one that needs to be discontinued if significant and increasing costs for employees, employers, the NHS and State are to be reduced (Financial Times 2024; HSE 2022; SOM 2022; Deloitte 2020; Albin et al. 2021).

Most current approaches to this crisis are remedial and focus on the individual. They attempt to 'fix the worker' but, as Marmot (2012) points out, why treat sick people and return them to the conditions that made them sick? What is needed is a preventive approach intended to avoid job-related ill-health occurring in the first place by identifying what aspects of jobs are associated with better and worse mental and physical health. It is the job that can then be fixed through redesign.

To undertake this task, we use the standard measures of job quality adopted by the ONS (Warhurst et al. 2025f). These measures have seven dimensions: pay and benefits; terms of employment; nature of work; social support; worker voice and representation; work-life balance; health, safety and psychosocial wellbeing. This research is the first to use these measures for this purpose.

The paper reports the results of rapid literature review of international literature for each of the seven dimensions with respect to mental and physical health. This review was based on published reviews and considered evidence that was pooled in systematic reviews, meta-reviews and meta-analyses. A 'review of reviews' was conducted for each dimension. The findings reveal, for example, that job insecurity negatively correlates with mental and physical health; job strain is linked to heart disease, strokes, high blood pressure and depression, and a lack of task control correlates with poor mental health. Conversely, social support from managers and co-workers, having task control and job security are linked to good health, both mental and physical. The paper also assesses the prevalence of this research across the seven dimensions and identifies gaps in the current research base.

These findings suggest what job-related interventions are needed to reduce ill-health from work and create healthy jobs in the future as well as indicate future research agendas.

Labour Agency, Trade Unions & Social Movements – Room 3.213

Are Unions Good for Temporary Workers in the New Digital Workplace? Evidence from European Countries

Alessio Tomelleri, Giorgio Cutuli, Andrea Signoretti

(Fondazione Bruno Kessler, Research Institute for the Evaluation of Public Policies)

Over the last two decades, a large body of socio-economic literature has shown how the diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the increased relevance of digital skills in organizational and productive processes significantly affect labour market functioning. The possession of digital skills has become highly influential in determining individuals' labour market outcomes, while the endowments of and the returns to these skills at the workplace do play a significant role in shaping wage prospects and broader labour market inequalities between distinct workforce segments. Analyzing the role played by sociological and industrial relation dynamics in this respect and framing their role within the literature on possible distributive effects of unions' agency, this paper examines how trade unions can influence the returns to ICT skill use for temporary and permanent workers within the same job where legal provisions of equal pay are present. The paper theoretically discusses and empirically tests for the role of individual trade union membership, allowing for heterogeneous wage

effects across labour market segments. Theoretically, we first examine if temporary workers are penalized by power asymmetry with capital or if the theory of compensating wage differentials, foreseeing higher pay for people hired with disadvantageous conditions, is applied. Then, we consider the institutional factor of union agency. We hypothesize that unions can help temporary workers also at the individual level through the mechanisms of knowledge providers over employment rights and by activating grievance procedures beyond collective bargaining. The union conflict-based effect would be higher for contingent workers endowed with higher digital skills who can have less fear of acting against employers. We then see if this potential effect increases on the grounds of power resource theory by considering associational power resources of temporary workers (i.e. their union density) in relation to permanent workers' associational power. The comparatively stronger associational power of non-standard workers' work makes them fully part of the union constituency, being so able to influence union action and strategies (Lindvall and Rueda, 2014). Therefore, it can mobilize the whole workforce through demonstrations and protests to advance their concerns. Findings reveal that ICT diffusion, especially in the absence of trade union interventions, risks exacerbating wage inequalities between workforce segments, not only, as widely acknowledged in the literature, between distinct occupational groups, but rather hinging on contractual segmentation. The analysis is carried out on the last release of the CEDEFOP microdata European skills and jobs survey (ESJS-2022) by means of Mincer OLS regressions, matching procedures, and IV techniques. The overall pattern of results confirms the potentially positive role of trade unions on wage prospects of temporary workers, but conditionally on individual membership and in national contexts with low discrepancies in contractual-specific trade union density. More generally, at odds with the mainstream economic perspective, this theoretical and empirical suggests how inequality spillovers of technical innovations in current labour markets are not univocally defined by task content or demand-supply dynamics for specific sectors and occupations, showing instead how institutional factors can still significantly shape the consequences of technological change.

PhD Showcase

Drivers of Workforce Segmentation in Globalised Industries: Restructuring of the Global Electronics Industry and the Labour Regime in Thailand

Dara Leyden

(Queen Mary University of London)

This paper investigates the impact of the recent restructuring of the electronics industry on work and employment in middle-income countries, based upon a case study of Thailand. Drawing on 66 interviews conducted in 2023 with workers and representatives from labour, firms and the state, it examines the continuities and discontinuities in working conditions in Thailand's electronics industry. The industry is deeply integrated in the middle nodes of 'global value chains' (GVCs), which have grown since the 1990s to account for between 50 and 80 percent of global trade, according to the World Bank and UNCTAD. The electronics industry is emblematic of GVCs. Recent restructuring of the industry has been driven by surging demand for data centres and the US-China tech war, which has exacerbated industry consolidation. Like other middle-income countries, until the late 2000s Thailand experienced growing GVC employment and wages. However, both have subsequently stagnated, and have given way to heightened casualisation and workforce segmentation. The paper deploys a multi-scalar labour regime framework developed by Baglioni et al. (2022), which is rooted in the sociology of work concepts developed by Harry Braverman and Michael Burawoy. It reveals that industry representatives regard Thailand's unique strength to be the characteristics of its workforce, particularly its discipline. It identifies that industrial upgrading in Thai electronics since the 2000s has been based upon the intensification of labour processes. Such intensification has required high levels of worker discipline, which has been constructed by employers and the state primarily through workforce segmentation. It analyses four major employers that have each recruited production line workers from different workforce segments with limited rights, including subcontractors, student interns, cross-border migrant workers, and casualised daily workers. By comparing these four distinct workplace regimes within the same industry and national context, the paper contributes to debates over the drivers of heightened workforce segmentation. It argues that employers choose particular segments based upon their specific labour process and regional labour supply, and identifies a major rationale for segmentation in suppressing workers' collective power. Nevertheless, the different segments of workers have contested their regimes by asserting different forms of labour agency. It contributes to the emerging multi-scalar labour

regime research agenda by conceptualising how such struggles link the scales of labour regimes and propel their uneven evolution over time.

Workplace Regimes and Attitudes to Redistribution in Europe

Sean O Riain, Amy Erbe Healy

(National University of Ireland Maynooth)

Research on attitudes to redistribution has increasingly directed attention towards aspects of the work process and workplace organisation, including employment insecurity, exposure to risk of automation, and the cognitive frameworks and moral codes of occupational groups. We extend this approach by analysing the effects of 'workplace regime' on attitudes to government efforts to redistribute income (GRID) and prevent poverty.

'Workplace regime' is conceptualised as configurations of crucial elements of the organisation of work (e.g. autonomy, learning, working time flexibility, modes of labour control) that form regimes such as 'lean production', 'learning organisations', 'Taylorism' and more.

We expect workplace regimes to affect welfare attitudes through two channels related to the existing literature – the formation of particular risk profiles and of distinctive moral codes. More generally, quantitative and qualitative case study literature has identified a range of 'workplace bargains' associated with different forms of work organisation. We expect that these will shape worker notions of fairness that will spill over into their assessments of redistributionist and poverty prevention policies.

Building on previous research we take advantage of variables related to work organisation in the 2004 and 2010 European Social Survey to construct a categorical variable identifying a range of workplace regimes. We then analyse the effects of these regimes, interacting with employment status, on attitudes to government redistribution and poverty prevention (controlling for a range of relevant variables).

We also extend our analysis over time, analysing support for GRID from 2002 to 2020. We use the relevant socio-demographic variables from the previous regression and the limited work variables included in the standard survey: contract-type, total hours worked, training, and autonomy at work in terms of work organisation. We were unable to carry out this analysis of support for government prevention of poverty as this question was only asked in 2010.

We find a significant set of effects of workplace regime on support for redistributive policies – with the most supportive workers proving to be those in the highly controlled Simple/Taylorist regimes and some precarious workers in highly flexible, 'learning' organisations. Autonomy at work has little effect apart from those with particularly high autonomy who are less supportive. Workplace regime, however, does not affect support for prevention of poverty, though precarious employment increases that support, across all workplace regimes.

Overall, the analysis finds that workplace regimes have a clear effect on support for redistribution, in interaction with employment contract status and in addition to many other aspects of class and gender in particular. The relative independence of these effects from relevant attitudinal variables suggests that these effects do not work as clearly through their effects on broader attitudes as Kitschelt and Rehm (2014) argue. However, we suggest that the result show clearly that workers are indeed likely to form their attitudes to government redistributive policies at least in part through the social contracts and moral order formed through the work process and workplace regime.

Technology & Work – Room 3.209

"We bring them to life": Service Robots and Emotional Labor among Frontline Employees in the Service Sector

David Oborn Regin, Calle Rosengren, Kristina Palm, Carin Håkanstad

(Karlstads Universitet)

This presentation, based in an ongoing research project, discusses how new technology, in shape of humanoid and zoomorphic service robots affect frontline employees' emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983)

in the service sector. While the historical role of robots was to replace human labour, robots are increasingly used in the service sector to assist humans in shared work spaces (Ivanov et al., 2019), influencing the dynamics and social interactions at the work place. The presentation focusses on the impact these robots has on the emotional dynamics of frontline employees and how their introduction reshapes the interaction between employees, customers, and the robots. In the presentation, the framework of emotional labour and Goffman's (1990 [1950]) dramaturgical perspective provides a lens to view the workplace as a stage where employees perform roles, with frontstage and backstage behaviours influencing their emotional experiences.

The setting for the study presented is an amusement park in Sweden, where service robots assist in restaurants and cafes. These robots, designed with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic features, interact closely with first lines employees, who are responsible for providing a joyful and entertaining experience for visitors. The managerial emphasizes on customer satisfaction and the creation of memorable experiences, shaping the expectations placed on the first line employees, where public interaction with the robots are seen as an important aspect of the job.

The methodology involves a qualitative case study approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data were collected from first line employees, managers, and HR officers to gain insights into the emotional labour dynamics influenced by the presence of service robots. The presentation discusses the on-stage interactions with customers and the backstage experiences of employees.

The findings reveal that service robots alleviate some physical tasks, allowing the first line employees to spend more time on stage, interacting with customers. This increased on-stage presence reduces the opportunities for informal backstage interactions that is crucial for emotional recuperation. This presentation discusses the theatricalization of labor, where first line employees bring robots to life by attributing human or animal characteristics to them, enhancing customer experiences. While this role-playing is not explicitly directed by management, it is shaped by the park's aim to provide joy and entertainment. The dual impact of robots on emotional labor is evident, as they contribute to positive customer experiences but can also elicit negative emotions when malfunctioning or in crowded environments.

Despite centuries of fiction describing them, humanoid and zoomorphic robots in service-providing workplaces are a relatively recent phenomenon. Drawing on emotional labor theory (Blackwell-Pal, 2020) and Goffman's (1990[1959]) dramaturgical perspective, this presentation offers insights into the "theatricalization" of work enabled in the complex interplay between technology and human labor.

"We can't stop change, so you have to work with it": An Investigation of the Impact of Artificial Intelligence and Employee Wellbeing in the Financial Services Sector, Through the Lens of Alienation Theory

Tayler Cunningham, Derek Thomson

(Glasgow Caledonian University)

This paper investigates the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) implementation on worker wellbeing in the broader Financial Services industry. AI in work processes has become an increasingly important topic in both academia and industry (Al-Amoudi, 2023; Bankins et al., 2024). Whilst there is much theoretical discussion around the potential impacts of AI on work and employment, few empirical studies have investigated the impact of AI on wellbeing.

This research engages alienation theory, which has seen a resurgence in recent literature (Doberstein and Charbonneau, 2022; Healy, 2020; Soffia et al., 2022), and with seminal debates highlighting the impact of new technology on alienation (Marx, 1848; Blauner, 1964; Braverman, 1974), appears a suitable lens for this research. Recently, Yuill (2023) has highlighted alienation theory as a means of better understanding the concept of 'employee wellbeing'. However, a gap in the literature remains surrounding the impact of AI on alienation and how this may influence worker wellbeing.

This research focuses on the UK finance sector, with a particular interest in broader Financial Service employment, as this sector has tended to be at the vanguard of new technology (Ashta and Herrmann, 2021; Cao, Yang and Yu, 2021). A case study approach was undertaken, employing semi-structured interviews with sectoral stakeholders: employees, unions, employer organisations, and managers. To

date, four union representatives and one FinTech employer organisation representative have been interviewed. In operationalising alienation, key facets of the theory most aligned with a study of AI and the concept of wellbeing – control, meaningfulness, social and self-alienation - were used to shape the interview questions.

Initial findings suggest that the industrial relations contexts of stakeholders influence their predictions with relation to AI implementation. Unions predict alienating outcomes of deskilling, meaninglessness, increased monitoring and work intensification. Though, whilst larger unions admit that little action is currently being taken regarding AI, a smaller, sector-specific, union shared that AI is a key focus of theirs, due to predicted destructive, long-term changes. These findings suggest alignment with classical perspectives of alienation (Marx, 1848; Braverman, 1984).

Stakeholders more aligned with employer interests suggest AI automation may decrease alienation, freeing up workers for more specialised tasks, reminiscent of Blauner's (1964) conceptualisation of alienation. An enterprise union, with a partnership agreement, shared that although job loss was expected, they believed fair consultation would mitigate these outcomes. Furthermore, a FinTech employer organisation was optimistic, due to the expected benefits to productivity and performance, though noted concerns regarding a lack of legislative framework for employers in relation to AI.

Thus, stakeholder perspectives suggest uncertainty in predicting the impact of AI on employee wellbeing, though expected changes align closely with the theoretical framework of alienation. Experiences of workers are currently being gathered via semi-structured interviews, targeting approximately 30 workers, to uncover how AI implementation is impacting experiences of alienation, and ultimately, employee wellbeing. Therefore, this paper will empirically contribute to our understanding of AI and employee wellbeing, as well as theoretically contributing to wider alienation debates.

PAPER SESSION 5
11:00-12:30

Difference, Diversity & Social Justice – Room 3.210

The Resolution Gap: Workplace Conflict Management Approaches and Their Efficacy for Resolving Identity-based Conflict

Denise Currie

(Queen's University Belfast)

Workplace conflict management is traditionally framed through interest- and rights-based approaches. Interest-based methods emphasize reconciliation between disputing parties through informal, mutually acceptable settlements. Rights-based approaches, by contrast, often rely on formal mechanisms—such as collective agreements or employment law—where a third-party neutral assesses the dispute and determines an outcome. However, these conventional paradigms largely overlook the increasing relevance of identity as a distinct and influential lens through which workplace conflict manifests and is experienced (Riordan and Kowalski, 2021).

Identity is shaped by a range of characteristics, including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, disability, and caregiving responsibilities. The intersectionality of these identities adds further complexity to workplace dynamics. In recent years, movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter have amplified the significance of identity in the workplace, leading to the widespread implementation of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategies aimed at fostering cultures where difference is recognized and valued. However, despite the growing prominence of EDI initiatives, identity-based conflict remains a challenging area - not least demonstrated by the current backlash against EDI policies in the United States and beyond. The increasing attention placed on identity in the workplace underscores the importance for organisations to develop effective strategies for managing identity-based conflicts that arise between individuals, groups, and within the broader employment relationship. This paper critically examines the efficacy of existing workplace conflict management frameworks in addressing identity-related disputes.

Drawing upon a review of the extant literature and qualitative data from ongoing semi-structured interviews with EDI professionals, HR practitioners, and other stakeholders (across the UK and Ireland), this study explores three key objectives: 1) The paper examines how identity-based disputes arise in organizations, identifying common patterns and underlying drivers of conflict. 2) It evaluates how traditional rights- and interest-based frameworks accommodate identity-based conflicts, particularly when disputes involve characteristics that do not receive legal protection (e.g., political beliefs) or when protected characteristics conflict with one another (e.g., religious beliefs versus LGBTQ+ rights). 3) The paper investigates how D&I professionals collaborate with HR, senior leadership, and legal teams to prevent, mitigate, and resolve identity-based conflicts within organizations.

Preliminary findings indicate that while EDI roles play a vital function in shaping organizational culture and promoting values such as respect, inclusion, and tolerance, existing conflict resolution mechanisms often struggle to adequately address identity-based disputes. The study highlights key barriers, including misalignment between organizational policies and lived workplace realities, inadequate conflict resolution training, and fragmented coordination between HR, EDI, and legal functions. In many cases, identity-based conflicts escalate due to a lack of clear dispute resolution pathways that integrate identity considerations alongside traditional legal and interest-based frameworks.

This paper raises critical questions about the effectiveness of current organizational approaches to conflict management and emphasizes the need for more nuanced, identity-conscious dispute resolution strategies. Ultimately, it argues that while organizations frequently articulate strong EDI commitments,

gaps in policy implementation, conflict management skills, and interdepartmental alignment create risks that can allow identity-based conflicts to escalate or be avoided, rather than be effectively resolved.

Job Loss and Time off Work Due to Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse

Niels Blom, Vanessa Gash

(University of Manchester)

Background and research question: How family circumstances affect labour market attachment has been well document. However, an important aspect of family-life that has largely been overlooked, namely experiencing intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA). In the past 12 months 3.4% of adults experienced intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA) in England and Wales. While the wellbeing and health consequences of IPVA have been well-documented, research on the impact of IPVA on labour market behaviour is scarce. We answer the research question to what extent are different forms of IPVA related to job loss and time off work, and what are gender and socioeconomic inequalities therein? We incorporate the perspectives economic abuse and work-home resources models.

Data and method: We ustilise four waves of data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (2008, 2010, 2012 and 2017) and information of 3,813 respondents who were victim-survivors of IPVA in the past 12 months. Our dependent variables concerns the question whether IPVA victim-survivors say they have lost their job or taken time off work because of the abuse experienced.

In our sample, 37% reported physical violence/abuse, 5% sexual violence/abuse, 24% stalking, 57% controlling or coercive behaviour, and 33% threats. We use weighted logistic regression to analyse whether people took time off work or lost their job.

Findings: Of those who experienced IPVA in the past 12 months, 4% lost their job as a result of the abusive behaviour experienced. The weighted logistic regression models indicate that among IPVA victim-survivors, stalking, controlling behaviour, and threats, are associated with a significantly more job loss, but physical violence was not. The more types of IPVA experienced in the past 12 months, the higher the risk of job loss. Additionally, those with intermediate occupations and routine and manual occupations have a higher risk of losing their jobs compared to higher managerial, administrative, and professional occupations. While the majority of victim-survivors are women, male victim-survivors have a higher risk of losing their job compared to women when adjusted for the type of violence people have experienced.

Regarding time off work, 11% of victim-survivors had to take some time off work in the past year because of the abuse experienced. Logistic regression analyses indicate that all measured types of violence and abuse by a (former) intimate partner are associated time taken off. Men and those with intermediate occupations have a marginally (p<.1) lower risk of taking time off compared to women and those with higher occupations respectively.

Conclusion: We conclude that IPVA has a significant and detrimental impact on victim-survivors' labour market outcomes. Considering those in economically precarious positions are also more likely to be victim-survivors (and perpetrators) of intimate partner violence and abuse, this is suggestive of a circle of economic precarity and intimate partner violence and abuse.

Symbolic Compliance or Embedded Practice? Organisational Responses to FDV Leave Policy in Australia

Renata Casado, Kantha Dayaram, Mihajla Gavin

(University of Western Australia)

The recognition of family and domestic violence (FDV) as a workplace issue has gained momentum through initiatives like the International Labour Organisation's Convention 190 (C190). By broadening the definition and scope of violence and harassment in the workplace, C190 highlights the spillover effects of FDV, framing it as a safety concern that necessitates intervention at both the State and workplace levels. In Australia, all employees are entitled to ten days of paid FDV leave each year under the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth), a right that became legislatively effective in 2023.

Informed by neo-institutional theory (NIT) (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and the institutional logic perspective (ILP) (Thornton et al., 2012), this paper discusses how conflicting logics create disparities in how organisations implement, prioritise, or resist FDV Paid-Leave policy implementation in Australia. While NIT recognises the external pressures that drive organisational conformity and change (Scott, 2008), the ILP explains how organisations manage and prioritise competing logics in response to these pressures (Thornton et al., 2012). We employed a mixed methodology comprising an online survey with open-ended questions for victim-survivors (n=100) and semi-structured interviews with stakeholder groups (n=18) such as trade unions, regulators, employers, and community organisations.

Preliminary findings reflect how organisations operate within multiple institutional logics, which can sometimes conflict with determining how they implement or prioritise institutional policies. Disparities in implementation are evident across different industries, such as a large mining organisation, a compliant law firm, and a small childcare. Most organisations and victim-survivors reported a 'compliance logic' guiding policy implementation. Still, small and medium businesses seemed to be driven more by a 'moral logic', prioritising employee well-being and welfare.

Combining NIT and the ILP can enhance our understanding of how and why organisational compliance to institutional structures occurs, especially when organisations must navigate conflicting demands in complex, multi-logic environments. Furthermore, morality, in the sense of altruism, sympathy, and understanding for others, is a crucial consideration that is still underdeveloped in the ILP (Thornton et al., 2015). One significant critique of neo-institutional theories is their lack of a positive account of morality at the organisational level (Meyer & Braga, 2015; Moore & Grandy, 2017).

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Responding to Selective Incivility in the Workplace: An Intersectional Life Course Perspective of Ethnic Minority Doctors in the NHS

Dulini Fernando, Ashok Patnaik, Etlyn Kenny, Joanne Duberley, Chris Darko

(Aston University)

Incivility is pervasive in contemporary workplaces, and studies indicate that many minorities experience selective incivility due to their social affiliations (Deitch et al., 2003; Smith et al, 2021). A bourgeoning literature provides insights into the harmful effects of incivility on targets and documents their responses (Joseph et al., 2025). While insightful, extant understandings depict a rather static and simplistic picture of selective incivility, paying little attention to how multiple social locations (e.g. gender, ethnicity, migration status) interact in complex ways to shape individuals' experiences and responses over different stages of their career trajectory. To enhance understanding of the dynamic and changing nature of targets experience of selective incivility in the workplace over time, we adopt an intersectional life course approach (Foster et al., 2023) to examine the accounts of 100 ethnic minority doctors in the UK's NHS. Our qualitative study, based on one-to-one interviews, provides insights into varying combinations of constraints as well as privilege (see Atewologun and Sealy, 2014) in individuals' experiences of selective incivility at different points of time in their careers while also highlighting distinct strategies used to navigate selective incivility in the workplace and their implications. We theorise selective incivility as a contested social process, and depict targets of incivility as reflexive agents who can incrementally shape the social space that they are situated in.

(Dis)Continuities in Professions, Occupations & Skills – Room 3.212

The Impact of First Job Occupation and Occupational Mobility on Workplace Authority in the UK: A Longitudinal Analysis from a Gender Perspective

Jagriti Tanwar, Gurleen Popli

(University of Westminster)

This paper analyses the impact of first occupation and occupational mobility on workplace authority in the UK. Previous research has shown evidence of the links between the first job characteristics (e.g., contract, firm size) and wage, employment and job quality in later life but has paid little attention to how first job "occupation" influences the chances of holding an authority position in the workplace. Since occupations are gendered and gendering occurs from entry into the labour market, we examine the extent to which the effect of first occupation differs for women and men. We use the UK Household Longitudinal Data 2009-2019 (1-11 waves; 133,577 observations) and employ the probit regression technique with standard errors clustered at the individual level. After adjusting for age, ethnicity, gender, partnered status, dependent children, highest qualifications, manager/supervisor in the first job and wave dummies (to capture time effects), our preliminary findings suggest that individuals who worked in high and mid-level skilled occupations are significantly more likely to hold authority positions later in their working life, while those who began their career in low-skilled/manual occupations (the bottom in the occupational hierarchy) have significantly lower chances of gaining authority position relative to their skilled peers. Gender analysis shows that women beginning their careers in high-skilled occupations have significantly lower chances of accessing authority positions. In contrast, women in high/technical skilled occupations are significantly more likely to secure authority positions. Unsurprisingly, across all occupations women (0.35) compared to men (0.43) are significantly less likely to have authority positions later in their careers – suggesting a gender gap of 8 percentage points. Our findings highlight that gender-based discrimination that starts at the beginning of the career persists and creates gender inequalities in accessing leadership positions. Following these preliminary results, our next step is to explore if occupational mobility plays a role in explaining the initial findings.

Returner Programmes: Promoting Gender Equality through Postfeminist Practice

Cecile Guillaume

(University of Surrey)

This paper presents a qualitative study looking into the recent (re)deployment of returner programmes in the UK private and public sectors in the mid-2010s that purportedly intended to provide a re-entry route to employment for professionals, mostly women, who had taken career breaks. Its contribution is both empirical and theoretical.

Drawing on 53 interviews with policymakers, consultants, program managers, and women returners, this research offers original insights on an under-researched gender equality tool which has been use intermittently in the UK as a way of addressing employers' skill shortages and (women) economic inactivity; a subject that has taken centre stage in the political debate since the COVID crisis. Moreover, building on research on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) work the paper explores how a deeper engagement with boundary work literature offers valuable insights into the discursive and organisational practices through which competing rationales are negotiated and translated into EDI initiatives—such as returner programmes. As EDI work represents a distinct form of boundary work, balancing internal organisational and economic imperatives with external societal, legal, and political pressures, this article also examines how returner programmes reflect the 'postfeminist sensibility' (Gill, 2007) shared by both sponsors and participants while exposing the contradictions inherent in this feminist approach.

The findings will show that although returner programmes are framed as initiatives to 'fix the system' by addressing discriminatory recruitment practices and the 'career break penalty', they are simultaneously justified through business-driven rationales, including employer skills shortages and EDI deficits. This strategic 'framing and selling' enables professionals to implement 'covert' positive action while mitigating controversy, as the primary beneficiaries are women returners. However, in securing

managerial buy-in, these programmes adopt an incremental and selective approach that ultimately shifts responsibility onto (women) returners themselves. The coaching and mentoring provided to returners reflect a 'fix the women' strategy, rooted in confidence culture (Orgad, & Gill, 2022), constructing an idealised vision of the 'career returner'—one that aligns with postfeminist ideals. For these reasons, we argue that returner programmes not only support a socially selective back-to-work model but also fall far short of genuinely 'fixing the system.' They do little to challenge the persistence of linear, uninterrupted career models or the entrenched masculine professional cultures that demand rigid working hours with little tolerance for flexibility or personal constraints.

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(Dis)Continuities Experienced by Volunteer Library Workers

Helen Tracey, Jen Hagan

(Northumbria University)

Our paper examines volunteering motivations and practices within libraries. Libraries are spaces where discontinuities and continuities of work and society intersect. Discontinuities are reflected in public service austerity and reduced arts and heritage funding leading to budget cuts. The growth in digitalised information has also challenged libraries' legitimacy as places to access information (Audunson et al., 2019). Under these conditions, libraries have either been forced to adapt or face closure. In many cases, volunteers have stemmed service discontinuities by undertaking duties that were formerly part of paid librarian roles. Concerns around the de-skilling of these professional roles are particularly pertinent when viewing libraries as third spaces where discussions that contravene dominant neoliberal capitalist ideals can take place (Hider et al., 2023). Therefore, while volunteers ensure continuity of library services, their role can also be problematised within the wider context. This is further complicated where volunteers exist alongside paid staff, and where volunteer time may not be given freely.

There are also (dis)continuities at an individual level. For many, volunteering acts as an appropriate and hugely powerful response to discontinuity in their professional and/or personal lives. It offers a means of structure, reliability, routine and something they can control. These are important benefits for people struggling to continue to engage in work and society due to relationship breakdown, loss of paid employment or poor health. Our research has found that the Covid-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for libraries to demonstrate an impact on well-being through addressing isolation. Some of the libraries we studied have also found ways to work with volunteers that compliment, rather than challenge, paid library work.

Heritage and culture provides a particularly unique intersection where very diverse individuals come together who are often seeking continuity. In the case of the volunteers in our research, they were attracted to both the historic library building and the antique books the volunteers can train to restore. Some of our most interesting findings relate to volunteer's motivations and identity. Although volunteering is often viewed as altruistic and thereby concerned with the well-being of others, we found initial motivations were individualised. Organisations can view volunteers as both an audience and resource, as visitors or service users and as staff. This raises questions regarding individual and collective volunteer identities.

We situate these experiences within wider research data collected over the past decade. The data explores volunteering within a range of organisations in the heritage sector, including libraries, nature conservation, art galleries and railway museums. This data reveals broader volunteer motivations, management and outcomes, with both positive and negative implications for work, employment and society.

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Historical (Dis)Continuities and Crises in/at Work & Employment – Room 3.211

Minimum Wage in the Time of Pandemic

Andreas Georgiadis, Maria Del Carmen Franco Gavonel

(University of Leeds)

We investigate impacts of COVID-19 on a low wage essential sector, adult care homes, in England, where one in four deaths due to COVID-19 occurred, and whether the minimum wage moderates these impacts. We identify effects of COVID-19 and the minimum wage on home outcomes implementing a difference-in-differences estimator on a large, matched employer-employee quarterly panel data set between December 2019 and June 2021. We find that higher locality exposure to COVID-19 reduces home wages and employment and that higher home exposure to the minimum wage mitigates these effects. We show that these results can be explained by monopsony in the adult care homes labour market and that the extent of monopsony is considerable, as we estimate the elasticity of labour supply to the home to be around 0.9. Our results are also consistent with a positive effect of local COVID-19 mortality on home deaths that increases with home's exposure to the minimum wage and suggest that these effects manifest through reductions in care inputs. .

The 'Green Transition' as 'Green' Restructuring: The Case of the French Automotive Industry

Juan Sebastian Carbonell, Armanda Cetrulo, Angelo Moro

(Université de Liège)

The European automotive industry is currently under pressure from EU regulations to undertake a transition towards electromobility. Despite its steady industrial decline, France is still one of the leading automotive manufacturing countries in Europe in terms of the number of vehicles produced in 2023. As a consequence, this transition is not without risks for an industry that still directly employs just under 200,000 people in France and around 85,000 directly in internal combustion engine manufacturing, insofar as the production of a battery electric vehicle (BEV) is supposed to require less labour – between 20% and 40%.

Inversely, the transition to BEVs has been presented by French car manufacturers and the government as a way of preserving a declining industry, with plans for creating new jobs in electric powertrain plants and battery assembly gigafactories. The "green transition" also appears as a challenge for the French industrial relations system, which is unaccustomed to trade unions negotiating on work organisation, technological change and product architecture. The aim of this paper is precisely to study how the French industrial relations system adapts to an external constraint on the basis of existing negotiation practices on work and employment, and to what extent the green transition can lead to institutional innovation.

To this end, we analyse in depth the bargaining process that led to the creation of a subsidiary dedicated to the production of BEVs within a French car manufacturer and compare it with previous negotiations that had led to concession bargaining within the group over the past 15 years. The analysis is based on various field materials collected over four years (2019-2023). The first 26 semi-structured interviews with staff and union representatives, as well as central union delegates on collective bargaining of restructuring in the aforementioned carmaker, conducted between 2019 and 2022. The second relates to the bargaining process that led to the signing, in June 2021, of the company collective agreement enabling the creation of the BEV subsidiary and includes 16 interviews conducted between May and November 2023 with managers, engineers and union delegates, as well as a collective interview conducted with a dozen workers and union activists.

We show how the « green transition » bargaining fits into the framework of the cost-cutting and competitiveness-seeking policies pursued throughout the industry over the past 15 years. In particular, the negotiations for the creation of the BEV subsidiary reproduced the same bargaining logics and strategies already used in the negotiations of the previous competitiveness agreements, such as the so-called « joint reflection groups », aimed at obtaining the ex-ante consent of the trade unions on the

need for restructuring and the threat of relocation of production to low-cost countries. At the same time, we show how this collective bargaining came about through greater union involvement in the company decision-making process, encouraged by a decentralisation of industrial relations, the permanent nature of which, however, has yet to be established.

Nurseries in a Time of Economic Crisis: When Young Women Have to Fix Everything

Thomas Haines-Doran

(University of Leeds)

In Britain, as in many other countries, the government is committing significant funding to increase nursery places. The fact that this is happening in a context where investment in public and social services has been squeezed is very significant, suggesting that neoliberal governments have a high strategic commitment to this sector.

This paper explores the reasons why government spending is increasing and asks whether this strategy is likely to succeed. It finds, through an analysis of lobbying documents by business associations such as the CBI, that the business sector—especially since the outbreak of COVID-19—believes that childcare policies can help address high inflation levels and stagnant economic growth. Funding for nursery places is contingent on enabling parents to undertake paid work, and its target audience is clear: working-class, young women (men are rarely mentioned in accompanying documentation), who are expected to fill the gap in the labor market for low-wage workers, caused by declining fertility rates and increased sickness.

However, as multiple studies reveal, this plan is already failing at the first hurdle: there is a considerable recruitment and retention crisis in the sector, driven by low pay and poor working conditions. The government and nursery providers are looking for ways to increase employment, but their efforts are focused on the demographic that already represents the majority of the existing workforce—young women—without providing sufficient funding to create well-paid jobs with good conditions and career progression prospects. In other words, young women are seen as both the problem and the solution to broader systemic economic failings.

This paper, which is at a formative stage of preparation, seeks to understand this contradiction with reference to social reproduction theory and debates in political economy regarding the nature of 'economic value.'

Immigration Control, Broken Promise of Brexit and Continuum of Social Harm: Insights from the UK's Ethnic Curry Houses

Shaila Ahmed, Razzak B M

(University of Essex)

Workplace exploitation is high on business operations, policymaking and research agenda, particularly in this era of relentless discontinuities and uncertainties. This study informs the current debate on the relationship between (dis)continuity in market externalities and workplace exploitation. It draws upon qualitative data from a field study of Britain's curry houses—a workplace setting where volatility and unpredictability are deeply entrenched. Valued at £3.8 billion and employing over 100,000 people (Daily Mail, 2016), Britain's curry houses historically flourished through waves of South Asian ethnic migrant labour, with 80% comprising Bengali Muslim migrants (Ram & Jones, 2008; Bloch & McKay, 2015). However, with two to three curry houses closing every week (The Guardian, 2017), the sector is grappling with an existential crisis, particularly in the wake of Brexit and the UK government's broader political agenda of immigration control.

Employing Scott's (2017) theory of social harm, this study examines how internal labour processes adapt to shifting market conditions, perpetuating a continuum of work-based harm. Evolving labour processes are characterised by informalisation, precariousness and hyper-flexibility, leading to heightened job insecurity and the erosion of workers' bargaining power. Findings suggest that consent to such a labour process is neither purely coerced nor voluntary, rather an inevitable adaptation to discontinuities and uncertainties.

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(Im)Mobility & Migration – Room 3.214

Changing Expectation and Strategies in Regard to Deskilling and Reskilling: Investigating Labour Market Strategies of EU Migrants from CEE States in Vienna

Clara Holzinger, Martina Kanovich, Alina Cristea, Anna-Katharina Draxl, Elisabeth Scheibelhofer

(University of Vienna)

The contribution presents findings from two research projects (2021-2025) on EU migrants from CEE states in the Austrian capital of Vienna. Our qualitative approach focuses on the micro-level processes leading to experiences of labour market discrimination, in particular deskilling. We thereby opt for a multi-perspective and longitudinal mixed-method proceeding, combining a qualitative panel study with highly-educated migrants from different CEE countries, a cross-sectional interview study with Romanian migrants with lower levels of formal education, interviews with institutional actors, and complementary ethnographic observations. Contrary to most research on this topic, we do not investigate labour market integration and deskilling from a static point of view but take account of the temporal dimension. We thus opt for process-oriented research in order to gain insights into the ways that deskilling proceses are lived by the individuals concerned. Such a qualitative longitudinal approach enables us to trace changes at the individual level over time and draws attention to the biographical processes through which social outcomes are mediated, thus offering a fresh perspective on deskilling. First findings point to shifting temporal horizons and staggered migration trajectories. In our data, we could identify changing expectations in regard to work opportunities and an adaptation of coping strategies over time. Thereby, founding a family or emerging transnational (elderly) care responsibilities constitute crucial biographical events that impact decisively individual migrants' experiences with work placement. Also, in regard to the chances of occupying a job position corresponding to the individual's qualifications, our empirical results indicate the existence of critical periods in the first few years of migration.

Skilled Migrants' Navigations of Labor Market Barriers and Entrepreneurial Adaptations in Turkey: Findings from Multilevel Qualitative Research

Tesnim Chirchi

(Ibn Haldun University)

The migration of skilled professionals is often framed within brain drain/brain gain debates, yet this binary overlooks the complex (im)mobility and employment precarity experienced by migrant academics and businesspeople. This paper examines the occupational trajectories, work challenges, and adaptive strategies of Arab academic professionals and businesspeople in Turkey, highlighting the barriers to formal employment and the rise of alternative entrepreneurial pathways.

Drawing on 40 semi-structured interviews, digital ethnography, and field research conducted in Istanbul (2022–2024), this study explores the ways in which Arab academics struggle with professional deskilling and institutional exclusion, while businesspeople develop alternative economic networks in response to restrictive labor policies. Findings show that highly skilled Arab academics, despite their expertise in fields such as social sciences, Islamic studies, and economics, face structural obstacles to employment in Turkish universities and research institutions. These barriers include language requirements,

bureaucratic hurdles in credential recognition, and limited access to tenure-track positions. Many are forced into precarious adjunct roles, online teaching, or self-funded research, reflecting a downward shift in professional mobility.

In contrast, Arab businesspeople—though equally constrained by legal and financial limitations—demonstrate higher levels of economic agency, leveraging community networks, informal partnerships, and digital platforms to build businesses in sectors such as consulting, education, and e-commerce. While entrepreneurship provides a workaround for employment restrictions, the lack of formal business support and regulatory stability results in economic precarity and limited scalability.

This paper argues that the work and employment experiences of skilled migrants must be analyzed beyond wage labor, incorporating alternative modes of economic participation such as semi-formal entrepreneurship and knowledge-sharing economies. By situating Arab migrant professionals within a broader context of labor market segmentation, migration governance, and institutional barriers, the study challenges dominant frameworks of skilled migration as a linear pathway to socioeconomic mobility. Instead, it highlights the precarious yet innovative strategies through which migrant academics and businesspeople negotiate their place in Turkey's labor economy.

The study contributes to migration and labor sociology by advancing discussions on precarious work, occupational (dis)continuities, and the informalization of skilled migrant labor. Policy implications suggest the need for greater institutional support for foreign academics, improved credential recognition, and policies that foster transnational business collaboration between migrant and local entrepreneurs.

Migrants in Medicine: Exploring the Workplace Experiences of Doctors in the NHS

Toma Pustelnikovaite, Neha Gopinath, Michael Rimmer

(Cardiff University)

Research on the NHS has repeatedly highlighted increasing workloads, demands and administrative pressures within the sector (e.g. Dominic et al, 2021; Chaudhry et al, 2021; Wise, 2022; Lang, 2024; Laverty et al, 2024). While their impacts on staff are documented, effects on diverse employee groups remain underexplored. The NHS heavily relies on migrant professionals, with recent data showing that 35% of doctors in England's NHS are non-British (Baker, 2023). However, they are found to experience various forms of exclusion emerging from immigration policies and institutional practices within the sector (Chopra et al, 2023; O'Brien and Ackroyd, 2012). With the numbers of migrant doctors expected to grow further (GMC, 2023), a better understanding of their employment experiences is needed.

Against this backdrop, our qualitative study aims to compare the workplace experiences of UK-born, foreign-born and foreign-trained doctors in the NHS. Data collection (semi-structured interviews) and analysis for this project are ongoing. Early findings from interviews with 10 doctors suggest that pressures such as managerialism, overwork, burnout and lack of work-life balance are common across all groups. However, results also indicate a segmented profession where foreign origin and foreign training influence perceptions of doctors' competence, expertise and authority, further intensifying their work and limiting their inclusion. These findings challenge assumptions about the degree of internationalisation within professions (Pustelnikovaite and Chillas, 2023; Muzio et al, 2011) and contribute to reducing inequalities and developing more sustainable employment within the healthcare sector.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 1 – Room 2.217

Challenges in Addressing Gender Sexual Harassment of Frontline Service Workers by Customers in Scotland's Tourism and Hospitality Sector

Paul Prescott

(University of Strathclyde)

Customer sexual harassment (CSH) of frontline service workers in the tourism and hospitality industry is a widespread and persistent issue (Dawson et al., 2021). This problem is often viewed as part of the job (Hadjisolomou et al., 2023), and despite the increasing awareness, particularly post-pandemic, little have changed to protect workers, especially women (Beltramini et al., 2020). CSH prospers in hospitality services due to ingrained idiosyncrasies of hospitality service provision and service effort, with the nature of hospitality service fostering close involvement with customers (FolgerØand Fjeldstad 1995; Poulsto n, 2008). The customer-centric nature of service work, however, creates unequal power and gender dynamics, which normalise undesirable and distressing sexualised experiences, particularly for women in the sector (Matulewicz, 2016).

The hospitality industry is often described as a feminized workplace (Mooney, 2018). Clark (2024), citing the UK's Office of National Statistics, notes that 53.7% of accommodation and food service workers were women in mid-2024, mirroring global trends showing that women made up 54% of the tourism workforce (WTO, 2019). Alarmingly, research underscores the gendered challenges women face within their roles suggesting that they are more likely to experience CSH (Bragason, 2016; Gibbs et al., (2021). Despite the widespread nature of the problem, surprisingly little research has examined the role of hospitality management in supporting women who have experienced customer sexual harassment.

This paper draws on 44 semi-structured interviews, with frontline service workers, line manager human resource practitioners, trade union representatives and industry representatives. It considers how women in frontline service work experience CSH in Scottish hospitality industry and how line management and organisational human resources react to this phenomenon. Initial findings indicate that individuals, both frontline workers and line-managers, view customer sexual harassment through their personal interpretive prism which forms decision making on reporting, handling, and addressing CSH Additionally, real-time decision making, and sovereignty of customers are commonplace pressures that effect frontline worker reporting of incidents to line management. Relatedly, these pressures also effect the judgement of line managers in their decision making in how to navigate the addressing of the phenomenon with the perpetrator. In addition, human resource practitioners are generally unsure or at worst unaware that such a phenomenon exists. This is due to the practitioners citing that neither frontline worker nor line management inform them of such incidents taking place.

This research identifies three contributory areas. First it takes a holistic view of CSH in Scottish hospitality from the perspectives of different stakeholder actors, highlighting differences in how CSH is viewed as a concern. Second, it identifies navigational caution, due to perceived customer sovereignty, as a factor for frontline workers in deciding whether to report incidents of CSH, and for line management in how, or if they address the phenomenon with the perpetrator. The third element shows how and individuals interpretative prism is a key factor in how frontline workers and line management deciding on incidents of CSH and a potential factor for HR practitioners being largely unaware of the phenomenon.

Hounded Out? Measuring the Effect of Violence on Labour Market Exit Using Nationally Representative Data

Vanessa Gash

(City St Georges, University of London and University of Manchester)

Objectives. Workplace violence is poorly understood, with few data collecting indicators on the topic. It can be taken to include dangerous working environments and conditions, alongside problematic interpersonal interactions between co-workers or between workers and service users/clients or members of the public. Moreover, interpersonal workplace violence can cover a broad range of problematic behaviours, from incivil interactions to the most extreme forms of physical violence. While research has confirmed the considerable risk to mental health of workplace violence (Gash and Blom, 2025) less is known about its effects on labour market exit, and thereby on aggregate rates of productivity. Moreover, much of the current literature on workplace violence does not have access to crime data and tends to limit itself to assessments of workplace bullying, which may offer imprecise estimates of prevalence. Therefore, one of the central aims of this study is to reveal the disaggregated effects of different forms of violence, including disaggregated workplace violence, on labour market exit. In so doing, we highlight the importance of workplace violence as an under examined component of working-life which requires better interventions that allow for assessments of their efficacy.

Methods. We use multiple waves of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), a nationally representative survey with indicators collected annually from individual respondents on criminal and non-criminal victimisation. Using weighted logistic regression, we provide predicted probabilities of labour market exit by types of violence experienced, workplace or otherwise, alongside an assessment of differential effect by perpetrator type. Variance by perpetrator type is important, as prior research suggests that workplace violence between co-workers is more corrosive than between workers and service users.

We supplement our statistical analysis with the views and voice of those with lived experience to ensure that victims of violence are more than objects of study. These insights are obtained from focus groups discussions.

Results. We find workplace violence to be disproportionately associated with labour market exit compared to other forms of violence in a model with controls for known confounders. Moreover, we found perpetration by one's colleague or co-worker to increase drop-out risk. Finally, we found that victims of workplace violence were considerably less likely to report their experiences to police in instances where the perpetrator was a colleague or co-worker.

Conclusions. Using the CSEW we found workplace violence to be a significant and under-reported form of interpersonal violence and abuse. We found it to be highly predictive of labour market drop out and also found it to be under-reported to police. Those with lived experience noted the significant mental health effects of their experiences of workplace violence and called for better support for workers.

Contextualising Organisational Justice: Insights from Chilean Workers in the Public Sector

Francisca Alvarez Figueroa, Jenny K Rodriguez, Paula Ascorra

(University of Manchester)

Organisational justice (OJ) is key to meaningful work and signals respect for workers' rights and dignity. Yet, injustice remains widespread, and OJ frameworks have not resolved inequality in management or society. Emerging research now calls for more context-sensitive approaches to OJ, exploring how people perceive and address justice issues within specific settings. While context shapes how OJ is understood and what outcomes are expected, little research has explored these dynamics in the global south. To contribute to this theoretical gap, this study aimed to understand territorial-level contextual and social dynamics that shape OJ and focused on the following research question: How do employees understand OJ in a developing context? To study this question, we compared data from four school districts in Chile, where we conducted 48 in-depth interviews with employees to explore their perspectives on OJ. Data analysis involved a coding-led thematic analysis, informed by the main approaches to OJ (interactional, distributive, and procedural dimensions) alongside a grounded theory approach to allow emergent context-based topics.

The Chilean education system is an interesting empirical setting to explore perspectives of OJ, given its complex transformation that resulted from the implementation of Neoliberal principles during the authoritarian military regime.

The findings unveil three key types of OJ that emerged from the data analysis: status-driven and paternalistic interactional OJ, informal and clientelist procedural OJ, and favour-based distributive OJ. These are premised against unique cultural values such as paternalism and compadrazgo, as well as perceptions structured by status and neoliberal influence in the studied workplaces.

When approaching status-driven and paternalistic interactional OJ, we appreciate similarities in the interactional approach developed in DMEs and LSPEs, as fair interactions, treatment, and participatory opportunities are conditioned to the workers' status. Besides, workers justify with benevolence the lack of such instances and poor working conditions amidst demanding working environments with limited resources.

When exploring procedural OJ, findings suggest that when protocols and procedures were in place, these were trespassed following an informal mechanism based on a clientelist, consumer-based decision that benefited users and voters over workers and organisational processes. In a context defined by a market-based environment, where user satisfaction is key to measuring organisational success, procedures are often ignored in favour of a clientelist approach, which determines the extent

to which procedures are trespassed. The third theme emerged when examining distributive OJ, unveiling a favour-based approach in which formal mechanisms for the distribution of resources are bypassed and delegitimised by authority. Indeed, cronyism, pituto, favouritism and compadrazgo networks emerge as key components of this dynamic.

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This presentation offers three theoretical contributions. It conceptualises OJ as context-dependent, highlights the role of cultural values in shaping fairness perceptions, and introduces a typology of OJ in a neoliberal, developing context. Findings underscore the need for a fluid, situated understanding of OJ, where fairness is shaped by structural, cultural, and institutional dynamics—particularly within Chile's neoliberal public system.

Legacies of #MeToo in the UK Film and Television Industry: A Qualitative Study of Workplace Justice Mechanisms to Address Sexual Harassment

Anna Bull

(University of York)

Workplace policy and practice in relation to handling sexual harassment reports has been argued to have substantially shifted since #MeToo. However, within academic discussion on the #MeToo movement, academic literature – particularly in discussions of media workers – has focused on informal or 'DIY' strategies for tackling workplace sexual harassment such as the 'whisper network' while the role of workplace justice mechanisms for preventing and responding to sexual harassment remains under-explored. Workplace justice mechanisms – which form part of a broader framework of equalities and labour rights – are internal organisational grievance, complaint and disciplinary mechanisms, routes for redress under civil law, or other steps to prevent and respond to workplace discrimination and harassment. The role of such mechanisms is disputed; they have been argued to be a form of carceral feminism 'that serve mainly to interpellate the dangerous Other and safeguard the institution' (Phipps, 2024, p. 63). On the other hand, as Sara Ahmed argues, 'to deprive someone of institutional power has to involve the institution in some way' and therefore feminists should engage with organisational complaints processes (Ahmed, 2022).

This article explores the role of such mechanisms in addressing workplace sexual harassment. It draws on a case study of the UK film and television industry, the sector at the centre of the 2017 #MeToo movement, analysing interview accounts from those who had experienced and/or spoken up about sexual harassment in this industry since December 2017. The epistemological framing of this study foregrounded gathering knowledge to support social change (Wise & Stanley, 1993). Data collection took place in early 2023 and a public report giving an overview of the findings from the study was published in late 2023. This paper describes further analysis of interviewees' experiences of workplace justice mechanisms.

The findings reveal a reliance on informal approaches. Formal action was only taken on sexual harassment reports in a minority of cases. Furthermore, a new risk since #MeToo was apparent: workers being encouraged to speak out about harassment and abuse but then being punished or victimised by employers when they did so. Even so, mechanisms for addressing sexual harassment were still lacking in many workplaces. The study also sheds light on precarity and sexual harassment. Freelancers experience more harassment, however this study found that those in ongoing contracts experience sexual harassment situations for a longer period of time and therefore they had lower satisfaction with workplace justice mechanisms than precarious workers.

Amidst ongoing revelations of sexualised abuses of power within this industry, this examination of workplace justice mechanisms for addressing sexual harassment in the UK film and television industry since #MeToo reveals the weakness of the current regulatory regime in this area. While complaints and grievance processes have been rightly critiqued for individualising issues of discrimination (Charlesworth, 2002), I argue – with Sara Ahmed – that there remains potential for collective action to negotiate better prevention of and responses to workplace sexual harassment.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 2 – Room 2.218
Special Event

What Can Central Asia teach us about labour, gender, and precarity today?

David Bailey, Giulio Benedetti, Franco Galdini, Eugenia Pesci, Madini Gazieva, Binazir Yusupova

(University of Birmingham, University of Helsinki, Dublin City University)

This Special Event brings together editors and contributors to an edited volume entitled What's in a Job? Rethinking Labour, Gender, and Precarity in Central Asia (under review, Palgrave IPE series). The book explores what lessons can be learnt from the transformations that took place in Central Asia in the past three decades, a region that has largely remained at the margins of scholarly debates around recent changes in labour and employment relations in sociology, labour studies, and political economy. This presentation will introduce the main themes running through the edited volume and how they relate to several research strands at the BSA Conference 2025, namely: historical discontinuities in work and employment (from the Soviet to the post-Soviet era); precarity/precariousness at work and employment; conflict at work and individual and collective forms of resistance; and technology and work, particularly in relation to new forms of exploitation and resistance in the gig economy.

Over the past three decades, the nature of work has been revolutionised in Central Asia. From full employment and generous welfare provisions during Soviet times, the region's workforce has been facing increasing casualisation and informalisation since independence in 1991, with widespread but uneven effects for working men and women. While processes of labour precarisation have become prevalent in the global political economy, however, much of the literature on post-soviet/post-socialist countries continues to focus on the supposedly incomplete 'transition' from the socialist Soviet past to account for present instances of precarity, informality, and inequality in Central Asia. The contributors to this volume challenge this narrative, drawing on diverse scholarly traditions from critical political economy to frame labour precarisation, casualisation, informalisation, and their gendered effects in four Central Asian countries within broader global processes. How, we ask, can feminist political economy, theories of rentier capitalism, and other critical approaches offer novel insights into the changing landscapes of work in the Central Asian region, in line with similar but variegated global dynamics of labour precarisation? And how, in turn, can empirical accounts from Central Asia enrich our understanding of global economic processes and their uneven effects on working men and women?

What's in a Job? Rethinking Labour, Gender, and Precarity in Central Asia

Franco Galdini

(University of Birmingham)

What's in a Job? makes three contributions to the debate. First, it situates labour precarisation in Central Asia within broader global economic trends, offering an alternative to the dominant 'transition' paradigm, while showing how the region can inform the theorisation of gendered labour precarisation across and beyond the postsocialist world. Second, the volume offers empirically rich accounts of gendered experiences of labour precarity based on recent extensive fieldwork in a region that has largely remained marginal to debates in sociology, labour studies, and political economy. Finally, the book brings critical (feminist) political economy, sociology, labour studies, and post-socialist (post-Soviet) area studies into interdisciplinary dialogue, making it of interest to students and scholars of all these diverse disciplines.

The Changing Landscape of Rural Work: Navigating New Employers and Resource Enclosures in Samarkand Region, Uzbekistan

Madini Gazieva

(Dublin City University)

How are market-oriented reforms transforming everyday labour in rural Uzbekistan? Following 25 years of political isolationism, in 2016 Uzbekistan opened its economy to global markets by attracting foreign investment through policies such as deregulation and the intensification of relations with international financial institutions. This opening significantly transformed Uzbekistan's agricultural landscape. Many formerly state-controlled cotton and wheat farms have been replaced by a mosaic of land ownership structures. Consequently, agricultural labour relations are increasingly dictated by private interests with mixed results. While state-sanctioned forced child labour in cotton was eliminated in 2021, neoliberal policies are introducing a new set of challenges and opportunities to the everyday lives of smallholder producers, who supply the bulk of informal seasonal work on large farms. Drawing on twenty semi-structured interviews with smallholders, a female seasonal labourer, and two owners of intensive horticulture gardens conducted in 2023-24 in Samarkand region, this chapter uses feminist political economy and political ecology to examine a) how intensive gardens transform the labour regimes previously dominated by cotton; and b) the gendered implications of land and water enclosures on the social reproduction of the household. As Uzbekistan intensifies its path towards globalisation, the resource requirements of smallholders are further deprioritised in favour of private investment, linking the country to the "global land grab" previously inhibited by the government's monopoly on agriculture. Therefore, the chapter aims to give voice to those who are navigating these changes, contributing to a growing body of literature on the ambiguous results of state-led privatisation in agrarian societies in the postsocialist world and beyond.

(Re)Producing Precarious Lives: Women Day Workers in Kyrgyzstan's Birzha

Eugenia Pesci, Giulio Benedetti

(University of Helsinki)

This chapter explores the life stories of women day labourers in one of Kyrgyzstan's informal day labour markets known as birzha. It examines how economic survival in an informal, precarious environment intersects with social reproduction in a context shaped by male labour migration, an increasingly fragmented labour market, and gendered inequalities. The chapter highlights the ways in which Kyrgyzstan's post-Soviet economic restructuring has increased women's reliance on precarious work, emphasising the tension between their role as unpaid caregivers and the need to sustain social reproduction through paid work. Through a framework that emphasises the centrality of time, and by focusing on three life stories of women involved in day work at the birzha, the chapter examines how informal labour markets like the birzha are ambivalent spaces of exploitation and opportunity. Day work offered at the birzha is strategically chosen by women at certain times in their lives to sustain social reproduction and to overcome strictly gendered norms that relegate them to the domestic sphere. The chapter shows the entanglement of productive and reproductive work, expanding our understanding of the economic strategies and agency of women in precarious labour markets in Central Asia and beyond.

Inhabiting Ugiloy's Skin: Housewifisation and the Bazaar in Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Binazir Yusupova

(Dublin City University)

This chapter examines the intersection of precarity, patriarchy, and capitalism in Uzbekistan. Using a feminist International Political Economy (IPE) framework, the study applies the concept of housewifisation, as articulated by Maria Mies in the context of gendered labour in the Global South, to problematise mainstream Western-centric precarity theories. Housewifisation elucidates how women's labour is naturalised, invisibilised, and devalued, enabling its cheap appropriation in the capitalist market. Through ethnographic fieldwork employing methods of attunement and the "arts of noticing", the research captures the nuanced realities of women working in Tashkent's bazaars. In particular, the chapter revolves around the life history of a bazaar trader named Ugiloy. Born in a rural village in Uzbekistan, her experiences reflect the broader systemic undervaluing of women's labour during Uzbekistan's transition from Soviet collectivism to a market economy. The findings reveal that the processes of marketisation and informalisation have disproportionately impacted women, pushing them into precarious, low-paid, and unrecognised forms of labour. Official statistics underscore this trend, with women's participation in the formal labour market declining, and their overrepresentation in informal employment increasing. The study argues that the (re)institution of the housewife's role in independent Uzbekistan not only paralleled, but also facilitated the country's integration into the global economy. By

situating women's unpaid and underpaid labour as central to capitalist (re)production, the research contributes to the literature on precarious labour by providing a context-specific analysis that addresses the limitations of Western-centric theories of precarity, emphasizing the need for gendered perspectives in understanding labour dynamics in the Global South.

Labour Agency, Trade Unions & Social Movements – Room 3.213

Trade Unions, Training for Empowerment and Public Health: A Disconnect between Trade Union Practice and Public Health Professionals

Jane Thomas, Sean Tunney

(University of Brighton)

Trade unions have a positive impact on public health from a range of perspectives, not least through an improved safety climate. Yet researchers have recognised the failure of public health professionals to engage fully with unions to help improve population health and reduce health inequalities. Here we address a further dimension to trade unions' work that public health services also, in parallel, aim to improve. This is empowerment. Trade unions provide training for members on a range of topics. Our focus is on training to support a particular area of empowerment – that of writing draft resolutions and presenting them. We report on a survey, in-depth interviews and a website analysis of UK trade unions' work in training members on how to write draft resolutions. We find that, in contrast to typical public health-led empowerment promotion projects, this union training can help members to connect issues across personal, community and societal levels. Learning from unions' work, we suggest a range of wider workplace and education applications in this pedagogical area. Furthermore, based on our literature review and findings, we consider the possibilities as to why public health professionals tend to be disconnected from unions' health improvement work, despite there being evidence that unions can positively contribute to improving the determinants of health and reducing inequalities in health.

Continuities and Discontinuities in Union Involvement in Travel and Tourism

Anke Winchenbach, Piotr Zientara, Joanna Adamska

(University of Surrey)

Travel and tourism are key drivers for global employment and income generation, with over 290 million workers, or about 9 % of the world's workforce, directly or indirectly employed in the travel and tourism industries around the world (Statista, 2023). However, the industry's rapid expansion and its reliance on a flexible, service-oriented workforce (Baum et al., 2016) have led to a range of social sustainability challenges, with ongoing concerns over insecure and undignified work, and labour and human rights violations (Ladkin et al., 2023; Winchenbach et al. 2019; 2024), including strenuous working conditions, unpredictable schedules, and insecure contractual arrangements leaving them exposed to exploitation, precariousness, and burnout (Papadopoulos & Ioannou, 2023). Additionally, increased labour outsourcing, automation and gig economy work pose new challenges to the workforce. The imbalance of power between employers and employees further compounds these vulnerabilities, with employers often exerting disproportionate control over wages, scheduling, and working conditions (Lucas, 2004). Without robust institutional protections, such as those championed by labor unions, workers may find it difficult to assert their rights or seek redress for unfair treatment (Papadopoulos et al., 2021). While there has been considerable research on decent work in travel and tourism, the place unions have within this has to date been largely neglected (Zientara et al., 2024).

Unions, alongside governments and businesses, have a crucial role to play in addressing labour and human rights in travel and tourism employment (Winchenbach et al., 2024). They can advocate for stronger safety regulations and policies to prevent workplace harassment, and by facilitating collective bargaining, unions empower workers to negotiate for fair wages and better working conditions, ultimately fostering a more stable, equitable, and resilient workforce (Lowery et al., 2019). However, unionization efforts in these industries often face significant resistance from employers (Wood, 2020). Many employers actively discourage unionization by exploiting legal loopholes or employing more overt

tactics such as intimidation and misinformation campaigns, and employer collaboration with unions remains limited (Zientara et al., 2024).

This research considers continuities and discontinuities in union involvement in travel and tourism. We present initial findings from a recent research project for the International Transport Federation (ITF) and The Food, Farm, Hotels and More Union (IUF). The project aimed to identify the scope of social sustainability as part of new ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) regulations in relation to labour and human rights in travel and tourism, guide its application, and identify opportunities for union engagement, implementation, and collaboration at industry and policy levels. Guided by Institutional Theory, and based on thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019) of semi-structured interviews with global trade union affiliates and industry leaders, we identify unions' role and related dynamics and tensions in regard to organizing, collaboration and partnerships, and practices and processes, and provide recommendations for achieving decent and dignified work in travel and tourism. Findings indicate that workers' unions are strengthening their efforts through new organizing tactics, activities, and strategic collaborations and partnerships, but businesses' anti-union sentiment and Government inaction and regulatory weaknesses remain significant challenges.

Managerial Candidates' Reactions to Contradictions between CSR Rhetoric and Anti-union Practices

Piotr Zientara, Joanna Adamska

(University of Gdansk)

Mid-level managers are central to implementing corporate strategies and shaping employee relations. Recruiting for these roles has grown more complex as ethical considerations - particularly around Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) - increasingly influence candidates' job decisions. However, some organizations that promote CSR also engage in questionable labor practices, such as union-busting or discriminatory hiring. This study investigates how managerial candidates respond to ethical contradictions between CSR rhetoric and labor-related controversies.

A between-subjects online experiment was conducted with 500 managerial job seekers. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. In the control condition, they viewed a CSR-focused job advertisement emphasizing sustainability. In the second condition, the ad was paired with a news article reporting the company's union-busting practices. The third condition added a second article reporting weight-based hiring discrimination. After viewing their assigned materials, participants completed a survey measuring willingness to apply, perceptions of the company's ethics, and the authenticity of its CSR claims. Open-ended responses and reflection questions assessed moral disengagement and ethical dissonance.

To examine individual differences, participants completed a pre-screening survey measuring attitudes toward unions (McShane, 1986), cognitive frames (unitarist vs. pluralist; Budd et al., 2022), and ethical convictions (Black & Reynolds, 2016). These factors served as potential moderators in candidates' reactions to CSR contradictions.

Findings supported the hypotheses. Candidates exposed to ethical controversies were significantly less likely to apply, with the strongest aversion seen in the condition that combined union-busting with weight discrimination. Pro-union candidates reacted more negatively to the union-busting information than anti-union candidates. Those with pluralist cognitive frames and strong ethical convictions were particularly sensitive to perceived inconsistencies between the company's CSR claims and its labor practices.

These results offer insight into how CSR inconsistencies - especially regarding labor issues - can undermine recruitment efforts among managerial candidates. The study highlights the importance of internal ethical coherence in corporate messaging, particularly for companies seeking credibility among ethically oriented applicants. It also emphasizes the role of individual values and cognitive frames in interpreting ethical contradictions.

By linking CSR perception, labor relations, and person-organization fit, this research contributes to the literature on ethical decision-making in recruitment contexts. Practically, it advises companies to align their CSR narratives with fair labor practices to attract managerial talent that values ethical consistency.

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Class Consciousness of Young Precarious Workers: Insights from Greece and Germany

Alexandra Seehaus, Ioulia Bessa, Vera Trappmann

(University of Leeds, Leeds University Business School)

The paper explores the class consciousness of young individuals in precarious employment. It identifies specific views, beliefs, and identifications linked to their work experiences, which hinder a collective perspective, let alone a formation as an emerging class formation.

International debates posed the question of whether the 'new' process of precarisation created a global class (Standing, 2009), and the great British class survey even detailed a profile of the precariat as a new class in Britain (Savage, 2015). Besides analytical issues with such definitions of the precariat as class (Breman, 2013; Hardy, 2015; Wright, 2016; Alberti et al., 2018), research on the subjective experience of precarious work discourages the idea the precariat could be a class of-itself or 'in the making'. Even when precarity is perceived as a problem, it is downplayed, legitimised or promotes a competitive perspective towards others (Hassard and Morris, 2018; Murgia and Pulignano, 2021; Trappmann et al., 2023). However, few studies have actually explored how precarisation and its subjective experience link to wider political and social views, for example, on social class and inequality (Trappmann et al., 2021).

This paper addresses this gap by investigating the class-related views, beliefs and identifications of precarious workers. Drawing on empirically informed models of class consciousness (Mann, 1973; Gurin et al., 1980; Wright, 1989; Keefer et al., 2015), we developed a conceptualisation that integrates six elements. Through this lens we examine how precarious workers acknowledge and situate themselves within class relations, particularly focussing on their experiences, identification, perceptions of social structure and class conflict. We analysed 44 in-depth interviews from Germany and Greece.

Despite the precarious work and employment situations, middle-class identifications were common in both countries. However, in Germany, these identifications fit people's general descriptions of social stratification, while in Greece, where society was widely described as a dipole of the rich and the poor, the middle was "invented" only when describing their own class position. Descriptions of a working class and identifications as workers were rare in both countries. Although many problems were described and social and political issues were criticised, conflicts at work and in society were generally framed in terms of conflicting class interests. Lastly, we found the young workers sceptical of the possibility of social change. Struggling to identify agents for change, most feel powerless toward their own and wider social problems.

The paper argues that the lack of perception of class conflicts and collective identifications as workers are linked to how uncertainty around work and low incomes are experienced and how change beyond individual coping is perceived as unattainable. The positioning in a neutral space (the middle) and emphasising individual agency function as a makeshift for those resigning vis a vis power imbalances and unsolvable individual and social problems. We also indicate when class discourses are explicitly adopted and when the experience of precarious work and perceptions of conflicts translate into a form of collective identity.

Open Stream – Room 2.220

PhD Showcase

Manifestations of Poverty on the Urban Labor Market: Occupational Mobility Prospects for the Working Poor

Beatrice Manole

(National School of Political and Administrative Studies)

"Work pays you a ticket out of poverty, but look at me, I hustle hard, and I'm still a mess…[...] I had a stable job, a home at one point, I lost everything. [...] Now I work wherever I can to make a penny. But I can't find a stable job because everything in my life is unstable…" (homeless man, in his 40s, whom I interviewed at a social canteen in Bucharest). In the rhetoric of social and labor policies, work is often presented as a guarantee out of poverty. However, in 2023, according to Eurostat, Romania had the highest in-work poverty rate in the EU, with 15.3% of employed individuals living in poverty. The paradox of the working poor challenges the dominant narrative that work leads to prosperity, highlighting how the promise of wealth through hard work is increasingly unattainable for certain groups. Research shows that individuals with low socio-economic status are often trapped into low-ranked employment due to immediate financial pressures and their limited access to social, economic or cultural capital. Moreover, labor segmentation, precarious work (e.g., unstable employment, poor working conditions, low wages), and deindustrialisation have worsened poverty and downward mobility, especially for unskilled and marginalised groups.

My paper aims to explore the working poor paradox, by looking at theories of poverty, social mobility, and labor market segmentation from a structuralist perspective. It employs an interdisciplinary approach that draws on economic anthropology and the sociology of work to understand both individual and structural factors that maintain employed individuals in poverty. The main question of my research is how individual characteristics (e.g., gender, race, education, skills) taken together with structural factors (e.g., labor market institutional arrangements related to precarious employment) influence the occupational mobility prospects of the working poor in urban areas. The contribution of my study to the literature lies in examining intra-generational mobility in the labor market drawing from Bourdieu's theories on capital. Using a grounded theory approach, I aim to identify new mobility models based on the capital individuals develop throughout the course of their lifetime. More specifically, I will explore to which extent the working poor utilise social, economic, and cultural capital to navigate the labor market and how these forms of capital influence their employment status. Thus, my goal is to offer a deeper understanding of why individuals continue to be trapped in precarious employment despite the challenges associated with it.

The research is currently in the literature review stage, with fieldwork scheduled to begin this May. I will conduct ethnographic and biographical interviews with at least 30 unskilled workers, both male and female, aged 40 or older. The interviews will explore their educational and career trajectories over their lifetime and any strategies they may use to escape poverty. I will select at least 15 individuals whose lives I intend to follow in greater depth over the next two to three years, through participatory observations of their daily personal and professional experiences.

Evaluation of Women's Work in Small Businesses through Taxation: Historical Study of Collective Movements by Women Family Workers in Japan

Saori Miyashita

(Nagoya City University)

Feminism has called the definition of work into question. The tax systems used in developed countries began to recognize the value of work provided by family members in small family businesses and incorporated it into the formal economy in the 1970s. In Japan, female family workers have consistently advocated this right since the 1950s, but even in the 21st century, it remains the exception and not the rule. What factors have led to the neglect of the value of female labor and the patriarchal tax system?

This study examined how the tax system and social security system have treated family labor in small businesses and how small business owners and their families have viewed this system and conducted collective movements. We used public documents, including information provided by tax and social security authorities and periodicals published by small business organizations that include female family workers from the 1950s to the present.

The findings are as follows: the tax authorities have ignored, in principle, monetary valuation of the work done by family members for a business to prevent the minimization of the tax burden. Japan's social insurance system levied a flat-rate or household contribution on the self-employed, which has prevented problems with calculating social insurance premiums without recognizing the rights of family employees as taxpayers. Objections to these conditions were successful in the 1960s, in which they were

recognized for taxation only if several conditions were met. However, the movement of female employees began to lose its strength by the end of the 20th century. Because it made work by family members invisible, the state created informality in small businesses, particularly in women's work.

Feminist scholars have provided a comprehensive picture of the exploitative relationships arising between spouses, including those in small family production units. However, the role of the state in regulating families has received insufficient scholarly attention. Due to the shift in the patriarchy from private to public during the 20th century, an analysis of wives' work in family businesses today is required to elucidate the role of the state and the politics that have produced the regulations of the state.

This study adds the Japanese case to the international comparison of social protection for the self-employed that has been developed in recent years, and it also contributes to the debate on making this less disadvantageous.

On Labouring Performing Bodies

Tomaz Krpic

(Ljubljana University)

Throughout the history of the Slovenian nation, artists, most notably writers, playwrights and poets, have played a significant role in the production of political thought and action on behalf of the nation. However, despite their role in providing ideological support for the secession of Slovenia from Yugoslavia and the transformation of the political system, the expectations of retaliation were never fully realised. Instead of receiving a higher economic and social status, artists were instead granted unfavourable labour conditions and a state of economic precariousness.

This paper will demonstrate how a group of Slovenian performing artists critically addressed the newly established economic conditions for artists in post-socialist Slovenia in their project Let's Work! between 2022 and 2023. The present study is grounded in in-depth interviews with the artists involved in the project (performers, actors, dramaturges and theatre directors) from various Slovenian theatres and so-called Ljubljanska neodvisna uprizoritvena scena (Ljubljana Independence Performing Scene), as well as a thorough analysis of the elements of the project.

Two art projects are used to provide an 'introduction' to the project Let's Work!. The first of these is Teja Reba's and Loup Abramovici's performance entitled Made with Love, which was staged in 2015. Another 'pre-project' to Let's Work! was a record created by the musician Tomaž Grom. The project Let's Work! comprises a total of 14 performances, installations, durational actions, dance performances, durational statements and interactions with audiences. Each artistic event offers a critical examination of a specific aspect of labour in relation to theatre and performance. This includes the often unseen labour involved in rehearsals and in the artists' private residences, the intertwining of labour and domestic life, the right to receive fair compensation for artistic labour and a pension after retirement, the right to relaxation and disconnection from labour, the impact of labour on the artist's physical and mental wellbeing, and the position of artistic labour and the artist's role in modern society, and so on. Due to limitations in the available space, only a limited number of performing events are depicted in the article in more detail: These include Tomaž Grom's I Dream, Therefore I Work and Happiness at Work, Katja Legin's Work at Home, Tomaž Grom's Teja Reba's and Špela Trošt's Pause, Špela Trošt's 636.78, and Loup Abramovici's I Do Not Work, I Practice Collectivity.

The project demonstrates how the social contract that previously facilitated the transfer of monetary means and goods from the rest of society to the performing artist may now be irreparable. This social contract could provide a robust foundation for the performing artist's creative process, and the outcomes of this process could enable society to serve as a meaningful source of political action or as an augmentation of individual meaning. The project, entitled "Let's Work!", serves as a poignant reminder of the necessity for Slovenian society to establish a novel, more solidaristic social contract, one which would encompass the labour and welfare of performing artists.

Behind the Suits: Identity, Labour, and Legacy of China's 'Big White' COVID-19 Responders

Matthew Brannan, Weizheng Zhang

(Newcastle University, Newcastle University Business School)

Labelled Big White (dà bái, 大白) due to their distinctive hazmat suits, millions of volunteers in China were mobilised to support the state's civil response to COVID-19. These volunteers played a crucial role in enforcing lockdowns, managing quarantine measures, and facilitating China's extensive mass testing programmes. While official figures on the scale of this mobilisation remain undisclosed, estimates suggest that at its peak, China was spending approximately 2% of its GDP on testing, with state media reporting volunteer numbers in the millions. One estimate from 2020 indicated that 8.81 million volunteers participated in 460,000 projects, collectively contributing 290 million hours to pandemic response efforts (Hu & Sidel, 2020).

China's zero-COVID policy (January 2020 – December 2022) was both longer and more comprehensive than those of most other countries. A key factor enabling the state to sustain such an approach was the large-scale mobilisation of volunteers, who played a central role in enforcing compliance and reinforcing public health interventions. Despite growing scholarship on China's pandemic response, the Big White phenomenon remains underexplored from a sociological perspective. For many volunteers, particularly in the early stages of the pandemic, participation was perceived as both essential and risky, exposing them to infection while requiring long, unpredictable hours in physically and emotionally demanding conditions. Volunteers also became targets of public frustration, as China's strict COVID-19 measures fuelled resentment, with Big Whites often depicted in social media as symbols of state control and objects of ridicule.

This study draws on interviews with Big White volunteers from Changsha, Hunan Province, to examine (a) pathways into volunteering, (b) the lived experiences of volunteers during COVID-19, and (c) the continuity between Big White mobilisation and historical forms of state-led volunteering in China. It explores how China's zero-COVID strategy illustrates the paradox of stability and innovation in crisis management—relying on entrenched bureaucratic authority and social trust to enforce unprecedented public health interventions. The mobilisation of volunteers blurred the boundaries between civic duty and state-directed labour, challenging conventional understandings of volunteerism. Many Big Whites endured physically demanding conditions under hierarchical oversight while lacking the rights and protections of formal employment. Their experience raises critical questions about how crises reshape labour norms, particularly the use of unpaid mobilisation to sustain large-scale state interventions. By examining the Big White phenomenon, this study offers insights into how states adapt control mechanisms in times of crisis, reinforcing social discipline under the guise of civic participation and setting precedents for future governance models.

Technology & Work 1 – Room 3.205

Counterdata: Research and Solidarity in Platform Work

Cailean Gallagher, Karen Gregory, Marion Lieutaud

(University of Edinburgh)

Platform-mediated gig work such as riding for Deliveroo or driving for Uber is widely known to be exploitative and risky (Gregory 2020). Working conditions have deteriorated with the introduction of AI-managed fares and increasingly sophisticated surveillance (for example, live GPS tracking of riders to calculate delays and impose sanctions). However, workers' efforts to understand how platforms operate have been hampered by companies' determination to conceal data on workers' payments and movements (Gallagher et al 2023). What can enable platform workers to counteract data imbalances in their struggle to resist exploitation?

This paper answers this question by documenting a worker data science project in Edinburgh. Funded by the ESRC "Digital Good Network", this project drew together twenty-five South Asian and Spanish-speaking food delivery riders to explore the issue of declining wages. Riders came together to map concerns; design, develop and deploy a survey to explore working conditions; and to collectively monitor their fares. Together, these research activities provided workers with the quantitative tools and training to generate evidence of unpredictable and erratic platform wages. Through this inquiry process, workers made the collective decision to launch a campaign to reject "add-ons" or extra deliveries, which they identified as a particularly exploitative function of the platform. Here, the quantitative data analysis process enabled workers to generate new forms of "counterdata" (Olojo 2024), or data that is capable of contesting official platform accounts of wages and earnings.

In this paper, we document the inquiry process and draw on ten reflective interviews with riders. In these interviews, riders detail how the research process changed both their understanding of how platforms work, as well as changed their own relationship to the work. Beyond this, however, riders describe how researching together to generate counterdata forged a sense of solidarity among workers, allowing, as Oakley (1999) suggests, workers to "distinguish between personal experience and collective oppression." The paper argues that by using data experiments and data exercises, worker data science can connect the workers' inquiry tradition to feminist, critical data studies and develop not only a method of building research and data, but develop a creative means to foster collective organising and bolster workers' power where they are deeply disenfranchised.

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The Organisation of Warehouse Work and Social Dialogue in the UK's E-commerce Fulfilment Sector

Emma Hughes, Niall Cullinane, Conor Mccabe, Tony Dundon, Debra Howcroft

(University of Leeds, University of Manchester)

Introduction to the issue: How warehouse work is conducted has undergone substantial technological change, including robotics and digital technologies interacting with human labour. Advances in e-commerce artificial intelligence tools can control labour tasks, monitor workers, and re-shape employment conditions, including worker participation. Leading organisations in the sector, such as Amazon, have actively resisted unionisation and minimised collective forms of worker representation (Vallas and Kronberg, 2023; Zanoni and Miszczyński, 2024). What is less clear is what is happening in the many smaller e-commerce fulfilment providers, and how likes of social dialogue in small-and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are shaped by Amazon's dominance of the sector.

Research question: The core research question is 'to what extent do SME e-commerce fulfilment centres in the UK converge with or diverge from Amazon's work and employment practices?

Theoretical framing: To analyse these dynamics, the paper draws on the concept of mimetic isomorphism, which explores how local firms adapt the practices of dominant multinational enterprises (Jürgens and Krzywdzinski, 2016). Local firms may mimic employment practices to remain competitive, or to meet expectations of international clients by copying the employment arrangements of leading firms. These may include trade unions, but also, potentially, anti- or non-union systems for worker participation. Larger and foreign MNEs often compel local partners to adopt specific standards to maintain contracts, shaping their employment conditions. Nonetheless, there could be potential for divergence, as some firms adopt practices that are different yet dependent on dominant MNEs. Additionally, intense competition within product markets often forces domestic firms to prioritise short-term operational efficiency and cost reduction over long-term investments in advanced labour practices.

Methods: This paper draws on interviews across 30 UK-based SME e-commerce and third-party logistics fulfilment warehouses. All the cases are matched to be competitors with Amazon. Based on interviews with key industry and company informants, trade unions, operational and HR managers, along with shop-floor observations and desk-based research on respective firms, the paper provides an overview of how these firms reconfigure employment and worker voice in a sector dominated by Amazon and shaped by new emerging forms of digital labour control.

Findings and Contribution: The evidence makes a distinctive contribution to the role of agency in a sector subject to large MNC dominance-effects. Analysis also sheds insight on the impact of warehouse floor-picking and packing jobs, reporting a diverse interplay of human agency subject not always to

digital transformation and control, but the endurance of often low-tech workplace experiments as local managers seek to remain competitive when faced with external dominance pressures.

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PhD Showcase

Sensemaking in Hybrid Teams: The Dynamics of Meanings and Team Processes

Fatima Awil Ali

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Hybridity, spanning multiple locations, times, and virtual collaboration spaces, is a salient theme in recent discourses about continuities and discontinuities in the organisation of work. The transformation of contemporary work practices prompts an opportunity to revisit organisational theory. While hybridisation research has been evolving for decades (Neumayr et al., 2021), in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergent literature has characterised it as a new, dynamic and challenging context for organising work, particularly at the collective level (Wheatley et al., 2024). Moreover, hybrid work scholarship has mainly focused on the individual level (Lauring and Jonasson, 2025), with group dynamics and their implications for teamwork (Handke et al., 2024) under-theorised.

This PhD research addresses this by asking how teams make sense of hybrid work. Underpinned theoretically by Weick's multidisciplinary sensemaking perspective on organising (Weick, 1995) and through employing an ethnographic case study approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019) following two project teams, the study explores the intertwining of meanings and practices in hybrid teamwork. The paper will report on emerging findings.

The contribution of this research is fourfold. First, it enhances organisational theory by exploring the social construction of realities through sensemaking processes across hybrid settings, theorising psychological and sociological aspects of work around group norms (Brown et al., 2015). Second, it contributes to the emergent literature on contemporary hybrid work and hybrid teams (Teng-Calleja et al., 2024), using multi-level theorising around organising processes. Third, organisational research methods are advanced by utilising in-person and technology-mediated participant observations, particularly observational, processual, and longitudinal methods, in teams-based research (Einola and Alvesson, 2019). Finally, the embedded research design offers participating teams the opportunity to reflexively rethink hybrid work arrangements, giving rise to practice and policy implications.

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Scroll, Work, Repeat? A Computational Analysis of Generational Work Values and Generational Narratives of Work on YouTube

Lilian Leupold

(Technische Universität Dresden)

In contemporary digital capitalism, work-related discourses increasingly unfold on digital platforms outside traditional organizational settings. YouTube, a central site of cultural expression, is saturated with generational conversations about work—ranging from "day in the life" vlogs and burnout confessionals to critical discussions on hustle culture. Generational categories such as Gen Z, Millennials, and Gen X have been extensively adopted and popularized through marketing segmentation strategies, becoming influential identity frameworks shaping individuals' self-perception and how they articulate experiences of work. This study examines how these generational cohorts use YouTube to express, negotiate, and reshape their work values, specifically highlighting continuities and discontinuities in approaches to work-life boundaries, precarity, and autonomy.

Bridging computational social science with cultural sociology, the research investigates how generational work discourses on YouTube articulate ideals of self-fulfillment, autonomy, and identity, informed explicitly by consumerist values. The analysis explores how these generational labels may reinforce existing workplace sentiments or offer new frameworks for engaging with work experiences. Are younger generations reshaping work meanings through digital platforms influenced by consumer-driven identities? Does YouTube facilitate novel emotional engagements with work, or does it amplify established frustrations shaped by market segmentation?

The analysis uses a dataset of about 30 popular YouTube videos, explicitly labeled by generation, plus approximately 30,000 user comments gathered through the YouTube API. This methodological choice balances computational feasibility with the depth necessary for sociological interpretation. Two complementary computational analyses structure the methodological approach:

1. Sentiment Analysis: Quantifying emotional dimensions such as burnout, enthusiasm, resilience, and dissatisfaction explicitly linked to generational experiences of work.
2. Topic Modeling: Identifying recurring themes in work orientations, including autonomy, precarity, burnout, self-optimization, and critiques of workplace norms, enabling analysis of discursive legitimization narratives and generational critiques within digital capitalism.

Theoretically, the study integrates Boltanski and Chiapello's concept of the "new spirit of capitalism" and Nick Srnicek's analysis of platform capitalism. Boltanski and Chiapello's framework highlights shifting justifications, critiques, and legitimizations of work in contemporary capitalism, aligning closely with the study's interest in autonomy, precarity, and self-fulfillment expressed by generational cohorts. Generational labels themselves can be seen as reflective of capitalism's adaptability, strategically responding to and absorbing cultural critiques around work. Srnicek enriches this perspective by specifically analyzing how digital platforms, through data-driven business models, reshape economic relations, labor practices, and identity formations, thereby intensifying and restructuring capitalist processes of discourse production.

This paper builds upon my doctoral research (in advanced stages), exploring intersections among digital labor practices, consumer-driven generational categorizations, and shifts in work orientations. Ultimately, the research enriches sociological discussions by demonstrating how digital capitalism, coupled with segmentation marketing frameworks, reconfigures generational attitudes toward labor, emotional engagement, and workplace identity formation.

Technology & Work 2 – Room 3.209

Technological Frames of Reference in the UK Warehousing Industry

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(University of Leeds)

This paper interrogates the "frames of reference" through which managers and developers view the adoption and implementation of digital technologies. It presents a study of UK warehousing, focused particularly on the "industry" side, drawing on interviews with managers, consultants, and technology developers; as well as site visits; and a wide-ranging review of industry trade literature. What assumptions, experiences and priorities influence the way these actors think about technology, and its application in warehousing workplaces?

Theoretically, we offer a new framework for accounting for variation in competing "technological frames of reference" (Orlikowski and Gash, 1994) among industry-side actors. We argue that frames can be differentiated according to differences along three key dimensions: different organisational priorities; different technological priorities; and different ways of thinking about worker agency. These dimensions can help explain variation in how industry actors- especially managers- approach the use of technology.

Then, using this framework, we identify three distinct technological frames of reference. These are: 1) human fallibility, where technology is conceived primarily as a way of reducing worker agency, with the latter being inextricably associated with error and delay; 2) logistical puzzle solving, where technology is seen as a means of "fitting" warehouses into a wider logistical chain; 3) workers as beneficiaries, where technology is understood primarily through its potential to make work safer and pleasanter, with a view to reducing turnover and liabilities.

The paper responds to growing calls from sociologists of work to devote more attention to management agency in shaping working practices, while also decentering control as a seemingly inevitable outcome of management-imposed technologies (e.g. Vidal, 2022; Joyce et al, 2023). Our typology of frames addresses this priority by providing a set of concepts to help understand how and why industry actors make decisions about technology. We conclude by reflecting on the applicability of this framework beyond our warehousing case study.

Continuity Efforts at the Discount Store: AI and Store Managers' Role Understandings

Katja Schönian

(Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg)

Retail is a field currently undergoing major changes; digitalising and automating work processes alter work tasks and lead to new responsibilities and requirements for employees. However, current realities in retail diverge from unilateral and futuristic depictions that envision the future of retail through the lens of full automation and robotics. In Germany, for instance, self-service checkouts and online ordering are more prevalent than fully automated stores.

This paper presents empirical findings from an ongoing research project on the implementation and use of digital technologies in a German discount supermarket. This is a qualitative case study which began in early 2024. So far, we have conducted a total of 14 interviews across various branches of two subsidiaries: seven with branch managers, three with area managers, and one with a trainee. Except for one digital interview, all were conducted on-site at the respective branches. Additionally, three interviews with employees from the IT department were held at the company headquarters.

The study centres on the discussion surrounding the introduction of an automatic ordering system. Findings indicate that the ordering process currently constitutes a central work practice for branch managers. While automation could potentially save time, branch managers perceive their responsibility and control over the ordering process as being at risk. In fact, the existing ordering process is an intricate task that is based not only on sales data but also on store managers' implicit knowledge of local conditions. This includes seasonal fluctuations, individual customer preferences, and short-term events such as school holidays or weekly promotions. In contrast, automated ordering systems often calculate

order quantities based on historical averages, which can result in incorrect stock levels and storage issues. Consequently, branch managers currently oppose the introduction of such a system.

However, our study also shows that the introduction of an automated ordering system not only contradicts store managers' desire for control but also challenges management's view that responsibility for ordering must remain clearly attributable. That is, centralized algorithmic control would make it harder to assign responsibility for incorrect orders and stock levels, which conflicts with company management's preference to continue holding store managers accountable for ordering decisions. Thus, automation presents not only technological but also organizational challenges. In fact, the study makes apparent that technological innovations in grocery retail cannot be considered in isolation but must be embedded within existing work practices and structures of responsibility.

This contribution argues that despite increasing digitalisation and automation, retail employees remain pivotal in the digital transformation of work, bridging gaps and uncertainties in algorithmic control. In fact, employees must adapt to evolving digital and AI-driven workplace settings, necessitating the development of skills to navigate complex data and technologies. Therefore, the study emphasises the importance of training and involving employees in digital transformation – both in current digitalization and future AI projects. The insights from this study contribute to a more nuanced understanding of digitalization in grocery retail, illustrating that technological innovations can only be successfully implemented when closely aligned with organizational structures and work practices.

Moving the Control Debate to Digital Media Platforms: How Platforms (Do Not) Motivate Content Creators

Xiaotian Li

(University of Nottingham Ningbo China)

This article applies labour process theory to understand how digital media platforms motivate platform content creators. Previous studies on platform content creators have revealed that platforms usually use algorithms to moderate the content and control creators by managing their visibility on the platforms (e.g., Bucher, 2012; Cotter, 2019, 2023). Existing studies have also depicted creators' precarious experiences through concepts such as aspirational labour (Duffy, 2017) and hope labour (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013; Mackenzie & McKinlay, 2021), highlighting the fact that creators are usually under-compensated on platforms in the hope of establishing a successful independent, follower-based business. This research enriches the understanding of how platforms motivate creators from a labour study perspective. The data set consists of 34 interviews with content creators on China's social media platforms on their work histories, content production work, strategies of self-presentation and promotion, etc.

The analysis distinguishes three different forms of control: the technical/algorithmic, the situational, and the relational. The technical/algorithmic control means that platform algorithms use traffic metrics to educate creators on what kinds of content the platform wants or not. Echoing previous studies, this research finds that the key to algorithmic control is that platforms use algorithms to moderate the 'visibility' of creators, which is essential for their (potential) success. The situational control focuses on the 'entrepreneurial' subjectivity of creators, developed from their daily working experiences of conducting 'hope labour'. This process illustrates how consent is generated from their situational experiences of the labour process. The relational control happens when creators try to build a sense of authenticity in their accounts and a connection with their followers. For this purpose, creators need to regularly update their accounts to stay 'connected' with their followers.

In addition to a clear analytic framework in understanding how platforms motivate creators, this article further reveals the internal contradictions between the three forms of control. Instead of simply illustrating how each control technique developed by platforms works, this article highlights that these techniques are not self-consistent and their tensions may bring disruptions in motivating creators.

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Theories, Methodologies & Research Praxis – Room 2.219

On Policing: Would Graeber Say that Modern Policing is a Bullshit Job?

Stephanie Guirand

(Goldsmiths, University of London)

Is policing a "bullshit job" within the framework of David Graeber's theory?

This paper analyses policing as a job using both bullshit jobs and the concept of police dependency. Graeber defines a bullshit job as one perceived by its own workers to be meaningless, contributes little to society, and could disappear without substantial negative consequences. Using a prison industrial complex abolitionist lens, I argue that policing, while not entirely fitting Graeber's definition, functions as a "bullshit job" in a colloquial sense, prioritizing social control over public safety.

Police dependency draws from classical dependency and world systems theories to argue that modern societies are systematically made reliant on policing; police rely on exploitation to exist. Policing, therefore, functions not primarily to ensure safety but to uphold social hierarchies, protect private property, suppress dissent, and enforce conditions of exploitation. These structural roles, combined with questionable effectiveness in reducing crime or resolving social crises, challenge the legitimacy of policing as a public good. Police dependency explains the material dynamics preventing viable alternatives.

The analysis is conducted using historical trends, empirical studies, and real-world examples. The paper explores the motivations of police officers, noting a focus on job security and autonomy alongside a desire to fight crime. The paper also critiques the role of police unions in perpetuating the status quo and resisting reforms. I cite studies questioning the correlation between increased police presence and reduced crime rates; suggesting that policing's impact on public safety is overstated.

Ultimately, policing is a bullshit job—not due to individual officers, but due to its institutional role as a mechanism of control rather than community care. The paper concludes by advocating for a shift in resources from policing to social infrastructures, envisioning a "post-police future" where community safety is prioritized through investment in education, housing, and healthcare.

PhD Showcase

A Latent Class Analysis of Heterosexual Parent Couples' Divisions of Unpaid Work: Exploring Connections with Worker-led Flexibility Using Data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study

Joanna Wilson

(Manchester Metropolitan University)

Factors that constrain female labour market participation and male involvement at home must be alleviated if the gender pay gap in relation to motherhood is to close. While the gender gap in childcare time may be converging, fathers' involvement in housework appears more resistant to change (Sullivan, 2013). Several enabling/constraining factors explain this which may include the use of flexible working arrangements (FWA), parents' absolute/relative income and their gender role attitudes (McMunn et al., 2020).

This research focuses on the relationship between the use of FWA and dual-earner couples' divisions of unpaid work using a sample of UK dual-earner heterosexual parent couples (N=3,851) who responded to the Understanding Society Household Longitudinal Survey over the period 2010-2019.

Building on research that has examined FWA and couples' reported divisions of housework and childcare separately (e.g. Chung and Booker, 2022) this study uses a repeated measures latent class approach to analyse them simultaneously. This matters because while couples may share childcare, this may be inconsequential (for gender equality and the labour market participation of mothers) if mothers do more housework within that couple. Given higher levels of missing data for fathers and the risk that mothers' perceptions of unpaid work divisions may dominate (an issue for couples with contested divisions), this method also offers scope for a more balanced representation of divisions of unpaid work by maximising use of the available data and allowing change over time to be examined.

Results indicate that distinct categories of unpaid work divisions exist in UK dual-earner parent couples; those with non-mother-dominant (NMD) divisions of both housework and childcare (16% of couples), those with NMD divisions of childcare only (14%), those with mother-dominant (MD) divisions of both (30%) and those with various MD/NMD combinations including some contested divisions (the remaining 40%). When exploring associations between FWA and these divisions, the use of temporal (i.e. flexi-time) but not spatial (i.e. regular home working), flexibility for fathers was associated with NMD divisions of housework and childcare together with the non-traditional gender role attitudes of both parents and mother full-time working. In contrast, these factors were not associated with couples who had NMD divisions of childcare only.

This study contributes by building on prior research which has linked fathers' work flexibility positively to their absolute/relative childcare time and goes further in suggesting that the use of flexi-time by fathers may be associated with NMD divisions of childcare and housework within dual-earner parent couples. Using pre-pandemic data, it provides a useful methodological approach and reference point against which post-pandemic research on FWA and divisions of unpaid work can compare, once more stable data emerge. In the meantime, institutional policies must focus on improving access to temporal flexibility, particularly for fathers, the use of which has remained relatively static in the UK since 2010.

De-standardisation and Job Quality in Britain and Europe

Albert Varela, Alvaro Martinez

(University of Leeds)

Debates over the de-standardisation of work and spread of atypical employment contracts have been inherently concerned with the erosion of working conditions, pay, security and opportunities for career progression historically afforded by the standard employment relation. Whether non-standard jobs are also sub-standard has driven a wealth of research in the sociology of work assessing differences in job quality (Kalleberg et al., 2000; McGovern et al., 2004), job satisfaction and job-related attitudes (Broschak et al., 2008) as well as health and subjective wellbeing (Benach et al., 2010). Thus, temporary and part-time contracts are often characterised as negatively associated with job features that contribute to workers' well-being such as variety, skill requirements, autonomy and discretion, or a match between workers skills and job demands. This paper presents empirical findings of a research project that applies advanced quantitative methods to survey data in order to examine two interrelated but distinct questions. The first question concerns the extent to which non-standard jobs are on average worse than standard jobs, with a focus on the UK. It fits a series of structural equation models that capture multiple domains of job quality – from discretion to skill usage – and assesses the differences between standard and non-standard workers, both across those individual domains as well as overall. The analysis pools the 2006, 2012 and 2017 waves of the Skills and Employment Survey (SES) and shows that non-standard workers experience worse job quality than their standard counterparts both overall and across most domains. These findings lend support to the hypothesised overlap between non-standard and sub-standard jobs but also reveal important substantive and methodological observations related to the heterogeneity of atypical work and the complex interplay of job quality domains. The second question is concerned with whether at the macro-level the increasing share of non-standard jobs in the workforce can be deemed responsible for changes in the quality of jobs in European labour markets. Drawing on five waves of the European Working Conditions Survey from 1995 to 2015 it deploys multilevel models that specifically exploit the nested structure of repeated comparative cross-sectional datasets (Fairbrother, 2014, Kelvyn and Bell, 2015; Schmidt-Catran and

Fairbrother, 2016) to model the variation in de-standardisation within and between countries to gauge its effect on a range of job quality indicators, ranging from intensity to autonomy. This analysis suggests that the evidence on whether de-standardisation is driving employment precariousness is mixed and sensitive to the choice of domains of job quality under consideration. By combining these two strands of work, this paper provides both an assessment of important empirical questions as well as a methodological reflection on the measurement and analysis of key concepts at the core of academic and policy debates on the quality of work in European labour markets.

PAPER SESSION 6
13:30-15:00

WES Special Event – Room 2.220

Writing a Great WES Article: Publishing Insights from the Editors

Marek Korczynski, Laurie Cohen

(Work, Employment and Society Co-Editors in Chief, University of Nottingham)

In this interactive workshop, WES Editors-in-Chief, Laurie Cohen and Marek Korczynski, will talk about publishing in WES, share their experience of what makes a great WES paper and tell you how you might want to get involved in the journal. There will be opportunities for participants to consider papers they think have made the most significant impact on their work, and that have made them think about things in new ways.

Difference, Diversity & Social Justice 1 – Room 3.210
PhD Showcase

Assessing the Impact of Flexible Work Arrangements on Work-Life Balance in India's IT and Banking Sectors

Nazia Saeed

(University of Birmingham, Birmingham Business School)

The main objective of this study is to investigate the impact of flexible work schedules on employees' work-life balance, with an emphasis on women working in the Indian banking and IT industries. The research focuses on India's two largest economic sectors. i.e., Information Technology (IT) and Banking sectors. First, these sectors contribute to India's tremendous growth and massive job creation. Second, their contribution towards the GDP growth. Third, their values, operations, and ethics differ greatly. Their methods of operation in the workplace are completely unique. In the information technology (IT) industry, the concept of flexible working hours has been debated and used by many firms before to better accommodate their multinational clientele. However, the idea of flexible work schedules is novel in the banking industry. Because of its historic emphasis on face-to-face interaction, this sector has never considered moving its operations online. This research will gain a new perspective by looking at these industries through the lens of flexible employment.

The purpose of the study was to understand the impact of flexible working arrangements in these two sectors, the elements contributing to work-life balance, and its significance to employees. The study has adopted a mixed-method approach, including an online survey and semi-structured interviews with participants, to determine the diverse elements that influence the workforce. The study collected 700 quantitative responses using a questionnaire designed with established and validated scales. The sample was drawn from key urban centers in India, including Delhi, Noida, and Gurgaon, along with Mumbai's IT and banking sectors. Additionally, demographic factors such as age range, gender, relationship status, and employment status were considered.

On the other hand, the interview process is the second stage. The purpose of this stage is to enhance the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires and obtain further insights from the respondents who address the research themes. The study has conducted 45 Zoom interviews comprising 30 women employees and 15 men employees from each sector. The data has been collected through semi-

structured interviews in this study. The selection of participants will remain consistent with the criteria outlined in the survey.

This investigation enabled the identification of certain features that have not been previously examined from an Indian perspective. The study has identified several variables, including the gendered flexibility paradox, indistinct work boundaries, employees' inability to work flexibly, and many more factors that have significantly affected their work-life balance.

Gender and Flexibility in the Gig Economy: An Ethnographic Case Study of Female Riders in China's Food Delivery Sector

Xiaohan Li

(University of Southampton)

From a labour theory perspective, flexibility in the gig economy is typically framed as a strategy for achieving work-life balance or managing time under platform algorithms, often assuming a gender-neutral lens. However, many gig economy sectors—particularly on-demand services like transportation and delivery—are predominantly male-dominated, and the concept of flexibility may carry different meanings for women gig workers, given their distinct modes of employment.

This paper aims to investigate how women gig workers navigate flexibility, potentially leading to different experiences and constraints compared to their male counterparts. Using the food delivery sector in China as a case study, this research explores the flexibility needs of 42 Chinese female riders, employed on both a full-time and part-time basis, through an ethnographic approach that includes 40 semi-structured interviews. The study specifically addresses the following questions:
1. What are the flexibility needs and demands of female riders in China's food delivery sector?
2. Are there differences between full-time and part-time riders regarding their flexibility needs and demands?

The findings reveal that female riders' flexibility needs extend beyond work-life balance or time management. They strategically use flexibility to reduce safety risks in the workplace, minimize excessive gendered interactions, and challenge professional norms in male-dominated environments, negotiating their identities as riders. That said, full-time riders face greater algorithmic constraints, rigid schedules, and heightened security threats and identity challenges. In contrast, part-time riders experience greater autonomy, more capable of using flexibility to minimize risks and distance themselves from gender-based objectification. Further, according to interviews and observation, these dynamics often shift over time, as riders move between full-time and part-time engagement or exit the occupation for another job, reflecting a fluid attachment to gig work.

By unpacking the complexities of flexibility, this study reinterprets it as a gendered survival resource rather than a structural feature of the gig economy. While existing literature has examined the challenges of flexibility under algorithmic control—such as the notion of 'sticky labour' in the Chinese takeaway industry (Sun et al., 2019) and women's participation in gig work for family care responsibilities (Kwan, 2022)—this research expands the understanding of women's flexibility needs and demands in the gig economy across multiple dimensions.

Theoretically, this suggests a need to move beyond traditional labour theories and consider flexibility as a strategy for navigating systemic gender inequalities within the gig economy.
Reference
Kwan, H. (2022a). Gendered precarious employment in China's gig economy: exploring women gig drivers' intersectional vulnerabilities and resistances. Gender & Development, 30(3), 551-573. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2022.2118464.
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Sun, P., Yujie Chen, J., & Rani, U. (2023). From flexible labour to 'sticky labour': a tracking study of workers in the food-delivery platform economy of China. Work, employment and society, 37(2), 412-431.

(Dis)Continuities in Professions, Occupations & Skills – Room 3.212

Caregiving across the Lifecourse: How Work-Family Spill Over Influences Nurses' Retirement Decisions

Aine Ni Leime, Marie Pospisolova, Maggie O'Neill

(University of Galway)

Nurses' retirement decision-making is significantly impacted by work-family spill over – the interrelationship between professional and personal caregiving responsibilities (Cottingham et al., 2020). Taking early retirement is a form of discontinuity affecting the nursing sector that exacerbates staff shortages faced by health care systems. Understanding work-family spill over will help inform employer policies that take into account the needs of workers at pre-retirement stage and support workforce planning (Ní Léime & O'Neill, 2021). Extended working life policies often fail to account for the cumulative impact of caregiving responsibilities on women's careers, leading to gendered inequalities in financial security, job sustainability, and retirement pathways (Ní Léime et al., 2017). This comparative study examines how work-family spill over influences retirement timing decisions among nurses aged 48 and older in the Czech Republic and Ireland – two countries with distinct approaches to retirement and care provision.

Drawing on qualitative data from 63 semi-structured interviews, this study advances work-family spill over theory by integrating a lifecourse perspective (Elder & Giele, 2009). This approach demonstrates how spill over effects evolve over time, accumulating across interconnected career and caregiving trajectories, including the impacts of nurses' care-giving experiences such as childcare on current decisions regarding retirement timing. The findings illustrate how work-family spill over emerges differently across national contexts. For example, Czech nurses often postpone retirement despite experiencing physical and emotional strain, largely due to financial imperatives and pension adequacy concerns, compelling them to "hold on" in their posts despite exhaustion. In contrast, Irish nurses with more generous pensions and more flexible working conditions tend to demonstrate greater capacity to negotiate work-family boundaries, allowing for more strategic management of spill over as they approach retirement.

Applying a lifecourse perspective to the analysis highlights how the accumulation of caregiving responsibilities informs retirement decisions. This temporal dimension is particularly relevant for nurses who have experienced dual caregiving roles throughout their careers, often resulting in retirement pathways informed by both professional and familial commitments. The study identifies anticipatory spill over – where expectations of future caregiving responsibilities influence career decisions – as a significant yet underexplored factor in retirement planning (DePasquale et al., 2018).

To contextualise how structural conditions inform nurses' employment transitions in later life, the study employs a gendered political economy of ageing framework (Estes, 2020). This lens examines how pension systems, healthcare structures, and cultural expectations regarding care interact to create differentiated retirement experiences. At the organisational level, workplace flexibility, managerial support, and recognition of caregiving responsibilities are key factors that are intertwined in various ways, influencing nurses' ability to navigate work-family boundaries. Individual factors, including career history, family configuration, and financial circumstances, further inform these dynamics.

These findings emphasise the necessity for comprehensive policy measures that accommodate nurses' dual caregiving roles across the lifecourse, with implications for sustainable healthcare systems in ageing societies. Recommendations include flexible work arrangements, pension reforms that account for caregiving interruptions, and targeted workplace supports for older nurses.

The study is in its final phase, with the research completed and central findings being written up for publication.

Driving Past Retirement: Work-Life Histories with UK Lorry Drivers

Debbie Hopkins

(University of Oxford)

Road freight is central to economies around the world, moving goods from sites of production to consumption. This depends on a workforce of lorry drivers which has long been subject to depletion, in both number and status. Since the global financial crisis, there have been significant concerns about recruiting and retaining lorry drivers in the UK and elsewhere around the world. Even in the context of the acute shortage of 2021, little has been done to materially improve the working conditions for lorry drivers in the UK. In this paper, we present findings from interviews with lorry drivers past the age of retirement (66 years old) to develop work-life histories of changes and continuities as they navigate both sectoral and social changes.

Lorry driving is an ageing occupation. The average age of a lorry driver is 56, and there are few signs of this trend abating. It is also a changing occupation, with regulatory, technological, infrastructural and sectoral-economic changes taking place over the past 50 years. Across this same time horizon, social and economic lives have transformed, with, for example, new family and caring arrangements. Engaging with this workforce provides "windows onto the wider question of how people live and seek to live" (Castree, 2007, p. 860), and how this has evolved across space and time. By undertaking work-life histories with lorry drivers past the age of retirement, we contribute new understandings of working lives by engaging closely with our participant's "multifaceted lives, identities, geographies and histories" (Rogaly & Qureshi, 2017, p. 190).

Given that academic scholarship has focused "on the end of working life (retirement) rather than on later-life working itself' (Taylor et al., 2016, p. 681), we offer new insights into the ways working lives have been negotiated across the life course, but also into later-life working. In this paper we present the findings of 17 interviews with drivers aged between 67 and 73 years old. We trace their careers in lorry driving from training and entry into the sector through to their current work, showing diverse pathways and occupational changes as personal and sectoral circumstances alter. These are supplemented with three interviews with wives of the lorry drivers, which are used to situate the drivers' stories within a wider context of family life.

Precarious Continuities: Navigating the '35-Year-Old Phenomenon' in China's IT Industry

Boyang Liang

(University of Leeds)

The '35-year-old phenomenon' in China's IT industry exemplifies a paradoxical interplay between continuity and discontinuity within contemporary professional life. It refers to the widely held perception that IT professionals, particularly programmers, encounter a career ceiling as they approach the age of 35. This threshold is neither formally institutionalized nor universally enforced, yet it is deeply internalized and structurally reinforced across the sector, and frequently reported by China's mainstream media. As a result, even in an industry that prides itself on innovation and dynamism, workers commonly experience persistent anxiety about premature career stagnation and exit.

While the IT industry outwardly champions adaptability, creativity, and technological advancement, seemingly fostering a culture of constant renewal, it simultaneously imposes implicit expectations that favor youthfulness, pliability, and cost-efficiency. In doing so, it sustains a form of occupational continuity centered on younger, entry-level workers, while systematically marginalizing more experienced professionals. One of my research participants told me: "At this age, if you haven't moved into a management role, you have two options—either start your own business, which requires both courage and financial strength, or keep working hard for the company until it eliminates you."

Within this structural discontinuity, managerial and organizational preferences increasingly lean toward employees who can tolerate long working hours and meet high-pressure deadlines. Seniority and professional competence no longer guarantee stability; instead, they are problematized for higher labor costs, lower flexibility, and perceived resistance to the industry's intense work culture, and this reflects broader trends in China's increasingly saturated job market.

In my PhD research, I examine how IT professionals in Beijing navigate the tensions embedded in this career model, drawing on concepts such as involution (neijuan), lying flat (tangping), and slacking off (bailan) as distinct working philosophies. During interviews, many of my participants expressed pronounced concerns about aging, commonly referring to 35 as the "retirement age" within the industry. Given the relatively young nature of the field and China's recent emphasis on computer science education in higher education, most professionals are between the ages of 22 and 30. Participants nearing 30 displayed heightened anxiety about their future. Those deemed "retired" in the IT industry resemble elderly individuals in a traditional aging society, but they face not only the challenges of social disengagement but also the crisis of high-paying yet unstable jobs, coupled with the uncertainty of future career choices.

This research explores how these workers internalize the "35-year-old" boundary, treating it as an imminent and almost unavoidable fracture point in their career trajectories. Rather than framing this phenomenon solely in terms of individual aging or personal decline, this study emphasizes how organizational structures, labor market dynamics, and broader socioeconomic conditions intersect to produce a sense of career precarity. It highlights how systemic pressures such as intensified competition, shrinking career ladders, and shifting skill expectations reshape professional life cycles, making these discontinuities deeply personal yet structurally driven. Thus, this research explores how China's IT sector constructs a career path that appears stable on the surface but remains fragile and discontinuous underneath.

Historical (Dis)Continuities & Crises in/at Work & Employment 1 – Room 3.209

Consolidating and Refining the Contemporary Law of Combination and Master and Servants in the UK

Paul Smith

(Independent Researcher)

From the Trade Disputes Act (TDA) 1906 to the Industrial Relations Act (1971, notwithstanding wartime restrictions and the Trade Union and Trade Disputes Act 1927 (repealed in 1946), workers in the UK enjoyed a wide right to strike. The Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974 repealed the 1971 Act and re-enacted the TDA in modified language to take account of restrictive judicial decisions. Beginning with the Employment Act (EA) 1980, Conservative governments, 1979–97, with an ever bolder neoliberal agenda, successively emasculated the 1974 Act, so as to severely curtail the right to strike. This legislation was accepted and celebrated by New Labour governments, 1997–2010. Conservative governments, 2016-24, further restricted the right to strike. Thus, the discontinuity marked by the EA 1980 initiated a new continuity. As a result, the right to strike is now a narrow licence to strike and the employers' prerogative has been reinvigorated, despite extensive regulation

Elected in July 2024, the Labour government's Employment Rights Bill (ERB) is expected to become law by the summer of 2025. Notwithstanding that the Bill represents a dilution of the party's policy document, Labour's New Deal for Working People (2021), it has been praised as possibly 'the most ambitious set of reforms since 1971', the year of the Conservative governments Industrial Relations Act, whereas others have noted its silences, gaps and ambiguities.

This paper will build upon the latter critique but situate it within a historical analysis that conceives the ERB as being consistent with the two interrelated goals of all UK governments since 1979:
1. to restrict and regulate the right to strike, and trade-union administration and government,
2. to strengthen employers' authority and power within the labour market and employment relationship.

Such reforms as are proposed by the Bill are explained by the need to:
1. increase the size of the labour market,
2. reduce friction within the employment relationship,
3. simplify some aspects of the law on statutory ballots,
4. position the government as a one promoting 'change' and 'fairness',

The paper will explore the cumulative impact of statutes enacted since 1980 as amounting to the contemporary reconstruction of the laws of Combination, and Master and Servant as found in the UK of the nineteenth-century, but without criminal sanctions. It will argue that, far from being radical, the Bill will consolidate and refine this body of law.

PhD Showcase

The Precarity of the 21st Century Industrial Worker and Their Firm

Thomas Wilson

(University of Kent)

Tomlinson (2016) argued that deindustrialisation is not an event but a process. This helps to explain why, over 40 years after large-scale industrial losses in the 1970s and 80s, contemporary headlines continue to lead with stories such as the 2,000 industrial workers awaiting redundancy at the Port Talbot steelworks, or the 2,500 in Scunthorpe threatened with a similar fate.

The United Kingdom losing its core manufacturing basis is far from a novel convention, however, recent social transformations are beginning to carry greater consequence across what remains of the nations industrial sites. The growing demand for housing has led to a strange conundrum: a need for land to facilitate development, whilst retaining the industrial capacity required to produce goods for such projects.

The circumstance of Chatham Dockyard is a case in point. Once a Royal Naval Dockyard for over 400 years, its remaining industrial site is home to a variety of industrial firms. However, with the waterside area proving a lucrative venture for development, along with the local councils' target for housing, the future of the site and the livelihood of hundreds are at significant risk.

Encompassing a yearlong ethnographic study as the site manages this struggle, I have recorded the lived experience of work and life on the docks. This has included visual methods, and interviews across the major firm's hierarchy. Drawing on sociological theory around embodiment, material culture and deindustrialisation studies, this talk will explore the effect of this precarity on the space and how industrial worker's sense of identity and meaning-making continues to evolve well into the 21st century.

Industrial Decline and the Rise of Logistics: The Emerging Employment Regime in Liège

Juan Sebastian Carbonell, Eric Florence

(Université de Liège)

This paper examines the development of logistics employment in the Liège region (Belgium). On the one hand, the region is marked by a process of de-industrialisation following the closure of its last steel companies – which constituted the heart of its regional economy until the 2000s. On the other hand, there has been very significant growth in logistics employment, mainly around a range of logistics infrastructures and, in particular, a freight airport. Today, due to its geographical location and intense promotional activity, Liège and its airport have become one of Europe's major logistics hubs.

Logistics activities have been sponsored by a multitude of public and private actors (companies, regional and federal authorities, trade unions, political parties) as a substitute for the declining steel industry and as the economic future of the region, leaving aside the question of the quality of employment and working conditions in logistics companies.

The aim of our research is to shed light on this last dimension, and hence to understand the labour-use strategies of logistics companies in this dual context of deindustrialisation and logistics « reindustrialisation ». More specifically, it seeks to understand continuities and discontinuities in the logistics employment regime that is emerging as part of this ongoing economic reconversion.

This paper is based on ongoing research on the development of logistics activities in the Liège region. It draws on 25 interviews with actors responsible with the development of logistics activities and with logistics employment in the Liège former industrial basin, as well as with opponents to the development of logistics activities. This paper is also based on several rounds of warehouse and logistics infrastructure visits. Our aim in these interviews is to understand what the different stages in the

development of logistics activities in the region are, what forms of arguments used to support this development emerge. Finally, we seek to shed light on the employment strategies of logistics companies.

Our preliminary result are twofold. First, we observe that the economic conversion of the region to logistics involves a major change in the employment regime towards precarious employment and worse working conditions for the majority of workers. Second, we observe nonetheless a segmentation of the workforce. On the one hand, a minority of workers are recruited in highly specialised manual and intellectual jobs to work in the first line of the freight airport, while on the other, a large workforce is recruited for handling and warehousing activities.

Historical (Dis)Continuities & Crises in/at Work & Employment 2 – Room 3.211

Continuities and Discontinuities in the Meaning of Work for Young People

Barbara Barabaschi, Paolo Rizzi

(Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore)

In recent years, Italy and its provinces are characterized by good labor market indicators. However, the local economic systems and the relationship between labor supply and demand also present some bottlenecks that must be addressed in the coming years. They concern:
- the imbalance between supply and demand in the local labor market,
- the severity of the Neet problem, although smaller than in other situations,
- the difficulties in finding workers by companies, worsened by the aging processes and low birth rate typical of the country;
- the increase in situations of social and relational hardship among young people.

The paper presents the results of a two year research aiming to study the historical evolution of the main indicator of youth presence into the labor market and the meaning they give to work in their life experience. The final aim is to provide useful insights to address policies for sustainable labor at local level. Data refer to the Italian context, while a territorial in-depth analysis is presented in order to better understand the relations among the different stakeholders operating at the local level (Piacenza).

The research specific aims are: identifying the main factors influencing youth entrance into the labor market, cultural factors influencing the relation between labor and the new generations, finally the relations between educational and labor systems.

The empirical analysis adopt a mix-method, both quantitative and qualitative. In particular,
- desk analysis: statistics on the main indicator on labor market (employment, unemployment, inactivity, NEET rate); the results of previous studies on the same population (data are compared to those of a similar research realized twenty years ago on local and regional level;
- surveys on young people, firms and agencies with interviews online and on site. The sample is composed by 2.500 young people (under 35), students of secondary schools, academic students; young immigrants workers in order to better understand social and professional status, values and cultural factors, job expectations, the role of work in life project, ideal job features, relation between education and training and work, job satisfaction, problems in finding a job, opinion on public employment services and private agencies.
- focus group to collect original information from the various stakeholders engaged in local development processes. 3 focus-group with students and territorial actors (education institutions delegates, trade unions, interest association, municipality representatives, cultural associations, public employment services, entrepreneurs, work agencies) to collect their perspectives, opinion and suggestions to improve and personalize policies according to the need of different groups of young people.

The findings have been compared to those of similar studies realized in 2009 and 2013. They show both continuity in the sense young people recognize to work experience and in some cases strong discontinuities and this affect the public policy (especially labor and education) approach to the

phenomena of "less work for young people" that Italy experience at present time and "less young workers in the near future".

Understanding (Dis)Continuities in Graduate Employment: Higher Education Students' Perspectives on Employability and Their Strategies for Future Careers

Carlos Azevedo

(Centro de Investigação de Politicas do Ensino Superior)

This paper explores the relationship between higher education (HE) and graduate employability in the context of the neoliberal marketisation of HE, which has shifted the view of employability from being a by-product of HE to a personal investment. In this context, students are often constructed as consumers, and universities are held responsible for graduates' employability. The study specifically focuses on British students' aspirations and expectations regarding employability, as well as the strategies they adopt to improve it. I contend that individuals' socialisation experiences prior to entering the job market contribute to understanding (dis)continuities in graduate employment.

Historically, HE policies in the UK have been grounded in Human Capital Theory, which posits that increased education leads to financial and personal benefits for individuals. This has been used to justify cost-sharing policies, where students bear part of the financial burden through tuition fees, framed as an investment in their future earnings. However, critical research has exposed the limitations of this theory, particularly in the context of a changing graduate labour market. With the rising number of educated individuals, competition for high-status jobs has increased, meaning not all graduates can achieve the career outcomes they aim for. Moreover, students from more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be aware of which university subjects may lead to greater employability in higher-status professions and greater earnings.

The study deploys a Bourdieusian framework to explore British undergraduates' aspirations, expectations, and strategies regarding employability. This framework is complemented by a poststructuralist understanding of identity construction, identity regulation, and identity work, which allows for a more flexible approach to the participants' identities. Data were collected through 37 semi-structured interviews with students aged 18 to 23, attending various universities across England and Scotland. These students came from diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data.

The study's findings reveal that most participants believed that holding a degree would enhance their employment prospects. Many viewed HE as a stepping stone to their future careers, making decisions based on how their course choices and university selection could improve their position in the job market. Acknowledging the competitiveness of the graduate labour market, students adopted strategies to improve their employability, such as striving for high academic performance and top degree classifications. Regardless of their backgrounds, students emphasised the importance of hard work to achieve these goals, but students from more privileged backgrounds also highlighted the importance of their family connections and networking.

The research also highlights the influence of neoliberal transformations in HE on students' identity construction. These changes have introduced forms of identity regulation that impact undergraduates' processes of identity construction, somewhat restricting their options in terms of identity work if they want to adopt a strategy that will lead to future employability, that is, a strategy based on deploying mechanisms typical of the job market in the field of HE. Nonetheless, some students questioned the emphasis on competitive strategies, reflecting a degree of resistance to the dominant discourses shaping their educational and career trajectories.

Side-hustles: Passion, Productivity and Youth Identity

Brendan Churchill, Kim Allen, David Farrugia, Stephanie Patouras

(University of Melbourne, University of Leeds, Deakin University)

This paper explores the social phenomena of 'side-hustles' amongst young people. It describes and theorises the side-hustle as a form of youth entrepreneurship distinct from the 'gig economy', and locates the side-hustle within terms of shifting relationships between productivity, value, employment

and leisure amongst youth. Side-hustles as we describe them here constitute employment-adjacent entrepreneurship, in which young people carry out independent money-making activities whilst also maintaining formal employment and / or study. While they are the most common actually existing form of youth entrepreneurship, side-hustles are absent from the existing literature: youth studies researchers have focused on discursive critiques of enterprise culture and the 'entrepreneurial self' whereas researchers in entrepreneurship or business studies assume entrepreneurs are entirely self-employed and tend to celebrate entrepreneurship as a social good and a solution to problems in the labour market. In contrast, this is the first study to empirically analyse side-hustles in terms of youth identities, practices and working lives.

The paper draws on a mixed-methods project conducted in Australia which consisted of a survey with 1497 young people between the ages of 18 and 34, and 68 qualitative interviews. Our findings show shows that while side-hustles and entrepreneurialism generally are often celebrated as a pathway to secure employment, young people with side-hustles typically occupy relatively privileged educational and labour market positions, and draw on these in establishing their side-hustles. Side-hustles typically do not make enough money to support young people financially in a meaningful way, many side-hustlers would be better off with second jobs at minimum wages, and some even lose money on their hustles. However, young people mainly pursue side-hustles in search of labour that realises their interests and passions and do not always define their side-hustles as work at all. In this, side-hustles represent an instance in which notions of productivity and value shift beyond the boundaries of employment and become intertwined with young people's identities and leisure practices in an expansive sense. They therefore constitute a novel form of working practice emerging in the context of employment uncertainty, the expansion of intermittent forms of labour, and the increased moral significance of productivity and the optimisation of time for the formation of youth subjectivites.

Work: Meaning and Status for Youth in a Changing World

Ibrahim Mlhem

(Damascus University)

This article addresses the topic of work, which is the central focus around which an individual's life revolves. Work represents a significant value in the lives of individuals and society. The rapid developments experienced by societies have led to the evolution of the concept of work, in light of economic and social transformations. Studies have confirmed that, despite the differences in time periods, work remains a social value.

This study attempts to address global changes in working conditions, particularly among youth, and the shift in the concept and meaning of work in light of economic and social transformations.

The study adopts a descriptive analytical approach to reach conclusions about the concept of work, which shapes human identity. It also aims to develop a set of recommendations and proposals.

(Im)Mobility & Migration – Room 3.214

More Than Teachers: Precarity and Emotional Labour in China's Privately-run Migrant Schools

Yao Wang

(Newcastle University)

This paper examines the working lives of teachers in Privately-Run Migrant Schools (PMSs) in Guiyang, a fast-developing but economically disadvantaged city in Southwest China. PMSs emerged to serve internal migrant children excluded from public education due to China's hukou (household registration) system. Despite ongoing reforms, over 2 million internal migrant children remain outside the state school system (MOE, 2021), relying on PMSs for education. These schools operate on minimal funding, often existing in a precarious policy and financial environment (Liang et al., 2020; Hu, 2018).

Teachers working in PMSs are formal educators, yet their professional lives are marked by precarity, marginalisation, and heavy workloads. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, including 23 interviews with staff across 16 PMSs, alongside conversations with 6 NGO leaders, 10 parents, and 27 children, this

paper investigates how these teachers manage their professional and emotional roles. Many lack formal qualifications and recognition from the public (Wang & Ganassin, 2024). Their employment is often unstable, and salaries are significantly lower than in public schools. Yet, these teachers demonstrate a deep emotional commitment to their students, many of whom face not only academic hurdles but also challenges linked to poverty, housing insecurity, and parental absence.

The paper highlights the emotional labour at the heart of PMS teaching and the contradiction between employment status and precarious working conditions. It argues that PMS teachers challenge neat divides between formal and informal work, shedding light on how care-driven labour is undervalued and unsupported. By shifting the geographic focus to a less-studied city and centring the voices of PMS teachers, this paper calls attention to the underexamined but essential role of educators in marginalised urban school contexts. It offers important implications for education policy, labour studies, and the recognition of emotional labour in marginalised schooling contexts, particularly across the Global South.

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Continuity or Change? Examining the Occupation Aspirations of Chinese Young People in Higher Education

Yongyi Wu

(University of Manchester)

This paper demonstrates part of the empirical results of a PhD thesis which will be finished by September 2025. The paper explores the association of Chinese young people's occupation aspirations with their social backgrounds which include three dimensions: urban/rural origin, class backgrounds, and gender. This study is based on twenty-seven interviews with university and vocational college students in Guangdong province, China. The sample is divided into two groups, with a group of working-class students who come from rural areas, and the other group of middle-class students who come from urban areas. Using the research perspectives of Bourdieu's cultural reproduction and the Rational Action Theory (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997), the findings demonstrate how the two theories work together to explain the upward mobility experienced by the working-class students in the sample and the continuous advantages of middle-class students over working-class students.

The working-class students in the sample tended to move to urban areas and have 'stable' professional and administrative jobs after study for instance nurse and teacher, which is related to a belief instilled to them by school and family education that encouraged rural students to achieve a better life by moving to urban areas. The working-class students chose not to pursue further education as they tried to minimise the costs and risks of pursuing upward mobility. Nonetheless, they feel confused about their long-term career achievements, due to a lack of cultural capital and social support in their social backgrounds. The middle-class students in the sample tended to have determined occupation goals entailing professional and managerial jobs that they were interested in such as lawyer, scholar and doctor, who aspired to achieve career success in the long term. Many middle-class students developed cultural interests at an early age such as reading, photography, and broadcasting, which translated into their university subjects and occupation aspirations. They also had guidance as well as economic capital from family that supported them to pursue postgraduate study, which would increase their competitiveness in the labour market. As of gender, gender differences in occupation aspirations are much less evident in the middle-class group than in the working-class group, which is related to the different gender norms in urban and rural areas in China.

The research findings indicate a 'bounded' rationality' in the working-class students in the sample that they acted rationally to achieve occupation aspirations and upward mobility while their aspirations were shaped by the cultural value instilled by school and family education, which leads them to perceive short-range mobility as the most possible to achieve. Middle-class students in the sample who were consolidating their cultural advantages by achieving postgraduate degrees and high-level occupations, were reproducing the privileged position over their working-class counterparts.

PhD Showcase

Flux Migrants and Reflexivity Traps: The Structural Paradox of Migration Instability and Unattainable Sustainable Livelihoods

Esha Dey

(University of Mumbai)

This study examines the lives of migrant workers in post-pandemic West Bengal, India, focusing on how they navigate the liminal space created by the dual forces of primitive accumulation and its reversal. These migrants negotiate continuities and discontinuities in their livelihood which are contingent in causal nature. They interact and are placed in structure, but are unable to change the structure. They are caught between trigger events and its feedback loop which are uncertain and unpredictable. Hence living a life in Reflexivity Traps and becoming a Flux Migrant. This study conceptualizes Flux Migrants—workers trapped in cycles of movement without achieving stability. Their migration decisions are dictated by Trigger Events (e.g., debt, land loss, personal crises) that activate Feedback Loops, reinforcing a pattern of constrained agency. Unlike conventional understandings of migration as uncertain and unpredictable, the feedback loops of migration instability create a paradox where migrants foresee their futures but cannot escape their trajectories. As a result, they become caught in Reflexivity Traps, unable to break free from the structural forces that dictate their movement. This study critically engages with sustainability in labour mobility, arguing that for flux migrants, socially sustainable livelihoods remain structurally unattainable, making sustainability an unresolved structural paradox rather than an achievable economic goal.

Methodologically, the study employs an inductive approach with grounded conceptualization to interpret how migrant workers experience reflexivity traps. The primary data consists of 50+ in-depth narrative interviews with migrant workers, capturing their lived experiences of migration, economic precarity, and structural entrapment. Atlas.ti is used for thematic analysis and identifying patterns in reflexive decision-making. Content Analysis of policy documents and digital news articles to contextualize these experiences within broader migration governance frameworks. This multi-layered methodology enables an empirical and theoretical synthesis that bridges economic structures, reflexivity theory, and sustainability discourses.

The study's findings reveal four key dimensions of migration instability. First, Flux Migrants remain in a cyclical pattern of instability rather than linear mobility, reinforcing that migration is not a progressive economic transition but a structured entrapment in movement. Second, Trigger Events activate structural feedback loops, meaning that migrants are forced into movement by anticipated crises rather than unpredictable shocks. This contradicts the assumption that migration instability is random or uncertain, instead revealing that precarity is structured, foreseeable, and embedded in economic constraints. Third, Sustainable livelihoods remain unattainable, as migrant workers fail to establish long-term security in either rural or urban settings. Their work remains casualized, informal, and contingent on unpredictable wage cycles, preventing any meaningful accumulation of assets or social mobility. Finally, sustainability in labour mobility requires rethinking, as there are no pathways for migrants to escape cycles of precarious employment. By integrating Margaret Archer's Reflexivity theory, Anthony Giddens' Structuration, Kalyan Sanyal's Wasteland in Post-colonial Capitalism and Migration Sustainability Discourses, this study contributes to the ongoing sociology of work and employment debates, demonstrating how the duality of continuities and discontinuities shapes the lived experience of migration instability while questioning the possibility of achieving sustainable labour integration in contemporary economic systems.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 1 – Room 2.217

PhD Showcase

Who Wants To Be a Doctor? Indecent Employment and the Quality of Working Life of Junior Doctors in Italy

Michele Campanaro

(Sapienza Università di Roma)

A vast body of literature in the sociology of work agrees that neoliberal labor market deregulation policies have impacted all sectors within advanced capitalist economies, including medium-to-high-skill services and the remaining segments of the public sector. However, much of the existing scholarship has drawn attention to the proliferation of insecure contracts in low-skilled jobs within the private sector, with relatively few studies addressing high-skilled workers – i.e. professionals - in the public sector. This paper aims to fill this gap by investigating the quality of working life (QWL) of junior doctors in the Italian National Health Service and argues that their perspective warrants greater attention in sociological and public policy analyses.

In Italy, after earning their medical degree, junior doctors enter an apprenticeship period under full-time, temporary training contracts. The economic compensation amounts to approximately 26.000 euros gross per year and is fully funded by the State. The duration of the contract corresponds to the official length of the program, ranging from 3 to 5 years, and does not guarantee access to permanent employment. As such, the medical traineeship can be classified as a non-standard form of employment relationship, which a vast literature associates with insecure jobs and precarious work.

Building on this and drawing from 32 semi-structured interviews conducted in Rome (Italy) between November 2024 and January 2025, this paper examines how junior doctors perceive their QWL. Findings reveal that while all junior doctors consider their salary insufficient and express concerns about their career prospects, their experiences differ in terms of perceived economic condition and work-life balance. This variation arises from differences in income support, with some receiving financial assistance from family members, others taking on casual work to maintain a decent living standard, some relying solely on their training income and others opting not to pursue additional income. As a result, four distinct groups emerge: one with poor work-life balance but good economic condition, another with poor work-life balance and economic insecurity, a third with good work-life balance and economic condition, and a fourth with good work-life balance but economic insecurity.

By focusing on junior doctors, this paper contributes to the ongoing debate on indecent employment and rising inequalities. It demonstrates that equally precarious working conditions can lead to different outcomes in terms of QWL, thereby exacerbating disparities both inside and outside the workplace. Finally, the present research argues that analysing the quality of working life of junior physicians in the public sector today offers valuable insights into, and rises critical concerns about, the process of precarianization that is going to increasingly affect historically protected, highly trained healthcare professionals in the near future.

"A diploma means nothing here!": Un(der)employment Experiences of Educated Youth in Turkey's Supermarket Chains

Halil Can Ince

(TED University)

Across the globe, the promise of higher education as a pathway to secure, well-paid employment is increasingly being challenged. As university enrollment rates rise, labor markets have not expanded proportionally to accommodate graduates, leading to a growing mismatch between educational attainment and occupational outcomes. This phenomenon, often described as graduate underemployment, signals a broader transformation in work and employment, where the boundaries between employment and unemployment blur. This study examines these dynamics in Turkey, where university graduates are increasingly employed in low-wage, non-graduate jobs, particularly in retail.

Focusing on graduates working in supermarket chains, the research explores their experiences of underemployment and precarity. Despite earning degrees with the expectation of stable, qualified employment, many find themselves in temporary, low-status jobs misaligned with their academic backgrounds. The study investigates how these workers navigate precarious employment, manage the dissonance between their educational capital and employment realities, and make sense of their career trajectories.

The research is based on 22 semi-structured interviews with university graduates employed in supermarket chains across Istanbul and Ankara. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure diverse representation in study fields and employment histories. Trade union networks also helped reach interviewees engaged in labor-related discussions. The interviews explored perceptions of work, career aspirations, job search strategies, and experiences of precarity. The collected data was analyzed thematically to identify common patterns in how graduates negotiate their employment status.

Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of capital, this study situates these experiences within broader labor market inequalities. The mismatch between academic capital (as cultural capital) and occupational outcomes results in symbolic violence, as workers internalize their inability to secure jobs matching their qualifications, leading to frustration and disillusionment. While they largely perceive their jobs as temporary, this belief is accompanied by anxiety that their transitory status might become permanent. This condition of being "unemployed with jobs" reflects not only individual struggles but also structural constraints on upward mobility. Their job-seeking strategies—such as accumulating additional credentials or networking—demonstrate attempts to convert educational capital into economic and social capital, though with uncertain success in an increasingly precarious labor market.

The findings reveal that graduates often experience symbolic violence, struggling to reconcile their educational achievements with low-status jobs. Many participants described feelings of frustration and disillusionment, while simultaneously engaging in strategies such as networking and acquiring additional credentials to improve their prospects. This study highlights the personal struggles of underemployed graduates and calls for a re-evaluation of higher education policies and labor market structures to address the growing precarity faced by young workers in neoliberal economies.

By situating the Turkish case within broader transformations in work and employment, the study underscores how graduate un(der)employment is not an isolated issue but part of a wider restructuring of labor markets in contemporary capitalist economies. It contributes to the literature on precarious employment by shedding light on the subjective dimensions of underemployment and demonstrating how young workers navigate precarity within shifting labor market structures.

Academic Capitalism and (In)Decent Work in Neoliberal Universities: Job Insecurity and Stress in Liberal Market Economies

Greg Bamber, Sean O'Brady, Brian Cooper

(Monash University)

This study analyses relationships between academic capitalism, decent work, and employment precarity. Drawing on cross-national sources of survey data, we compare academics' experiences with job insecurity and related stress in Australian and Canadian universities, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although these two countries are similar liberal market economies, Australian higher education has embraced academic capitalism more than Canada. The study focuses on universities' use of contingent labour in explaining cross-country differences. We find that universities relying on international students' fees played a role in heightening job insecurity, (in)decent work and stress, particularly in the Australian universities due to their greater reliance on such income.

In terms of theories, we consider continuities and discontinuities in universities' employment practices drawing on literatures on neoliberalism, academic capitalism, precarity and decent work. This is novel. There have not been many attempts to integrate such theories in a international higher education contexts.

Regarding methodology, we analyse two data sets (N = 2,888) to consider cross-national variations in work and employment outcomes during the pandemic. The surveys were designed to examine how the pandemic impacted the work of academics. The research has been completed. This paper's

contributions include developing explanations. We also discuss limitations of the research, and agendas for more research on (in)decent work and employment in universities.

Another contribution includes policy recommendations that are also applicable in other countries including the UK. From the perspective of most workers, casualised jobs are not decent work, and it is unfair that such workers bear the risk of the universities' entrepreneurial activities and unpredictable funding. From the perspective of leaders of universities, casualisation may seem attractive in the short term; it may provide cheaper and more compliant labour. However, universities' rhetoric about being great places to work and promoting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (which include decent work) is inconsistent with the reality that universities depend on casual employment (which is usually indecent work). This inconsistency means that universities' policies and practices appear to be contradictory.

Improving employment arrangements and providing decent work for more academics would help universities to avoid such contradictions and help them to overcome conflicts between rhetoric and reality. In the longer term, overcoming such inconsistencies could also help universities to improve their reputations with the public and policymakers. This could also help with recruitment and retention of academics and students. It would also be beneficial for universities' two primary domains: education and research. It would enable universities generally to provide better and more consistent education and research than universities that depend too much on academics who are precariously employed casuals.

If universities were to improve their work organisation as we suggest, this would have a more positive impact than the current practices of universities seeking to improve performance and alleviate stress among academics by subjecting them to more surveillance and monitoring, performance reviews, counselling, employee assistance and mindfulness services. Since the advent of academic capitalism, there has been a proliferation of such managerial activities in universities.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 2 – Room 2.218
Special Event

The Politics of Unpaid Labour: How Can the Study of Unpaid Labour Help Address Inequality in Precarious Work and What Theoretical Adaptations Are Needed

Valeria Pulignano, Elizabeth Cotton, Knut Laaser

(Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, University of Leicester, King's College London)

This special book launch event will discuss *The Politics of Unpaid Labour: How the study of unpaid labour can help address inequality in precarious work* by Valeria Pulignano and Markieta Domecka. Valeria Pulignano will be joined by Elizabeth Cotton and Knut Laaser.

The book addresses a timely and critical topic, deeply embedded in contemporary sociological debates on the division of labour, precarious work, and inequality. Building on traditions in intersectionality, labour process theory, and the sociology of work, it revisits foundational discussions that challenge the traditional dichotomy between productive (paid) and socially reproductive (unpaid) labour. These earlier debates underscored how unpaid labour underpins and sustains paid employment. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to how transformations in welfare systems and employment institutions have reshaped the social division of labour.

This book fills this gap by analysing the evolving role of unpaid labour, which increasingly intersects with state policies and institutional frameworks. Governments, in prioritizing economic imperatives, have redefined their approach to social reproductive labour. By examining these dynamics, the book offers critical insights into the connections between unpaid labour, inequality, and precarious work. It conceptualizes unpaid labour as the time and effort individuals expend on tasks beyond formal job descriptions, revealing how such labour contributes to precarious conditions in the workforce.

Importantly, the book argues that unpaid labour's role in precarious work is not uniform. Its impact varies significantly based on individuals' class positions, which shape their access to resources and their capacity to build resilience. This nuanced perspective highlights how class-based power structures are both produced and refracted through income disparities, social reproductive labour, and state policies, alongside other institutional arrangements. These processes are further shaped by ongoing structural transformations in industries and labour markets. By examining the ideological and power dynamics that sustain unpaid labour, the book sheds light on the exploitative conditions that perpetuate it. It integrates analyses of public policy and institutional change to provide a comprehensive understanding of the shifting dynamics of labour and their implications for inequality.

Empirically, the book draws on rich data collected through a large European research project conducted between 2020 and 2022. The project spans various sectors often characterized by precarious work, including creative industries, residential care, and platform-based work, across diverse European countries. The research methodology combines 129 narrative interviews with workers, 38 working diaries, over 40 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and extensive document analysis. This empirical foundation strengthens the book's contribution to the sociology of work and its exploration of precarious labour conditions within contemporary institutional and economic contexts.

Labour Agency, Trade Unions & Social Movements – Room 3.213

Occupy! Resist! Produce! The Case of VioMe and Kazova as Recovered Factories in Greece and Turkey

Dogukan Dere

(London School of Economics and Political Science)

Recovered factories refer to workplaces where workers establish self-management via occupation as a response to abandonment under the guise of bankruptcy. The workers who cannot secure several months of their wages and decent job opportunities elsewhere decide to roll up their sleeves to occupy and subsequently recover the workplace to have their production collective. Recover factories deserve a particular academic and political focus since they offer a unique, working-class, and grassroots solution to the social problems of capitalism, such as unemployment, alienation, and exploitation. Yet, the recovered factories remain one of the least studied subsets of autonomous spaces and cooperatives. This paper presents my ongoing research project focusing on VioMe (Thessaloniki) and Kazova (Istanbul), the only recently recovered factories in their respective countries. In 2013, VioMe and Kazova workers decided to go for self-production. Since then, they have faced various internal and external challenges, including evacuation attempts. In the face of these challenges, the Kazova slowly dissolved throughout 2017-2018 while the VioMe Collective recently celebrated its 12th anniversary with a solidarity festival. By focusing on these two peculiar cases, this paper aims a two-folded inquiry: i) understanding which factors are effective for the formation, consolidation, and dissolution of these recovered factories, and to what extent, and ii) examining the effects of these journeys on the socio-political subjectivities of the workers, especially their perception on themselves, the production process, and class struggle.

Grassroots Activism and Labour Organising: Lessons from Marginalised People's Struggles in Italy Since 2014

Gabriella Cioce

(University of Sheffield)

Against the backdrop of rising precarity and inadequate representation from mainstream trade unions, grassroots activism has come to play a key role in supporting the struggles of marginalised people such as low-paid migrant workers (Cioce et al., 2024; 2022; Joyce et al., 2022; Umney et al., 2024). These forms of participatory and from-below activism not only emerge to address work-related issues but often respond to various political economy issues emerging within and outside the workplace. Examples include building collective mobilisations with the unemployed (Atzeni and Grigeria, 2019; Baglioni,

2012), fighting for public housing (Belotti, 2023) and reclaiming urban space (Piazza, 2018). Although we know that grassroots activism can be effective in the labour realm (Però, 2020), little is known about how it supports marginalised people's struggles for different, intersected political issues.

This manuscript addresses this gap. Adopting an actor-centred approach (Alberti and Però, 2018), it analyses two ethnographic research projects focusing on the mobilisations of housing squatters (2014-2015) and precarious migrant workers (2017-2019) supported respectively by the two Italian organisations, the Florentine Housing Movement and the independent union SICobas. Both ethnographies lasted 8 months and, in total, counted 81 semi-structured interviews with migrant squatters, low-paid migrant workers and the unemployed alongside policymakers and grassroots activists belonging to trade unions and social movements. These ethnographies also involved several participant observations at events, such as activist meetings, demonstrations, help desks, strikes, assemblies and social gatherings.

Overall, the article shows how grassroots activists adapt their organising experience to marginalised people's specific needs while building solidarity. Here, I argue that grassroots organising practices make these wide connections and re-adaptions possible, facilitating support within and across different struggles. The article first contributes to showing the important connections and networks between labour organising and other intersected struggles (Atzeni and Grigera, 2019). Second, it adds to research on grassroots labour projects (Cioce et al., 2022; Joyce et al., 2022; Però, 2020; Umney et al., 2024), accounting for the various ongoing efforts that grassroots activists develop to support the initiatives of marginalised people.

Mobilisation and Direct Action as a Regulatory and Organising Tool: Building Workers' Power in the Era of Liberalisation

Marti Lopez-Andreu

(Newcastle University)

This paper discusses the emergence of mobilisation as a regulatory and organising tool of labour organisations. Although to different degrees and extent, the institutional power of unions in Europe has been eroded by a common trajectory of liberalisation and neo-liberal reform (Baccaro and Howell, 2017). However, labour militancy, mobilisations and strikes are an emerging feature of precarious workers, including platform-economy workers (Visser, 2023; Cini et al., 2022). This paper investigates the role of mobilisation as a mechanism to organise workers and to regulate working conditions. It focuses the attention on the role of mobilisation (strikes, demonstrations, sitting-ins, occupations, etc) as a social and communicative activity that emerges in contexts characterised by eroded institutional practices and spaces for workers' influence. I engage with two main areas of academic debate concerned with the decline of labour power. First, the debate on union renewal and the sources of union power which has gained momentum discussing potential strategies to strengthen workers' power and influence (Murray, 2017; Lehndorff et al, 2018). The most influencing paradigm has come from organising, an approach to recruit new workers, empower union members and encourage worker self-organization (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013; Holgate et al., 2018). Within this approach, the process of collective organising and the development of grass-roots leaders are the prime conditions for successful mobilising over time. Similarly, the power resources' approach has highlighted the increasing complexity and combinations of workers' resources to strengthen the power of labour organisations (Refslund and Arnholtz, 2021; Smith, 2022). Increasingly, stronger links with civil society and social movements and the development of communicative power have emerged as crucial dimensions (Peró and Downey, 2022). Second, the erosion of unions' institutional capacities has revealed the complexity of the processes related to the regulation of work and employment. In one hand, the regulatory approach has highlighted the complexity between different levels and sites of regulation and the increasing displacement and decoupling of traditional spaces for the regulation of work and employment (MacKenzie and Martinez Lucio, 2005; 2014). On the other hand, several authors have emphasized the role of 'regulation from below' (della Porta, 2016; Fine and Bartley, 2018), highlighting the increasing role of civil society and social movement campaigns in the regulation of working conditions (Mustchin et al, 2023). In this discussion, this paper identifies three main dimensions of mobilisation in strengthening workers' power. First, it considers experiences of mobilisation related to what has been described as 'collective bargaining by riot' (Hobsbawn, 1968), in which workers' direct action becomes a means to improve wage and working conditions. On the other hand, mobilisation is conceptualised as a mechanism to enforce individual employment rights in the context of eroded

traditional enforcement mechanisms, such as State agencies and unions' presence (Dickens, 2012; Vosko 2020; Papadopoulos et al, 2022). Finally, mobilisation is also understood as a tool to organise workers in contexts characterised by the fragmentation of work and employment conditions (López-Andreu, 2020; Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020).

Open Stream – Room 3.205

PhD Showcase

Challenging Temporal Structures in Job Centre Pathways towards Labour Market Participation

Carl Johannes Middelboe

(University of Southern Denmark)

This study investigates how tensions between temporal structures influence the perceptions of Danish job centre pathways among long-term unemployed citizens and frontline professionals, as well as the challenges they face in aligning with the temporal imperatives of the job centre's institutional time. This study draws on qualitative individual interviews with 28 long-term unemployed citizens, two focus group interviews with frontline professionals and observations of four unemployed citizens' meetings in Danish job centres. Through an expanded conceptualisation of J. David Lewis and Andrew Weigert's (1981) notion of social time structures, we establish that accepting dominant principles and demands is necessary for alignment with the institutional time of the job centre. We find that unemployed citizens' misalignment with the job centre's institutional time can lead them to contest the progression of their pathways and dispute the priorities established in their pathways. Furthermore, we demonstrate that frontline professionals are similarly challenged in aligning with the institutional time. The analysis reveals that temporal alignment cannot be assumed for either long-term unemployed citizens or the frontline professionals involved in delivering job centre pathways. Temporal alignments constitute a significant tension in Danish job centres and are crucial for the perception of job centre pathways held by both long-term unemployed citizens and frontline professionals.

The study is currently undergoing peer-review for publication.

Navigating Stability and Change: Continuities and Discontinuities in Contemporary Work and Employment

Farkhanda Ijaz

(University of Brighton)

This paper critically examines the interplay between continuities and discontinuities in the realm of work and employment, exploring how persistent factors coexist and interact with emerging disruptions in contemporary labour markets. By investigating enduring features such as institutional practices, labour regulations, social hierarchies, and employment norms, alongside significant discontinuities driven by technological innovation, globalization, demographic shifts, and evolving organizational models, the analysis reveals complex dynamics shaping current working experiences. The inherent tensions arising from these intersections are explored, highlighting their implications for job security, worker autonomy, identity, and overall labour conditions. The paper offers critical insights into the resilience and transformation inherent within modern employment systems, contributing a deeper understanding of both stability and change in contemporary working life.

Contemporary Forms and Meanings of Work: The Case of Coworking Spaces in Mexico City

Maria Isabel Diaz Armas

(National Autonomous University of Mexico)

This research explores contemporary forms and meanings of work, drawing on an ethnography of coworking spaces in Mexico City. Coworking spaces provide privileged sites for studying how work is organized and understood today. They lie at the crossroads of increasing digitalization in the workplace and managerial discourses that emphasize flexibility, entrepreneurship, and self-realization. Moreover, they bring together workers who might otherwise be dispersed, making them an interesting setting to

observe sociability at work. These trends and patterns prompt questions about the lived experiences of workers in these environments and the extent to which work itself is undergoing significant structural transformations. Against this backdrop, this research focuses on individuals immersed in coworking spaces, distinguishing between freelancers, startup teams, and corporate remote employees. I aim to shed light on their daily work practices and the meanings they attach to them, discussing the impact of neoliberal work ethics at the individual level and exploring the broader implications of workplace alterations. This includes analyzing the blurring boundaries between work and leisure, work's detachment from specific spaces, timeframes, and face-to-face interactions, and how certain lifestyles and subjectivities are valued within these dynamics. Preliminary observations suggest that coworkers engage in ethical work on the self in order to cope with structural conditions, adding to the individualization and depoliticization of work (Salmenniemi, 2022). Thus, by adopting a critical perspective, this study contributes to scholarly debates on how purportedly new and alternative work arrangements reinforce precarity (De Peuter, Cohen & Saraco, 2017), elitism (Fast, 2024), and forms of self-exploitation (Bandinelli, 2020) upon which contemporary capitalism thrives. Additionally, by collecting data from a major Latin American city, this research helps bridge a gap in the literature on coworking spaces, which has mostly focused on the West. To explore these issues, fieldwork is currently being conducted in three coworking spaces in Mexico City—one transnational and two local companies. So far, 24 semi-structured, in-depth interviews have been carried out with an analytically selected sample of coworkers that reflects the field's heterogeneity in terms of gender, age, nationality, and employment status.

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One Factory, Many Regimes: Outsourcing, Migrant Labour, and the Politics of Production in Italian Shipyards

Nicola Quondamatteo, Francesco Eugenio Iannuzzi, Devi Sacchetto

(University of Padua, University of Venice)

This article explores labour process transformations within Italian shipyards, focusing on Fincantieri, one of the world's leading shipbuilders. The study investigates the changing composition and management of the workforce, how labour regimes are segmented, and how these transformations shape workers' experiences and power dynamics. Using empirical data from interviews with workers, trade unionists, and managers, the research highlights the consequences of outsourcing and subcontracting strategies on both the workforce and labour regimes.

Fincantieri has undergone a long-term strategy of organizational rationalization through outsourcing and the creation of complex subcontracting chains. These organizational changes have led to significant segmentation within the workforce, resulting in increasingly differentiated conditions. While technical white-collar workers now oversee production as supervisors, blue-collar workers are largely outsourced to subcontractors, with very different contractual and wage conditions. This segmentation has weakened workers' collective bargaining power and fragmented internal solidarity

While much of the literature on outsourcing tends to focus on the deteriorating conditions of outsourced workers, this study emphasizes the broader implications of these shifts on the factory regimes and labour control within production sites. The decentralization of labour has resulted in a multiplication of overlapping labour regimes that coexist within the same production site. These overlapping regimes reflect differing degrees of control, worker hierarchy, and exploitation, which complicate traditional analyses of labour power and management strategies in industrial settings.

Drawing on Burawoy's The Politics of Production (1985), the study frames the evolving factory regimes at Fincantieri as the product of both the politics in production (direct struggles within the workplace) and the politics of production (state and institutional factors shaping labour regulation). Outsourcing processes contribute to this fragmentation by creating distinct regulatory environments for different segments of the workforce, including migrant labourers. The segmentation of the workforce not only reflects racial and contractual differences but also shapes how labour control is exercised, highlighting the uneven distribution of power across different groups.

The study also addresses the role of migrant labour in this complex system of segmented labour regimes, where workers' access to rights, protections, and benefits is differentiated based on citizenship status and employment type. This segmentation, compounded by the diverse legal and social frameworks in which these workers are embedded, contributes to a precarious workforce that is highly vulnerable to exploitation.

This paper argues that the multiplication of labour regimes within Fincantieri is a result of the fragmentation of production processes and the reconfiguration of labour control mechanisms in response to outsourcing. These overlapping factory regimes have significant implications for labour relations, with workers experiencing varying levels of autonomy, exploitation, and solidarity depending on their position within the segmented workforce.

In conclusion, this study contributes to an understanding of how outsourcing within a single production site lead to the coexistence of multiple labour regimes, highlighting the complexities of factory regimes and labour segmentation in contemporary production settings. The findings challenge the conventional understanding of worker solidarity and union representation, offering insights into how the fragmentation of labour is managed and contested in the contemporary shipbuilding industry.

PAPER SESSION 7
15:30-17:00

Policy Engagement Workshop – Room 3.213
Special Event

Connecting research with the policy process: A workshop aimed at PhD students and ECRs

Jane Parry

(University of Southampton, University of Southampton Business School)

This workshop aims to support you in designing policy engagement into your research process and demystifying the process of engaging with parliament. We will discuss why it can be valuable to engage with policy throughout the research process, before looking at some key mechanisms, giving particular attention to submitting evidence to select committee inquiries. It will be an interactive and bespoke session to reflect the group's interests, and we will have time to explore ways that participants can orient their research towards live parliamentary inquiries to give themselves the greatest chance of their work being picked up.

Jane is a sociologist of work based University of Southampton Business School and also the UK parliament thematic research lead for business, economics, and trade, an ESRC-funded initiative to embed academics in parliament to diversify the academic evidence used in policy making. In this parliamentary session, she has been supporting the work of a number of select committees on inquiries related to the Employment Rights Bill.

Difference, Diversity & Social Justice – Room 3.210

What Do We Know about the Impact of Menopause in Relation to Work and Employment?

Katherine Twamley, Ian Briedis, Tom Phillips

(Department for Work and Pensions)

As more women are experiencing menopause transition while in employment, understanding the impact of the menopause in the workplace becomes ever more crucial. In 2016, a comprehensive literature review examined this issue (Brewis et al, 2017), but since then interest and attention to the menopause has grown significantly. We conducted a new literature review to identify the current state of the art in research on menopause and employment, with a particular focus on UK evidence. The EBSCO Discovery Service was used for the literature searches. 95 databases are covered by this service, including ScienceDirect, Web of Science, MEDLINE, JSTOR and Wiley Online Library. Only empirical research published since 2016 was considered for inclusion. Additional publications were identified through citation checking. 66 publications were reviewed in this stage of the search, of which 40 were included. In a second round of searching for international intervention-based research, 15 publications were identified of which 2 were included. The findings were synthesized according to the Framework analysis approach.

Overall, 70% of the publications are concerned with the impact of menopause on women in the workplace, how they deal with symptoms and how menopause is viewed/discussed in the workplace. Samples in these publications are mostly women aged 45-60 at various stages of menopause transition. Most studies draw on samples of white women working full time in professional settings such as offices. Only one study includes data from trans men.

The studies report on a range of symptoms and how they impact on women's experiences of the workplace. There is considerable evidence that some women going through the menopause experience symptoms which can impair their confidence and well-being at work and, to a lesser extent, their ability to effectively do their jobs. Few studies report positive or negligible experiences of the menopause, which is likely a result of the research designs most commonly used, whereby individuals are recruited to specifically discuss their experiences of the menopause at work or the kinds of support they need. However, the degree to which it is the menopause per se, or the particular social and cultural circumstances surrounding the menopause is not clear. Several studies emphasise that women's experiences of menopausal symptoms are deeply entangled with negative stereotypes of older women as less able and the menopause as a necessarily degenerative moment in women's lives. Moreover, studies also highlight how work may impact on experiences of the menopause, i.e. a potential reverse causal direction. Overall, there is a paucity of evidence of the extent and kinds of support offered by employers. Small case studies from a range of sectors suggest that employer support is disparate and uneven. Many studies report that women going through the menopause feel reticent to seek support in the workplace, and a fear that further interventions could lead to increased stigma for older women in the workplace. Based on these findings, we make a number of recommendations for future research on the menopause and employment.

Employer Gender and Hiring Preferences for Older Workers: The Roles of Perceived Strengths, Weaknesses, and Company Characteristics

Zeewan Lee, Hui Foh Foong, Xinyi Chen

(National University of Singapore)

Purpose - This study examines the intersection of gender and age diversity in hiring practices, specifically investigating whether male and female employers differ in their hiring preferences toward older workers. We also introduce and test two novel theoretical concepts: intersectional awareness of inequalities and intersectional awareness of diversity, assessing how they shape age diversity management in organizations.

Design/methodology/approach - We analyze survey data from 509 Singaporean employers with hiring authority to examine both current employment status of older workers in the company revealed hiring preferences of employers, measured through a vignette experiment. Mediation and moderation analysis further assesses how gender and hiring preferences for older workers are related.

Findings - Female employers are less biased against hiring older workers, aligning with intersectional awareness of inequalities. Male employers, while benefiting from gender diversity in a female-dominated HR sector, do not necessarily extend support to age diversity, failing to exhibit intersectional awareness of diversity—except in smaller companies. Mediation analysis confirms that perceived skills shape male employers' biases toward older workers. Larger companies mitigate male employers' biases but do not enhance their preference for older workers.

Originality - This study is among the first to explore the gender-age interplay in hiring older workers, offering new insights into diversity management by introducing and empirically testing intersectional awareness frameworks.

Practical implications - Findings highlight the need for targeted training programs to address biases against older workers' skills and promote age-inclusive hiring policies, particularly in male-led organizations.

PhD Showcase

Workplace Support for Working Family Carers of Older Adults in Chile: An Institutional Ethnography

Daniela Perucca

(University of Edinburgh)

Background: Since 2015, the World Health Organization (WHO) has addressed care as a right (WHO, 2017), which demands the development of policies guaranteeing the right to provide care in quality and equal conditions (UN Women and ECLAC, 2021). However, globally, informal care is assumed by

women who participate in the workforce and may face overlapping responsibilities, personal goals, and the challenges of ageing themselves, transforming informal caregiving into an urgent work–life conciliation issue (Saraceno, 2010). In Chile, evidence suggests a lack of awareness of eldercare as a shared social role and a deficiency in the involvement of central and local governments in providing support for eldercare, replicating gender and social inequities (Palacios, 2017, Villalobos, 2019). Consequently, informal caregiving is considered a barrier to female employment.

Aim: This research examines how workplace support for working family caregivers (WfC) of older adults is organised in the Chilean workplace. These new insights could potentially enhance awareness and understanding of workplace support for WfC, thus supporting Chilean society's transformation into a society of care.

Methodological approach: The method of inquiry for this research is Institutional Ethnography (IE) , which, according to its creator, Dorothy Smith, is an alternative full sociology, hence a method of inquiry, ontology and epistemology (Earles and Crawley, 2019, Luken and Vaughan, 2021, Smith, 2005, Smith, 2006). Applying IE involves investigating how things happen as they do (Campbell and Gregor, 2002), beginning and remaining focused on what people do in their everyday lives, and uncovering the relations of power that coordinate and organise people's lives (Rankin, 2017).

This study is for WfC of older adults. Thus, it was conceptually designed to explore their experiences in accessing support at their workplace.

Fieldwork: The first stage of data collection was conducted in the Metropolitan Region of Chile between September and November 2024. Twenty-three one-to-one, face-to-face interviews have been completed to date. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, facilitating an initial analysis.

Initial findings: Through interviewing local informants, I focused on identifying the relevant practices or what WfC does to request or access support in their workplace. This initial analysis allowed me to identify that changes in the care recipient's health status activate the work processes related to workplace support. One of the first processes I have identified so far is when WfC informs their manager about her new life situation.

Contribution: This IE could direct research towards the relations of power that rule everyday lives of WfC and since IE is valuable in identifying policies, practices, and system structures that negatively influence the work of people, it could contribute to social change (Deveau, 2008, Kearney et al., 2019, McLiesh et al., 2024).

The Wellbeing Penalty of Working Mothers

Ioulia Bessa, Helen Norman, Jennifer Tomlinson

(University of Leeds)

There are ongoing interdisciplinary debates about the pay penalties mothers face. Traditionally viewed as primary homemakers, women -and in particular mothers with younger children-are now active participants in the labour force. By 2017, 65.1% of women with children under the age of three were employed in the UK. Despite this progress, mothers of young children still had the lowest employment rates among all adults (ONS, 2017).

Alongside the rise in maternal labour force participation, the persistent "motherhood penalty" remains a critical issue. This term refers to employment changes following childbirth that lead to a cumulative loss of work experience and earnings (Budig & England, 2001; Gangl & Ziefle, 2009). The motherhood penalty often manifests as lower wages for new mothers or those with young children compared to women without children and men with young children. While extensive research has explored the financial penalties mothers face, less attention has been given to other consequences and in particular issues associated to wellbeing of a mother returning to work. The paper argues that, alongside pay disparities, working mothers also experience a significant wellbeing penalty that has not been adequately addressed or examined in the sociology of work. The paper also examines the relationship between the number and the age of children and the subsequent impact of these two factors on mothers' wellbeing.

Drawing on Understanding Society, a large longitudinal survey in the United Kingdom, we use Waves 1 to 13 (2008–2023), focusing on employed women aged 18–50. The study defines "mothers" as women who are responsible for at least one child at the time of measurement and "non-mothers" as women in the same age range without the responsibility of children. The same criteria are applied to men comparing fathers (aged 18-50 and responsible for at least one child while being employed) to non- fathers.

Looking initially at the relationship between pay and wellbeing results indicate a positive relationship between them, but for men only. Consistent with previous research results confirm that children (either first or second) lead to pay penalties for women, but not for men. Advancing to managerial or supervisory positions and aging are associated with higher pay for both men and women.

When looking at wellbeing, our results indicated a positive relationship with pay, for men only. The first child, a woman has/is responsible for, provides a lift to wellbeing. This, however, does not apply for men, which seems to have no impact. The second child, however, provides a drop in wellbeing; this - once again- applies for women only and not for men. Drops in wellbeing are also applied when mothers are given managerial and supervisor duties and also when switching to part time. Younger people report worse wellbeing. These results apply both to men and women.

The results highlight the complex interplay between pay, parenthood, and wellbeing, underscoring the need for further research on the non-monetary penalties working mothers face.

(Dis)Continuities in Professions, Occupations & Skills – Room 3.212

Occupational Shifts and Social Mobility among Dalit Agricultural Labourers in Haryana (India): A Sociological Analysis

Vikash Kumar, Lalatendu Keshari Dash

(Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee)

This study employs Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital—economic, social, and cultural—to examine the occupational shifts and social mobility of Dalit agricultural labourers in Haryana, India. Bourdieu's framework elucidates how the interplay of these forms of capital, embedded within structures of power and inequality, shapes individual and collective trajectories of mobility. In the context of Haryana's agrarian economy, the intensifying capitalization of agriculture has precipitated profound socio-economic transformations, disrupted traditional employment structures, and exacerbated the marginalization of Dalit communities. This research investigates how the unequal distribution and conversion of capital, mediated by caste-based structural violence, influence the occupational trajectories of Dalit agricultural labour households over two generations.

The study identifies three critical shifts in rural employment patterns: (1) the migration of Dalit labourers to non-farm sectors, (2) caste-based atrocities prompting changes in rural employment, and (3) the transition from permanent/attached agricultural labour to casual labour. These shifts are theorized as manifestations of the constrained conversion of capital. Dalit households, despite possessing embodied cultural capital (e.g., traditional agricultural skills), often lack the economic and social capital necessary to access stable or upwardly mobile occupations. Consequently, many are forced into unskilled urban jobs, while those remaining in agriculture face persistent precarity due to inadequate earnings and the devaluation of their labour in a modernizing economy.

The analysis underscores the role of structural violence—rooted in caste-based discrimination, systemic inequalities, and inadequate policy implementation—in perpetuating the marginalization of Dalit agricultural labourers. Structural barriers hinder the conversion of cultural and social capital into economic capital, thereby limiting opportunities for social mobility. The study advocates for targeted policy interventions, including wage increases, rural agro-industrialization, worker-specific loan waivers, and the effective implementation of reservation policies, to address these systemic inequities. By dismantling structural barriers and facilitating the equitable conversion of capital, such measures could foster inclusive development and improve the socio-economic conditions of Dalit agricultural labourers.

Rodents, Bodily Fluids, and Dirty Plates: The Management of 'Dirty Work' in the UK Hospitality Industry

James Green

(University Of Worcester)

Forms of dirty work consume the job role requirements for a bartender working in a public house (pub) in the UK. Rather than performing dirty labour due to medical intervention of health issues, for example, mopping up bodily fluids (vomit and excrement), collecting dirty plates and used glasses, picking up used drug paraphernalia, wiping down grimy tables in a pub are, in most cases, a product of enjoyment. This paper will outline the management of dirty work through the lens of organisational requirements (e.g., processes and procedures), third-party institutions (e.g., environmental health), and employees (e.g., management of 'dirt', concealment from customers). While the former set the conditions of 'cleanliness' from far removed locations, the (low-paid) employees bear the brunt of the symbolic and material effects of managing 'dirt' at work. At organisational level, pub corporations have been accused by the participants of this study of half-heartedly managing health and safety, while failing to provide relevant training, which has negatively impacted employee engagement and wellbeing. At an individual level, employees adopt coping mechanisms when having to deal with degrading and disgusting tasks at work. They, for example, may pass off cleaning to customers, lower-echeloned workers, or new starters, dissociate while performing these tasks, or adopt collegial emotional labour – the management and enticement of feeling and display between colleagues – to aid in the conjuring of 'professional' display. The data presented in this paper is an outcome of a wider project in which I undertook a year-long hybrid ethnography in a pub based in Central London. I worked as a bartender, adopting participant observation and observant participation, to investigate pub workers' experiences of emotion and managerial control through the eyes of both the self and other.

Consequences of Dignity in Circular Dirty Work in India

Lynn Wilson

(University of Glasgow)

Waste pickers in India are integral to the country's waste management system, especially in urban areas where municipal services often fail to meet the growing volume of waste. They perform critical tasks in waste segregation and recycling, diverting waste from landfills and minimizing environmental pollution. The informal sector, primarily composed of waste pickers, contributes to India's recycling efforts, supporting the circular economy by reclaiming valuable materials that might otherwise end up in landfills. Despite their significant role in environmental sustainability, waste pickers face social and economic marginalization. They work under hazardous conditions, often without legal recognition or labor protections, and remain excluded from formal waste management policies. Recent reports highlight the exacerbation of these challenges due to climate change. It is estimated that as many as four million people in India scratch out a living searching through landfills for anything they can sell. Extreme heat has intensified the hazardous conditions for waste pickers, making their already dangerous jobs even more perilous exposing the most vulnerable to heat-related health issues, with prolonged exposure leading to conditions such as heatstroke and cardiovascular diseases. This research seeks to explore the role of waste pickers within India's waste management system, examining both the opportunities and challenges related to their socio-economic conditions, as well as policies aimed at improving their livelihoods and social inclusion.

To date a scoping field trip has been undertaken by the author, visiting different waste management related nonprofit organisations that support women from the lowest cast communities in India, to generate income from managed waste processing work, including organic waste, plastics and clothing. Site visits were undertaken and the researcher observed women working in residential areas, picking and processing food and organic waste into refined compost that was sold on to farmers. Other sites include a plastics waste management facility and a second hand clothing processing organisation. A sample of women were selected by the nonprofit organisation to share their experience that included an intense six week training programme about waste management. During this exchange, the workers shared that this experience has enabled them to work with the waste of others, with a sense of dignity and purpose.

This paper sets out a proposal to undertake a new research project in Mumbai that applies a theoretical framework of consequentialism and dirty work, within the context of the transition to circular societies. The research addresses the future of waste management work in the most densely problematic areas by undertaking multi-method qualitative research, engaging nonprofit organisations, waste workers and citizens of the homes serviced by the waste workers. The purpose of the research is to increase a deeper understanding of the environmental, moral and social consequences and impact of the role of formal organisations that support waste workers.

It is proposed that the findings will make a significant contribution to circular economy and waste management policy developments in India.

Historical (Dis)Continuities & Crises in/at Work & Employment 1 – Room 3.209

"A fish out of water": Employees' Perceptions of Working from Home during COVID-19

Einav Segev, Yael Hochman, Oshrit Kaspi-Baruch

(Sapir Academic College)

This published qualitative study explored perceptions regarding work from home (WFH). The COVID-19 pandemic led to a sharp increase in WFH. Despite its potential advantages compared to work outside home (WOH), WFH may also be challenging and intensify both work-home and home-work conflicts.

The study explores these issues through the lens of boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000), which examines the interface between WFH and the home and family domains. The theory defines three types of boundaries: the physical boundary, which dictates the location where activities are performed; the temporal boundary, related to when the activity occurs; and the psychological boundary, which focuses on behaviors and emotions associated with the roles typical of each domain. The sample included 150 Israeli employees who worked from home due to COVID-19. We inquired about WFH perceptions by asking participants to provide metaphors for WFH, as well as WOH. We also explored the advantages and challenges of WFH as reported by the participants. The findings pointed to complex perceptions regarding WFH, with most participants viewing it as negative. Among the women, a minority viewed it positively, as it enabled them greater space for negotiating work-home and home-work conflicts, suggesting that traditional gender roles have been maintained. Thus, while examining changes due to the shock of the pandemic, the study sheds light on WFH that endure under ordinary circumstances. This study demonstrates the ongoing importance of social and communal support, as well as state policies, for promoting gender equality.

More than a Meal: The Workday Lunch as a Barometer of Work, Employment, and Social Change

Jennifer Whillans, Elena Dirik

(University of Bristol, School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies)

Most workers, most days, eat lunch 'at work,' wherever that workplace may be. After meals at home, the workplace remains the most common place to eat during the week. Yet the British workday lunch is 'in crisis': brief, often solitary, consumed while working, and gastronomically uninspired. Despite its prevalence and problematic status, it has been largely overlooked in both the sociology of food, lacking the symbolism of family meals or restaurant dining, and the sociology of work, where lunch is framed as a 'break' rather than an integral part of working life. However, as previous research has shown, it remains a significant feature of the workday and institutional rhythms and routines.

The pandemic accelerated shifts in working arrangements, increasing home and hybrid work, altering workplace cultures, and, for many, relocating lunch from the office to the home. Yet rather than replacing existing routines, these changes have layered onto them, generating new frictions. This paper examines UK print media representations of the workday lunch in the 'new normal' (2022–2024) through a thematic analysis of 145 newspaper articles. It asks: How is the workday lunch represented in UK print media? What does this reveal about work and employment today?

Media portrayals depict the workday lunch not simply as a practice in crisis but as a barometer revealing broader social crises. They reveal both continuity in the persistent critiques of British lunch habits compared with European counterparts and the ongoing blurring of boundaries between work and personal time. They also highlight discontinuity, including heightened concerns about social cohesion at work, employee-employer tensions and antagonism, and the financial strain of returning to or working from the office. The workday lunch is not simply a mundane practice but reflects deeper transformations in work, employment, and social relations.

Historical (Dis)Continuities & Crises in/at Work & Employment 2 – Room 3.211

From Pause to Pivot: Gendered Career Shifts in the Face of Disrupted Time

Efrat Givaty, Michal Frenkel

(Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Historical disjunctions and crises, such as pandemics and wars, shape individuals' career choices by influencing both the labor market's restructuring during crises and the personal meaning individuals assign to their work and career aspirations in the face of these events. The current study examines the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war that broke out in Israel following the events of October 7th on midlife employees' decisions to resign from their jobs and undergo career shifts. It further explores how gender differences manifest in framing the external crisis and the following career shocks.

Based on a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with professional employees aged 38-55 who quit their jobs during the pandemic (N=32) and the war (N=20), the paper reveals how collective time, which seemingly halts during a historical disjuncture, collides with the sense of personal time running out — a characteristic of the midlife period. This collision prompts employees to seek a profound reorganization of their lives, particularly in times of widespread uncertainty when maintaining employment stability might otherwise seem most desirable.

The study identifies two key gender differences in how historical disjunctions have been experienced by senior employees at midlife, and transformed their career trajectories:
1. The Intersection of Historical and Biographical Time: Both during COVID-19 and at the onset of the war, the historical disjuncture — marked by suspended work processes and an inability to plan — generated a sense of frozen collective time accompanied by profound doubts about future trajectories. These collective uncertainties coincided with the existential doubts typical of midlife, including concerns about personal futures and potential opportunities. While most men in the study responded to this temporal freeze by pausing their biographical timelines, anticipating a return to their previous trajectory post-crisis, for most women biographical time seemed to speed up, imposing upon them additional tasks primarily related to family work and maintaining the social structure surrounding them.
2. Disruption of Routine and Control Over Time: The suspension of daily routines, particularly the breakdown of work-family balance among senior employees, triggered what has been termed a "COVID epiphany" for women more than men. This epiphany heightened women's awareness of the importance of gaining control over their personal and family time. Consequently, women were more likely than men to initiate career changes in pursuit of this control. While men reported taking career breaks with the intention of returning to their existing career paths, women described a profound shift in values and a desire for career changes that aligned with their revised priorities and aspirations. Women, more than men, perceived the historical crisis as a call for personal reinvention — and they answered that call.

We expand the theoretical understanding of career shocks and their consequences in showing how age and gender intersect in shaping employees' responses to historical disjuncture and highlight the central role of historical and biographical time perceptions in decision-making during crises. It underscores the interplay between these temporal constructs as a key factor influencing career choices in times of crises.

Labor Negotiation, Production Politics, and Conservative Transformation in China's Publishing Industry: Evidence from Live Streaming Marketing Practitioners

Minghan Hou

(Communication University of China)

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the publishing sector was institutionalized under a tripartite governance framework encompassing content production (publishing houses), distribution and sales (Xinhua Bookstore), and printing (state-run factories). This division of labor, entrenched within the socialist planned economy, provided structural legitimacy and operational coherence during the nascent stages of the industry. However, the post-reform liberalization of markets destabilized this system, precipitating crises in book sales (1985) and subscription models (1986).

Subsequent market-oriented reforms precipitated a continuous transition: publishing entities midway through "public institutions adopting enterprise management practices" to state-owned cultural enterprises. This transformation imposed dual administrative-market responsibilities on practitioners, embedding bureaucratic hierarchies within competitive market dynamics. Consequently, the dialectic between market imperatives and political mandates has emerged as a central axis of tension, encountering the industry with digitalization amid oscillations between profit-driven and ideological priorities.

Institutional restructuring and technological innovation have further complicated identity formation among publishing professionals. To interrogate this phenomenon at a meso-level, a six-month ethnographic study was conducted within the live-streaming marketing division of a major Chinese publishing house, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with 13 practitioners (selected from an initial pool of 30 candidates). Drawing on Burawoy's factory regimes framework, this study reconceptualizes publishing labor as a socio-political construct shaped by production relations. A historical lens further contextualizes these dynamics within the broader trajectory of China's publishing reforms.The analysis identifies three dialectical tensions within live streaming practices.
1. Labor Content: Live streaming versus administrative duties
2. Professional Identity: Individual agency versus collective institutional roles
3. Entrepreneurial Logic: Traffic metrics versus political performance targets

Despite these contradictions, a hybrid governance model—termed "centralized management with personalized operational tactics"—mediates tensions at the macro-level. Interviewees analogized this system to a "courtyard within a skyscraper": political structures (e.g., bianzhi staffing systems) confer legitimacy and authority, while market mechanisms (e.g., outsourced labor) operationalize workflows, albeit at the cost of marginalizing non-core roles and exacerbating income precarity. This symbiotic yet asymmetrical collaboration challenges conventional narratives of political-market antagonism, revealing instead a negotiated coexistence constrained by opaque power dynamics, limited reform incentives, and fragmented practitioner identities.

"Abandoning the utopia of unfettered markets compels us to confront societal realities." This pragmatism underpins a conservative turn in industry strategies. Early reform-era calls for radical marketization (e.g., "intermediary distribution networks" or "property rights clarity") have yielded to incremental adaptations, such as in-house distribution systems and government-led project outsourcing. Echoing the classic Chinese metaphor "crossing the river by feeling the stones," these cautious yet adaptive measures reconcile historical legacies with developmentalist imperatives, defining a uniquely Chinese path of conservative modernization.

Belonging and Social Change: Voluntary Work in the Swedish Home Guard

Jennifer Hobbins

(Swedish Defense University)

Accentuated by geopolitical power struggles, ongoing wars and other crises, societies and working lives are being reshaped in ways that were previously unthinkable. Such disruptive forces may lead to fragmentation of work (Beck & Brook, 2020; Sargent et al., 2021). They may, however, also provide a foundation for solidarity and social change. One manifestation of such development is the increasing commitment to voluntary organisations and performance of unpaid work. Previous research has underscored the implications of exploring voluntary work as a discrete work category (Overgaard,

2019). Whereas scholars have argued that non-profit organisations in the past have been steered toward funders' priorities (Venter, Currie & McCracken, 2019), this study shifts the attention towards how changes in the external environment, such as conflicts and crises, are reshaping the work that is being undertaken in voluntary organisations.

The research project draws on 36 biographical interviews with 25 men and 11 women volunteering in the Swedish Home Guard. Their ages ranged from early 20s to late 60s, and their work experience in the organization spanned from 2 to 37 years. The Swedish Home Guard was founded during WWII as a voluntary defence force characterized by its local attachment, and that has since represented collectivism, continuity and familiarity. The study explores engagement in voluntary work through the lens of belonging as forwarded by sociologist Vanessa May (2011; 2013; 2017). From this perspective, a sense of belonging is achieved through iterative, habitual, everyday experiences. The concept involves a dynamic element, given that the sense of belonging, as well as the sense of self, shift over time. Further, the dynamic nature of belonging allows for examination of social change; while belonging has a positive connotation, the absence of said feature can also represent an opening for resistance or (political) action.

Following the biographical approach of the study, the analysis is structured along the framework of Emirbayer & Mische (1998) and engages in the volunteers' search for belonging, nostalgic recollections and prospective aspirations. The findings show that belonging serves as a mechanism of a collectivistic orientation, which is crucial for individuals' enduring engagement in the Home Guard. The sense of belonging provides volunteers with guidance to navigate through social life, and to identify places and activities that feel like 'theirs'. However, the study was conducted at a juncture of conflict and subsequent militarisation, which resulted in growing tendencies towards rationalisation but also amplified expectations on individuals to put in even more work. The changes in the external environment were set against the interviewed home guards' altruistic and social values: while the collectivistic orientation and sense of belonging appear to be reinforced, voluntary work in the Home Guard seems to be transforming into an obligation, undermining the sense of belonging.

(Im)Mobility & Migration – Room 3.214

Temporary Labor, Permanent Exclusion? A Critical Analysis of Sweden's New Work Permit Policies

Lisen Lowstedt

(Karolinska Institute and London School of Economics and Political Science)

In the wake of Sweden's declared 'paradigm shift' in immigration policy following the 2022 election, this paper examines the policy debates surrounding the dramatic increase in the maintenance requirement for third-country nationals (TCNs) seeking work permits. As of November 1, 2023, this requirement has more than doubled (Prop. 2021/22:284), despite strong opposition from employers' associations and limited evidence supporting its effectiveness. While the policy shift reflects an attempt to curtail low-skilled migration, a striking continuity remains—the exemption of seasonal workers from these restrictions.

Using the What's the Problem Represented to be? (WPR) approach, this study interrogates the underlying assumptions shaping policy discourse, challenging conventional views of policies as neutral problem-solving tools. Through an analysis of government documents and stakeholder statements, the paper argues that the persistent acceptance of seasonal workers—despite the broader framing of low-skilled migration as a social and economic problem—is not a policy failure but a deliberate strategy. This strategic continuity reflects a balancing act between economic demands for cheap, flexible labor and the political imperative to appease nationalist-populist anti-immigrant sentiment.

The findings highlight an emerging trend of increased temporariness in labor migration, where certain migrant groups are granted conditional inclusion in the workforce while remaining permanently excluded from national belonging. This echoes historical patterns of guest worker programs but also signals a shifting landscape of labor precarity under contemporary migration regimes. By situating these developments within broader debates on continuities and discontinuities in work and employment, this

paper contributes to critical discussions on the intersection of labor, migration, and the evolving boundaries of citizenship.

Social Stratification in Uncertain Times: Employment Trajectories of Returning Chinese International Students

Chu Liu, Yufeng Wu

(University College London)

In an era of global uncertainties, personal life trajectories have become increasingly unpredictable, with diverse potential outcomes and probabilities. Against this backdrop, this study explores the class-differentiated employment trajectories of returning Chinese international students by conducting semi-structured interviews with 82 individuals from diverse social backgrounds. The findings reveal that uncertainty has deepened class-based stratification in employment trajectories. First, sectoral disparities, rising hiring standards and a shrinking job market place disadvantaged students at a competitive disadvantage, as their limited access to quality education, internship opportunities and high-growth industries. Additionally, regional disparities in job availability exacerbate the issue, as privileged individuals secure jobs in major cities while others face housing costs and weaker regional networks, limiting high-quality employment access. Furthermore, periods of instability heighten the preference for stable positions (e.g., state-owned enterprises, banks, and large corporations) among returnees and their families. However, such positions increasingly impose implicit requirements, such as financial capital contributions, during uncertain times, further intensifying internal stratification even within advantaged social groups.

PhD Showcase

Living on the Edge: Continuities and Discontinuities in Work and Survival among Young Male Migrants in Paris' Informal Housing

Abel Mavura

(University of East Anglia)

Young male migrants in Paris' informal housing such as squats and foyers navigate a precarious existence shaped by continuities and discontinuities in work and employment, reflecting broader sociological tensions amid rapid societal change. This paper, part of a proposed PhD study, investigates how men aged 18–35 adapt to socio-legal uncertainty and urban exclusion in a migration hub marked by historical colonial ties and restrictive policies (e.g., France's 2018 Asylum and Immigration Law). The research addresses a pressing issue: how systemic barriers and global transformations reshape migrant labor and survival strategies, challenging grand narratives of stable employment.

Continuities persist in the form of enduring exclusion unstable legal statuses, restricted access to formal jobs, and gendered norms of self-reliance echoing decades of migrant marginalization in Europe (OECD, 2023). These barriers align with historical patterns of labor exploitation and socioeconomic precarity, reinforcing a familiar struggle for decent work. Yet, discontinuities emerge as these migrants forge resilience through informal networks and self-organized solidarities, disrupting conventional employment structures. Drawing on Hagan & Wassink (2021), who highlight migrant resourcefulness in informal economies, this study explores how survival strategies such as day labor, hustling, or mutual aid emerge as alternatives amid technological acceleration and economic crises like Covid-19.

Theoretically, the research employs Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory (1959) to analyze migrants' "frontstage" performances public displays of labor and toughness versus "backstage" communal support in multi-ethnic, multi-faith settings. This framework reveals how they navigate uncertainty, balancing societal expectations with adaptive practices. Methodologically, the study adopts an ethnographic approach, including semi-structured interviews and participant observation in sites like Canal Saint-Denis and Mairie d'Ivry. At this pre-fieldwork stage, the research design prioritizes lived experiences to uncover how work and survival intertwine with housing precarity. Data collection is planned for 2026-2027, with ethics approval pending from the University of East Anglia.

The contribution lies in illuminating how continuities of exclusion fuel discontinuities in labor agency, offering a sociological lens on precarious work beyond formal employment. It challenges assumptions of stability by showing how migrants' informal efforts reshape relational practices and norms in urban

margins. Expected findings suggest that while crises exacerbate vulnerability, they also catalyze innovative solidarities, with implications for policy on migrant integration and job quality. For the "(Im)Mobility and migration" stream, this work bridges historical labor patterns with contemporary disruptions, enriching debates on work's evolving nature.

As a PhD Showcase submission, this abstract outlines a work-in-progress, seeking feedback to refine its theoretical and empirical scope. It contributes to understanding how migrants inhabit the intersection of continuity and discontinuity, navigating unknowns in work and employment with resilience and collective agency.

Expatriation, Power and Agency: A Postcolonial Analysis of Indian Expatriates in the Netherlands

Dulini Fernando

(Aston University)

A bourgeoning literature inscribed in psychological theorising addresses the issue of expatriate adjustment to new work settings, considering adjustment as a state of psychological comfort (Black et al., 1991) and exploring the influence of an array of individual, organisational and non-work variables (Dimitrova et al., 2023). While providing useful insights, this literature is based on a conception of culture as static and as devoid of power differences. This is problematic because power differences are a pertinent feature of cross-cultural interactions within multinational organisations (Vaara et al., 2021).

An expatriate's approach to negotiating a sense of fit within new host country work settings is likely to be shaped by understandings of the power position of the country of origin in relation to host country nationals. Indeed, considerations of relative power are likely to be particularly pertinent in the case of expatriates originating in the Global South who may perceive themselves to occupy a low power position in the new organisation's discursive space. The fact that most studies on expatriate adjustment focus on the experiences of individuals from the Global North arguably occlude this reality. Indeed, the existing literature on expatriate adjustment has been criticized for insufficiently researching expatriates from the less economically developed world (Dimitrova et al., 2023) who may experience more challenging contextual conditions within western organisations.

We address this omission through a qualitative study of expatriation among Indian professionals in the in the information technology (IT) industry. Specifically, drawing on 43 interviews, we examine how Indian expatriates in The Netherlands account for transitioning into Dutch work-settings. We frame our analysis drawing on insights from postcolonial theory (Jack and Westwood, 2009; Prasad, 2003).

(In)Decent Work & Employment 1 – Room 2.217

Navigating Continuities and Discontinuities in Work-Life Balance: Insights from Employee Narratives

Athina Karatza

(Independent Researcher)

This presentation explores continuities and discontinuities in the experience of work-life balance through qualitative interviews with 16 employees across diverse sectors in Greece. The study critically examines how work-life balance has been reframed in an era of individualism, high-performance expectations, and an always-on culture. Contemporary work environments, dominated by to-do lists, constant connectivity, and reactive communication (e.g., emails, notifications), have reshaped traditional understandings of free time and leisure. The disappearance of "unproductive" time and the cultural devaluation of boredom reflect a broader intensification of labour rhythms encroaching on personal life.

Drawing on sociological theories of labour, flexibility, gendered work arrangements, and critical analyses of contemporary Happycracy, the study investigates how workers negotiate personal and

professional responsibilities amid these pressures, particularly post-pandemic. It explores how discourses of positive thinking, emotional self-management, and wellbeing –promoted by life coaches, wellness experts, and fitness cultures– reinforce the imperative not only to perform and achieve but also to remain happy, resilient, and emotionally balanced, regardless of working conditions. These discourses foster an individualistic perception of success and failure, where investing in oneself becomes a moral obligation, and any inability to achieve balance is framed as a personal shortcoming rather than a response to structural constraints.

The research employs in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a purposive and diverse sample, complemented by the Social Identity Wheel as a reflexive tool to explore how intersecting identities (gender, age, caregiving responsibilities, occupational roles) shape experiences and perceptions of work-life balance.

Key axes of analysis include perceptions of work intensification, the impact of flexible and hybrid work arrangements, digital surveillance and performance monitoring, and the intersection of work-life balance with gendered expectations and care responsibilities. The study also examines how the pressure to sustain a positive emotional state adds an additional layer of emotional labour to contemporary work experiences.

Findings show that while flexibility and work-life balance are promoted as paths toward autonomy, wellbeing, and job quality, they often conceal persistent structural pressures and inequalities. Women describe challenges balancing professional demands with responsibilities in the private sphere, including family care and household management. Male participants report pressures to overperform, sustain constant availability, and meet escalating productivity expectations – pressures that conflict with personal life and wellbeing. New forms of digital monitoring and performance tracking blur boundaries and reinforce precariousness across all workers, contributing to deteriorating workplace wellbeing.

Foregrounding workers' lived experiences, this presentation argues that work-life balance increasingly functions as a normative and aspirational ideal rather than a tangible reality. These narratives reflect both continuities, such as entrenched gender roles, persistent work intensification, and deepening experiences of alienation, and discontinuities, including the shift to hybrid work models and the rise of digital labour governance post-pandemic.

This study contributes to ongoing debates within the (In)Decent Work and Employment stream by critically examining how the pursuit of balance intersects with precariousness, burnout, and wellbeing. It calls for rethinking employment practices and policies that move beyond rhetoric, offering tangible support for sustainable and equitable working lives in an era of digitally mediated labour.

Management Compassion as an Antidote to Labour Control: Reducing Work-related Stress and Navigating Uncertainty

Marina Boulos

(London Metropolitan University)

Work-related stress and uncertainty affect employees across industries, impacting both well-being and organisational productivity (Hassard et al., 2018; Nixon et al., 2011). While stress is inherent in many work environments, its detrimental effects can be mitigated through leadership practices, particularly through compassionate management. This paper examines how management compassion reduces stress and uncertainty by shaping organisational culture, power dynamics, and leadership practices.

This research draws on the sociology of work and organisational theory, particularly Labour Process Theory (LPT). Braverman (1974) highlights how capitalist work structures create alienation, stress, and power imbalances between management and employees. Building on Woods et al. (2019) paper, utilising 'social suffering' and LPT in furthering research about interactions between workplace conditions and mental-(ill)health. This paper argues that management compassion can serve as an antidote to the negative effects of labour control by addressing social inequalities. By fostering empathy, active listening, and responsiveness, compassionate management can democratise power, ease hierarchical pressures, and reduce stress.

Compassionate leadership, defined as leadership that is empathetic and responsive to employee needs, and actively engages in reducing stress and uncertainty (Dutton et al., 2014), is central to this

investigation. Such leadership can buffer employees against stress caused by surveillance, cost-cutting, work intensification, and organisational change (Robinson and Smallman, 2006). The paper hypothesises that management compassion, through practices such as emotional support and fostering trust, can counterbalance the stress created by control mechanisms in organisations, providing employees with a sense of agency, belonging, and support.

To explore this relationship, the research uses a qualitative case study methodology, incorporating in-depth interviews with 40 employees and managers across two case studies. One case study is recognised for its efforts to improve stress management interventions (SMIs), while the other faced challenges due to inconsistencies in their SMIs resulting from decentralised practices. The dataset, gathered from late 2015 to early 2017, focuses on management and employee perceptions regarding the implementation and effectiveness of SMIs. Interestingly, management compassion unexpectedly arose many times during the interviews, warranting further attention in the analysis.

Preliminary findings suggest that management compassion plays a crucial role in reducing stress in uncertain work environments. Employees report that compassionate managers—those who engage in active listening, provide emotional support, and build trust—are more effective at reducing stress and navigating periods of uncertainty. In contrast, workplaces where leadership is indifferent or lacks compassion exacerbate stress and reduce employees' ability to cope with organisational challenges (Bhui et al., 2016). These findings support the argument that management compassion can alleviate the negative effects of labour control, contributing to more supportive and equitable workplaces.

This research contributes to the sociology of work by examining how leadership practices and organisational cultures shape the lived experiences of employees in the face of stress and uncertainty (Dextras-Gauthier and Marchand, 2018). By emphasising the sociological dimensions of management compassion, this paper advocates for a shift towards more compassionate organisational cultures, where leadership is not only a mechanism of power but also a key force for social support, employee well-being, and resilience in the workplace.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 2 – Room 2.218

Decent Work and the Fight against Undeclared Work: Computational Text Analysis of EU Initiatives

Alvaro Martinez-Perez, Albert Varela

(University of Sheffield)

This paper presents the empirical findings of a computational text analysis (using Natural Language Processing methods) of the initiatives devised around the European Platform Tackling Undeclared Work. Undeclared work, a significant challenge to decent work and fair employment practices, undermines social protection systems, distorts competition, and deprives workers of fundamental rights. The EU Platform, established to enhance cooperation and coordination among Member States, plays a crucial role in addressing this multifaceted issue.

Our study leverages a substantial corpus of 96 documents produced by the Platform, describing country initiatives to tackle undeclared work from 2014 to 2025 across all EU and EEA countries. We utilize a suite of Python libraries, such as NLTK, spaCy, scikit-learn, and gensim, to extract, process, and analyse such textual data.

We employ topic modelling techniques, specifically Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), to identify the prominent thematic clusters within the Platform's initiatives. This allows us to understand the key areas of focus, such as information exchange, joint actions, awareness raising, and capacity building. Furthermore, sentiment analysis is conducted to assess the tone and emotional valence of the documents, revealing the Platform's approach to communicating its strategies and achievements.

Meanwhile, network analysis is applied to map the relationships between key entities, concepts, and actions mentioned in the documents. This visual representation provides insights into the interconnectedness of different initiatives and the actors involved. We also conduct keyword frequency

analysis to identify the most salient terms and phrases, highlighting the Platform's priorities and strategic language.

Our findings reveal the Platform's emphasis on collaborative actions and knowledge sharing among Member States. We observe a strong focus on preventive measures, such as enhancing labour inspectorates' capacity and promoting awareness campaigns. However, we also identify potential gaps in addressing the root causes of undeclared work, such as precarious employment and social exclusion.

The analysis underscores the Platform's commitment to promoting decent work principles, including fair wages, safe working conditions, and social protection. Nevertheless, the study suggests that a more holistic approach is needed to tackle the complex nature of undeclared work, considering the diverse socio-economic contexts across the EU.

This paper contributes to the understanding of the EU Platform's efforts in combating undeclared work, offering valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners. By employing robust text analysis methods, we provide an empirical basis for assessing the effectiveness of the Platform's initiatives and identifying areas for improvement, ultimately contributing to the advancement of decent work and fair employment practices within the European Union.

The Difficulties of Measuring Underemployment and the Implications for Decent Work

Vanessa Beck, Levana Magnus, Daiga Kamerade, Tracey Warren, Vanesa Fuertes, Luis Torres

(University of Bristol)

Underemployment has become a key policy issue with increasing numbers of workers wanting to work more hours than they are offered by their employer; being paid below the real living wage; and/or not utilising their qualifications and skills in their current job, and therefore being time, wage and/or skills underemployed. Underemployed workers may face continuing insecurities in terms of their working hours and income as well as satisfaction with their jobs yet are often stuck in low skilled jobs with low pay. We present empirical mixed-methods data from our sociological investigation of underemployment and the lived experiences of underemployed workers (see https://underemployment.info). Data includes results from the LFS, UK Household Longitudinal Survey, and the CIPD's bespoke UK Working Lives Survey, as well as interviews with employers, and 60 underemployed respondents based in Bristol, Greater Manchester, Glasgow and Nottingham.

The focus of the paper is on the implications of complexities in our findings depending on method and place and what this means for the measurement of underemployment overall, as well as for how underemployment or in-decent work is experienced by individuals. A range of ways of measurement can be employed for each of our three underemployment indicators (time, wage, skills), demonstrating how conceptualising underemployment might be problematic when positions are based in different understandings. For example, the official figures and measurement of underemployment focus heavily on time underemployment, whereas our research suggests that this is the least common form of underemployment.

The main argument of this paper is that the measurement of underemployment has implications for national approaches to data collection on work and employment, theoretical understanding of a key labour market phenomenon, and for policy aimed at supporting the development of decent work.

Open Stream – Room 2.220

The 'Ideal Mother-worker' in China: Professional Women Navigating Career and Family Choices

Yi Chen, Arjan Keizer, Isabel Távora

(University of Manchester)

Motherhood has been recognised as a key factor negatively affecting women's employment status and career advancement (Brown, 2010; McIntosh et al., 2012). This also applies to Chinese women but there remains a limited understanding of how Chinese women experience, navigate, and negotiate their dual roles as mothers and professionals. The relaxation of China's one-child policy in 2016 has further

intensified concerns about the potential deterioration of women's career prospects due to increased expectations that women might have more children, highlighting the need for research to understand how professional women respond to these challenges (Cooke, 2017; Liang, 2017).

Drawing on data from two focus groups with 16 female professionals and interviews with 57 professionals and managers, this study explores societal and organisational expectations placed on women and the ways in which women exercise agency in navigating their careers and family responsibilities. The data revealed some of the challenges and tensions experienced by professional women in trying to balance work and motherhood in a very unsupportive work environment. Organisational expectations of the 'ideal worker' demanded full-time availability, long working hours, and frequent business travel, with limited adjustments for family responsibilities. Simultaneously, societal norms expected mothers to take the primary responsibility for childcare while remaining fully active in the workforce. Within this environment, women negotiated their career choices and sought support for balancing their dual responsibilities.

The challenges were amplified as their employers perceived women as less productive, and engaged in pre-emptive discrimination, thereby undermining their career efforts. The recent relaxation of fertility policies has intensified concerns about women's productivity and the costs associated with pregnancies, further increasing employer discrimination and restricting women's employment opportunities. This study introduces the concept of the 'ideal mother-worker' in China: a dual and contradictory expectation that women should take primary responsibility for childcare while also working full-time and long hours. However, despite women's commitment to both roles, they remain constrained by organisational expectations from workers that contradict their dual responsibilities, thus limiting their career advancement. This 'ideal mother-worker' concept illustrates how full-time work and good mothering are not necessarily contradictory, as work can be integrated into motherhood expectations. While this encourages women's workplace participation, it also places substantial pressure on them and makes career advancement challenging due to limited institutional and organisational support.

Religion, Breastfeeding and Employment in Qatar and the Mediating Role of Entitlements

Patrizia Kokot-Blamey, Sara Rashid, Grace James

(Queen Mary, University of London)

There is consistent evidence of the long- and short-term health as well as wider benefits of breastfeeding for both mother and child (Wiciński et al., 2020) following birth and beyond the first year of a child's life. This makes it a key concern for policy makers and those working in public health. Returning to employment is a primary reason for breastfeeding cessation among new mothers (Al-Katufi et al., 2020). This empirical research shares insights from interview data with fifty employed Qatari mothers with a focus on understanding the role of organisational support policies in supporting breastfeeding mothers within a context that offers only minimal leave entitlements (50 and 60 days leave in private and public sector respectively) on the one hand, yet culturally emphasises the importance of breastfeeding one's child for at least two years, in accordance with Qur'anic instructions, on the other hand. Thematic data analysis was used to process the data and develop the resulting themes and understanding (Braun and Clarke, 2014). Theoretically, this work is framed O'Reilly's (2016) matricentric feminism as well as a return to Hays' (1996) original notion of intensive mothering as a cultural paradox, where women are expected to be both full-time workers and yet available mothers, but examined within a new context. The findings unpick the dilemmas the women face upon return to work and the role of organisational support polices in the absence of significant leave entitlements to either help or complicate meeting the juxtaposed expectations and norms related to what constitutes an 'ideal worker' (Acker, 2006; Lee, 2018) and what constitutes a 'good Muslim mother'. The accounts portrayed a sense of entrapment in a cultural context that, we show, critically extends, and aggravates the cultural paradox Hays' (1996) described in her seminal work on intensive mothering. Evidence provided by the interviewees shows that the centrality of Qatari mothers in the provision of care to infants is elevated by religious doctrine, and yet undermined by the need to return to work after only two months, with organisational support policies at best further complicating their desire to breastfeed their children to meet their own expectations and beliefs.

Technology & Work – Room 3.205

Evolving Worker Agency in the Increasingly Automated and Digitalised Hospitality Workplace

Agnieszka Rydzik

(University of Lincoln)

This paper discusses findings from a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship study exploring the ways in which emerging technologies deployed in hospitality workplaces are reshaping hospitality work through altering working conditions and workplace interactions. It addresses the following research questions: (i) How do hospitality workers navigate the increasingly automated and digitalised hospitality workplace; and (ii) what are their in-situ agentic responses to these in-progress transformations that are reshaping hospitality work?

For less privileged worker groups that are often excluded from other sectors, hospitality plays a critical – yet under-appreciated – societal role in providing work and sustaining livelihoods. Rooted in the service economy, the sector prides itself in offering host-guest experiences based on the ideals of hospitality, welcome and human connection. Over the past decade, however, hospitality workplaces have faced continuous crisis, significantly affected by the pandemic, Brexit, acute labour shortages and growing operating costs due to the energy and cost of living crisis. This resulted in mass closures of pubs and restaurants as well as an ideological management drive towards efficiencies. Technology is increasingly presented to employers as the best solution to address staff shortages, cut costs and increase productivity, with numerous products – from mundane solutions to sophisticated AI models – being developed for hotel receptions, housekeeping departments, kitchens and restaurants.

Driven by the persuasive discourses of efficiency and productivity, the general sector direction towards accelerated digitalisation and automation is having disruptive implications for workers and their livelihoods. However, limited empirical and worker-centric research exists about the ways in which technology-driven workplace transformation is – in visible and less visible ways – affecting workers and their agency, in particular workers in lower-skilled, lower-paid (often customer-facing interactive) precarious jobs and less privileged worker groups that the sector relies on, such as students, migrants and women.

Drawing on data from 65 interviews with hospitality workers in a range of roles, the paper conceptualises the ways in which hospitality workers deploy their agentic power to adapt to the continuous technology-driven reshaping of their roles and shifting social relations at work. It discusses how (dis)continuities play out in the lives of hospitality workers, and explores the adaptive and resistive mechanisms that hospitality workers deploy in their everyday working lives to make sense of the accelerated technology-induced ruptures. The paper's contribution lies in its theorisation of workers' responses to the changes that are coming to dominate the future of work in service economies, and proposing ways to avoid entrenching technology-induced inequalities and furthering precarisation of largely non-unionised workers in a sector where mechanisms for collective worker voice are limited.

Outsourcing Digital Intimate Labour

Victoria Antonio

(Leeds University, Leeds University Business School)

Social media content publishing has allowed for the monetisation of content as a form of online gig work (Hamilton et al, 2022). Paywalled platforms such as OnlyFans, Fansly, and JustForFans are at the intersection of content creation and pornography (Hamilton et al, 2022). Adult content creators (ACC) charge a subscription fee for access to a feed of content, or subscribers can Direct Message (DM) for custom and pay-per-view content (PPV) by "tipping". Sex work is typically embodied labour, however, the asynchronous nature and the non "face to face" communication methods of the platform-mediated digital delivery of sexual content have begun to create unique, new types of business process outsourcing (BPO) of intimate labour functions. For example, it is possible for an ACC building a business based on their image and parasocial, intimate labour, to hire a contractor to respond to DMs as though they are the content creator, thus outsourcing the intimate labour. There is currently only a small body of work on parasocial labour (Zelizer, 2012; Bonifacio et al. 2021; Hair, 2021) and none to date regarding the outsourcing of digital intimate labour.

Using qualitative methodology and currently at the writing up stage, the present research has begun to identify new types of work, business models, and labour relations resulting from asynchronous, digital, and parasocial sex work (ADPSW). The study will map the wider working relations (Brouwers, 2023) of the emerging digital ecosystem of the BPO of intimate labour in ACC. It explores the experiences of the workers who outsource their intimate labour, and the workers hired to perform the outsourced intimate labour, as well as exploring the role of intermediaries such as agencies. BPO is heavily associated with outsourcing to the Philippines (Lockwood, 2017). The data collected from this study shows a similar parallel with the outsourcing of intimate labour correspondence to the Philippines. It also reveals an economic dynamic in labour relations depending on the geolocation of the outsourced workers and their relationship to those outsourcing.

The study aims to lend support to sex work as labour and to give voice to ACC and the correspondence BPO workers of the adult content creation industry who directly and indirectly perform intimate labour. With a focus on working relationships, the study aims to be regarded in terms of labour rights by policymakers and provide insight into emergent labour relations and digital ecosystems in the wider world of platform work.

"I now tend to reflect less…": Experiences and Perceptions of Digital Transformation (Disruption) in the Social Care Sector in England: Evidence from a County in the East Midlands

Chandrima Roy

(University of Leicester)

The study focused on understanding the extent to which digitalisation has taken place in the care sector, its impact on delivery of adult care services and in turn on frontline care workers' own working and employment experiences.

As part of a 10-year plan to reform the social care sector, the UK government in 2021 announced £150 million to achieve widespread digitalisation across adult social care in England (Department of Health and Social Care, Policy Paper, 29 June 2022). It is speculated that digital transformation in the sector will improve care, bring in increased efficiency and workforce satisfaction. Such speculation is rooted in technologically deterministic narratives that continue to influence debates on technology, work and employment but is problematic in its assumption that "technology achieves the ends for which it was intended" (Joyce et al., 2023, p. 148) "ascribing decisive causality" (p.147) to technology. Shaping the future of digitalisation in UK social care sector needs understanding of the extent to which care service providing organisations and frontline care workers at the forefront of delivering care services understand, accept, and perceive the benefit of digitalisation.

Initially, 2 focus groups of 1.5 hours were conducted with care home group owners and managers followed by 25 interviews of one-hour duration conducted with frontline care staff engaged in delivering care services in residential care homes. Services ranged from providing routine personal care, administering medicines, monitoring health and wellbeing to providing complex care needs requiring additional medical, psychological, or social support. Out of the 25 care workers interviewed, 4 were males. The sample was otherwise varied in terms of age, nationality, educational background and work experience in care sector.

The study is situated within the critical literature on digital technologies and routine work (Loyd and Payne, 2021) and utilises the social shaping of technology (SST) approach to discuss the findings. The study finds that there is a wide gap between what is speculated as technologically possible in the care sector to support delivery of quality care services and what is actually happening, and is perceived and experienced by frontline care staff. Managers and owners of care home groups reported slow pace of digitalisation in the sector and complexities around implementation and adaptation. Evidence from frontline care workers revealed their limited awareness about digitalisation in the sector. Their experiences of working with digital care plans and digital record keeping, the digitalisation elements they were familiar with, was perceived by them as a radical break in social relations and work practices with managerial imperatives of control dominating. They complained about the intrinsic rigidities of the technologies and the tensions experienced in providing people-centred care besides reporting "pointless" work intensification and digital exclusion experienced by senior care workers (implication for retention). This workplace study provides a contextualised and empirical account of the complexities that accompany the introduction of digitalisation in the care sector, in this case, within a particular

organisational setting (residential care homes) and encourages critical examination of the impetus to bring digital transformation in the sector.

Theories, Methodologies & Research Praxis – Room 2.219

Reframing Earning-while-Learning: A Working-Life-Course Perspective on Youth Employment in the UK

Mia Zhong

(University of Leeds, Leeds University Business School)

Earning-while-learning (EwL) has a widespread phenomenon in the UK, yet students are rarely seen as part of the labour force. Traditionally, researchers, policy makers, and educational institutions has viewed students' engagement in paid work as a distraction from academic engagement, framing "work" as peripheral to "study" within a linear model of youth transitions. This study challenges that perspective by adopting a "working-life-course" framework, positioning EwL as a dynamic and integral part of young people's lives.

Using the first seven waves of the national longitudinal dataset Next Steps, which follows a student cohort from age 13 to 25, we investigate the work experiences and life trajectories for youths from early adolescence through early adulthood. To our knowledge, this study is one of the first studies utilising Next Steps datasets that explicitly frames young students as workers. It provides a comprehensive mapping of EwL experiences, including those at very early ages. By examining student samples at different ages and educational stages, we estimate the impact of early EwL exposure on individuals' later trajectories and performances in education and labour market.

We first confirm the prevalence of EwL with more than two-thirds of students ever worked while studying before leaving education. Moreover, we map out a discontinuous, fluid pattern of EwL that more than half of students moved in and out of work status by age 20. Secondly, EwL experiences at school were associated with a higher chance of engaging in work-related activities at college and predicted higher likelihood of continuing to work while studying at age 20. More importantly, working during school and college years modestly reduces the risk of being NEET (not in education, employment, or training) at age 25. Lastly, there are significant gender variations in EwL as male students were more engaged in EwL during their school years while more female students work in higher/further education settings. Notably, early EwL nearly doubles the likelihood of male students continuing to work while pursuing higher education.

In this paper, we theoretically propose to deprioritise the "student" identity of young people and bring attention to their "working-life-course," considering work as a prevalent and fluid experience that shapes their life trajectories and (could) positively influences their early adulthood outcomes. Also, our empirical findings provide policy implication. Given the prevalence of EwL, how EwL is fluidly embedded in early life course histories, and the positive influence of early EwL experiences, we call for policies that acknowledge students' worker identities and integrate EwL into broader discussions of youth development and labour market transitions.

Dual-career Couples and Longer-term Impacts of UK Fathers' Solo Leave

Emma Banister, Ben Kerrane, Joanna Wilson

(University of Manchester)

This study responds to recent developments in the United Kingdom's parental leave framework and asks: What impact does fathers' solo-leave during a child's first year have on emergent and evolving work/care practices amongst dual-career couples?

Disparities in men's and women's career trajectories significantly impact gender equality (Ford et al, 2020) and research has started to recognise careers as embedded within broader social structures and institutions, acknowledging how multiple actors collectively shape career trajectories (Tomlinson et

al., 2018). Drawing on life course and career theories, this paper addresses critical gaps in understanding how couples collaboratively navigate work and care responsibilities in early parenthood, adopting a linked-lives lens which recognises the importance of enmeshment with others (Lee et al., 2011).

Our research design took a longitudinal approach, and in-depth interviews were conducted with ten dual-career couples over five years. We recruited couples where fathers took a period of solo-leave in their child's first year. The first two in-depth interviews were with fathers, followed by a 'couples' phase, enabling us to recognise the evolvement of care practices alongside the consideration of careers as processes 'unfolding over time' (Lee et al., 2011).

Our findings are organised around three key themes: couples' shared values surrounding the 'doing' of family ('on the same page'); fathers' lived experience of solo-care and its connection with enduring involvement ('muscle memory'); and couples' collaborative construction of sustainable work/care patterns ('rethinking care(ers)'). These themes enhance understandings of couples' work/care trajectories by recognising their inherent relational embeddedness and fluidity, a supportive approach which alleviated competing work-care demands and involved career compromises for both parents. They demonstrate how shared parenting values and fathers' solo-leave experiences can facilitate care-sharing practices that transcend traditional gender divisions; the men in our sample did not just aspire to involved fatherhood, they practiced it, offering a more optimistic reading of contemporary fathering practices than other studies.

In exploring the legacy of fathers' solo-leave we recognise that the taking of leave is just one (albeit important) step in a life course approach, which should also integrate subsequent care(er) experiences, challenges and decisions. We contribute to emerging understandings of flexible careers (Tomlinson et al., 2018) and emphasise the need to move beyond an overly agentic focus on individual actors, recognising couples' collaborative navigation of career/care biographies within institutional frameworks and the importance of offering all employees opportunities for holistic, dynamic, and flexible career paths.

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Exploring Service Workers' Musical Understandings of Their Working Lives: Critical Connections and the Absented Worker

Marek Korczynski, Jonathan Payne, Robert Cluley

(University of Nottingham)

'It is possible to gain aesthetic, rather than logico-rational, understanding of organisational life.' (Strati, 1999: 7).

This paper focuses on the relationship between popular culture and working life. It considers if and how service workers create meaning regarding their working lives through music. Given that economies are increasingly service-driven, and given that very many service workers hear music during their entire working week, our questions concern important issues.

We know from Korczynski's (2014) ethnographic account of working lives and popular music in a factory that workers can and do create a range of often critical meanings about their working lives through music. There is also a range of relevant theorising from popular culture analysts. The logic of the theorising by Adorno (2002), and Attali (1977) is that music is likely to simply accommodate workers to the social order of the workplace. That theorising is driven by emphasising the importance of the musical text. By contrast, Small's (1998) concept of musicking emphasises the agency of the music-listener in engaging with and potentially reinterpreting the musical text. This approach of giving primacy

to the reception of music is rich in potential and opens up questions regarding the possibility for workers to engage with music in ways that are resistive to the social order. There are many studies, primarily informed by managerialist-marketing, of the reception by consumers of music in service settings, but there is an important research gap concerning whether and how service workers employed in café and retail settings create meanings regarding their working lives from popular music.

We address this research gap by asking workers in café in retail settings, whether and how they create meanings regarding their working lives from music. Specifically, we report on interviews with 44 workers from café and retail shops in two UK cities. Despite working in settings where music was structured in relation to consumption, and where very few songs referred to work, many service workers made critical connections between pop music and work. We theorise this as connective musicking about working life. Such connective musicking was often critical of key aspects of the social order. Table 1 summarises the findings by coding category.

Coding Category	No. of Songs Chosen	Example Song
Music expressive of the negative quality of work	9	'You' by Atmosphere
Rising above the indignities of work	6	'Way in the World' by Nina Nesbitt
Positive meanings relating to work	5	'Firefly' by Michelle Nadia
Meaning in relation to music rather than work	4	'Mama Told Me Not to Come' by Tom Jones& Stereophonics
Unwanted echo	3	Benjamin Franklyn song
Community	2	'I Gotta Feeling' by Black Eyed Peas
Inspiring songs for work	2	'Lifted' by Lighthouse Family

The paper goes through each coding category and analyses the rich data given by workers in the interviews.

In addition, there was also a significant proportion of workers who did not engage in connective musicking. We analyse this as structured by the absented worker in the ideological content of the musical text.

PhD Showcase

Open Offices All the Way Down: The White-collar Labor Process and Continuities in Commercial Office Architecture

Petra Seitz

(University College London, Bartlett School of Architecture,)

In 1999 Chris Baldry asserted that 'For too long the built working environment has been excluded from the analysis of work organizations.' (Baldry 1999) This phenomenon appears particularly salient in terms of the space of white-collar work. While architectural historians have spun a design narrative based on positive evolution, such work has remained largely segregated from investigations of the white-collar labor process. Heeding Baldry's call for integrated study of the built environment of work and the labor process (Baldry 1992; 1999; 1998; 2012), this paper unpacks the relationships between office architecture and managerial control of white-collar labor.

The paper makes a threefold argument. First, it suggests that the history of commercial office architecture can best be understood as one of continuity. While perhaps differing in aesthetics, office spaces from the past hundred plus years overwhelmingly share a common floorplate, the open plan. From Frank Lloyd Wright's 1904 Larkin Administration Building to Frank Gehry's 2015 MPK 20 Facebook Headquarters, white-collar workers have been arranged in straight rows within undivided large spaces. Attempts to change or reform the open plan, such as Herman Miller's Action Office system (1968), have time and again resulted in failure, devolving back toward the open plan (Kaufmann-Buhler 2020; Saval 2014).

Drawing on the Marxian Labor Process scholarship of Braverman (1974), Burawoy (1985), Edwards (1979), and Knights and Willmott (1990), among others, the paper argues that continuities in architecture stem primarily from continuities and imperatives within the capitalist labor process. The space of white-collar work has remained continuous because the underlying nature of white-collar work

has continued. Finally, actioning Chris Baldry's repeated appeals, the paper emphasizes the importance of critical investigation of the built environment of work by sociologists, labor scholars, and architectural historians for comprehensive understanding of work and labor. The architectural record, it is argued, simultaneously reinforces, and provides nuance and texture to sociological understanding of these environments, highlighting both continuities and discontinuities in the labor process and the experience of work.