

Reconfiguring Labour and Welfare in Emerging Economies of the Global South

Venue: Centre for Interdisciplinary Research (ZIF), Bielefeld University, Germany
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Organisers:

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In the last two decades, various countries of the Global South, such as China, India, Vietnam, Brazil, South Africa, and a few countries in the former Soviet Bloc, have been introducing new forms of universal social protection through programs such as cash transfers, health insurance, or basic pension. Welfare expansion in many places is partly in response to the mounting economic crisis and social unrest caused by market reforms in the 1980s and early 1990s, which are manifested in public expenditure cuts, decentralisation and privatisation. Among others, these have led to the restructuring of labour through retrenchment, precaritisation and relocation at the same time with penetrating yet volatile global capital flows and mass labour migration. As the growth-obsessed national development model ran up against its limits, welfare expansion has become an instrument for strengthening political legitimacy in these contexts. The seemingly convergent experience across these countries with diverse historical and political economic trajectories provides a great opportunity to comparatively explore how welfare is being transformed in interaction with the restructuring of labour.

Despite the universal claim, the efficacy of emerging welfare programs in reducing inequality and protecting the needy, particularly the large number migrant labourers in global factories and in the service sector, remains unclear. Universal programs such as pension or health insurance turn out to provide the very conditions for privatised and commodified welfare solutions to emerge as non-state actors and market logics are increasingly relied on for meeting the needs of the migrant labour force. Our European Research Council (ERC) funded research project on welfare provision for migrant factory workers in China and Vietnam ([https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/\(en\)/soz/welfarestruggles/](https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(en)/soz/welfarestruggles/)) indicates that migrant workers often have to negotiate the changing landscape of welfare through an eclectic set of protection measures that are characterised by a high degree of self-reliance and self-responsibility.

These new dynamics of labour and welfare, nonetheless, do not sit neatly within the conventional critique of neoliberal reforms and labour precarity and defy the mainstream categorization of welfare regimes. We would like to bring the initial results of our research project into dialogue with similar research in the Global South and post-socialist Europe. Participants are invited to critically reflect on the changing relationship between labour and welfare through empirical investigations and theoretical elaborations of their intertwining

reconfigurations, and explore the global ramifications of these transformations. These are the themes and questions that we will explore in this two-day workshop:

Linking labour restructuring and welfare transformations

What kinds of welfare transformations have been taking place? What are their underlying political-economic forces? In what ways do these forces also shape the changing valuation and structure of labour? How does welfare restructuring feed into transforming state-society relations?

Politics and Moralities

What are the politico-moral logics or other rationalities that underline the formulation and implementation of welfare programs? How are these rationalities shaped by the restructuring of labour? How do workers negotiate and navigate the contemporary welfare landscape to ensure wellbeing and what do their struggles tell us about the place of labour in these societies?

Global implications

How is the restructuring of labour and welfare in these contexts connected to broader global dynamics of labour and welfare? Can the empirical realities of these Global South contexts serve as the basis for a theoretical model to understand global transformations?

We invite papers that address these issues and questions in relevant contexts. The interdisciplinary workshop will include both established and emerging researchers from anthropology, sociology, geography and politics. The workshop is funded by the European Research Council, which requires us to publish a special issue or an edited volume from it. We therefore kindly ask confirmed presenters to submit only unpublished papers and commit to taking part in the publication that follows. Most of the participants will be invited by the organisers, but we shall reserve a number of slots for an open call.

Please send your tentative title and abstract of up to 500 words with an author biography indicating current position, institution, and research areas, to Jake Lin (jake.lin@uni-bielefeld.de) by 10 December 2020. We will inform accepted papers by 15 December 2020. Full drafts of the papers should be submitted by 15 November 2021 so that discussants have sufficient time to read in advance.

There will be no registration fees. Refreshment and food will be provided during the workshop and we will cover your economy travel and accommodation expenses according to the rates and standards set by the state of North-Rhine Westphalia.