

Feminist Perspectives in Cultural Political Economy: The Case of Decent Work

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Introduction

Whether or not future collaboration between feminism and critical International Political Economy (IPE) will be possible, depends largely upon whether or not the IPE male-stream will show itself capable of adequately taking into account feminist perspectives and concepts in their analyses. Most critical IPE scholars admit the necessity of feminist (or intersectional) perspectives theoretically but fail to integrate them substantially in their own work. It is about time, not only for critical IPE but critical political economy more generally, to overcome the gendered division of labour within academia with feminists working on so-called “gender issues” and the male-stream sticking to the “hard issues” of political economy. If taken seriously, insights from feminist (and intersectional) studies suggest that these hard issues cannot be fully grasped without referring to the allegedly soft issues of gender (and race/ethnicity). Capitalism itself, when understood not only as an abstract logic of the motion of value but as a concrete social formation, has developed in form of the European modernity that involves not only the transition to capitalist production but just as much the transition to secondary patriarchy and the history of slavery, imperialism and colonialism. It is simply impossible to think about global capitalism as a purely economic system principally neutral to gender and race/ethnicity without making a mistake. The question, then, is not whether future collaboration will be possible but whether the IPE male-stream is willing to acknowledge these insights and take references to feminism beyond mere lip-service.

In this paper, I will argue that the emerging paradigm of Cultural Political Economy (CPE) provides an analytical framework allowing for a more fruitful integration of feminist perspectives into political economy than previous attempts. CPE is less a coherent theory than a research program aiming at combining elements from regulation theory, institutional and evolutionary economics and critical discourse studies in order to construct a more adequate theory allowing for more complex analyses of the structures, discourses and dynamics of contemporary global capitalism. The increasing attention to the constitutive role that the cultural production of meaning systems and discursive orders plays in political economy has contributed to the emergence of CPE. Unfortunately, first publications within the new field have once more largely failed to adequately integrate feminist perspectives. This is especially deplorable, because the evolution of political economy towards a more fruitful integration of neo-Marxist and

poststructuralist theories potentially allows for bridging the divides between feminist and male-stream political economy. There has been a still growing body of literature within feminist political economy about the interrelations between the material/economic and the symbolic/cultural, acknowledging the relevance of questions of semiosis, language and discourse well before male-stream discussions about CPE took off. If CPE is to be successful, it needs to integrate feminist concepts and insights – e.g. about how capitalism is gendered (and racialized) – substantially from the very beginning, not only when explicitly dealing with gender questions. Feminism has to be an essential, not an accidental property of Cultural Political Economy if androcentric mistakes in political economy are not to be repeated again.

I will illustrate the analytical value-added of a feminist approach to CPE by looking at the discourse of Decent Work of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The first argument is that Decent Work is better understood in terms of “economic imaginaries” as developed by Bob Jessop (2004; 2009) and Ngai-Ling Sum (2006) rather than in traditional terms of social regulation or economic governance as used in regulation theory or other critical approaches to IPE. The second argument is that economic imaginaries have to be analysed through a gender lens because they are affected by gendered meanings and norms. In this case, what even counts as work and, thus, where the right to Decent Work can be claimed is determined by gendered norms and discourses. In short, international political economy needs to be cultural and Cultural Political Economy needs to be feminist.

From Regulation Theory to Cultural Political Economy

Before turning to Cultural Political Economy, it is necessary to remember the historical and academic context of its emergence. CPE can be seen as an answer to the crisis of and as a successor to regulation theory. At least the variety that is of interest here, the critical CPE strand as developed by Bob Jessop, Ngai-Ling Sum and others (Jessop/Sum 2006; Jessop/Oosterlynck 2008), clearly grew out of discussions about regulation and state theory, and how to perform the cultural turn within a critical political economy framework that, like regulation theory, has freed itself from a dogmatic relationship with traditional or orthodox Marxism while keeping the key concepts of the Marxian critique of political economy up (Nadel 2002: 28).

Regulation theory can be understood as a contribution to renewing materialist critiques of society by overcoming economism, determinism, and structuralism. As a 'rebellious child' (Lipietz 1998: 12) of Althusser's structural Marxism, it can be seen as a "post-structuralism" of its very own kind. Regulation theorists stress the idea of Marx that people make their own history, people produce and reproduce the very social relations under which they are dominated and exploited. The central question of regulation theory, then, is why people reproduce the social relations of capitalism through their own actions in everyday life against all odds, despite the inherent contradictions and crisis tendencies of capital accumulation. In answering this question, however, most regulationist studies tended to explain subjective agency by structural requirements instead of focussing the processes of structuring through agency despite the common talk of the dialectic of structure and agency. Different scholars have, thus, criticised a certain surplus of objectivity and a deficit of subjectivity (Sablowski 1994: 155; Scherrer 1995: 462). Drawing on Althusser, many regulationists have stressed the mutual inter-relatedness of the economy, politics and ideology. This did not help, however, against the fact that most analyses stayed economy-centred, by and large. In Frankfurt, Joachim Hirsch (2005) and others have developed a strand of regulation theory that partially overcomes this economy-centredness by referring to Gramsci and Poulantzas. Even this kind of regulation theory, extended by hegemony and state theory, was confronted with the same kind of criticism.

Cultural Political Economy can therefore be a chance for reformulating the conceptual framework and the research program of the regulation approach, in a way as the *Aufhebung* of regulation theory, while overcoming the objectivity-surplus and the economy-centredness once and for all. The constitutive role of cultural-symbolic forms and discursive orders giving sense and meaning to material practices could be accounted for adequately without leaving the framework of historical materialism in favour of a postmodern everything-goes philosophy. CPE should not be mere lip-service for the postmodern zeitgeist, but understood as the serious and difficult but promising attempt to integrate the cultural turn within the framework of a materialist theory of society. Neo-Marxist scholars should not be afraid of the concept of discourse in this context. To the contrary, they should help develop materialist interpretations of poststructuralist discourse theories, like Sonja Buckel (2007) and others have done in the case of Foucault's works. Despite the epistemological and ontological differences, we should seek the commonalities between neo-Marxism and poststructuralism instead of endlessly

repeating the boring rituals of academic warfare. CPE can be, furthermore, a chance for integrating feminist approaches to political economy in a new and more fruitful way. Integration here should not mean a form of incorporation that includes feminist concepts as add-ons into the conceptual framework, which is otherwise untouched, but integration in the sense of a trans- or post-disciplinary research perspective. CPE might combine feminist and regulationist concepts in the context of constellative analyses of concrete circumstances, confront them and relate them to one another, let them learn from each other, without attempting to fuse them together to a holistic grand theory.

One reason for the crisis of regulation theory has been its androcentrism and gender-blindness. Existing attempts to integrate feminist concepts into regulation theory succeed in incorporating economic aspects of gender relations – e.g. gendered divisions of labour and their functionality for capitalist (re)production – but fail to account for other dimensions of feminist theories that are more or less directly related to these economic aspects – masculinities and femininities, subjectivities and symbolic orders, in which they are organised, discourse and meaning more general. The objectivity-surplus and the economy-centredness of regulation theory are thus being reproduced in a gender-sensitised manner. CPE could contribute to solving this problem. Before turning to CPE itself, I want to explain how I think CPE can be a framework for a more fruitful integration of feminism and political economy by showing how such an integration can be problematic when it takes the reference theory in political economy – in this case regulation theory – to be the grand theory and feminism to be the add-on. This type of incorporation necessarily leads to a selective reading and a skewed integration of feminist concepts, because they are read through a regulationist and thus economy-centred lens and important non-economic aspects fall out of view.

Regulation theory has been an important paradigm in heterodox economics and international political economy since the 1970s. In recent years, however, it has lost some of its appeal to critical scholars and less and less researchers actually still subscribe to one of the variants of this approach. Academic fashions are only one reason; others are the critiques of regulation theory articulated from both within and outside the field. Against their own standards, regulation theorists have been criticised for reproducing the economism and class-reductionism of orthodox Marxism. Especially the feminist critique of regulation theory is valid (cf. Ruddick 1992; Dackweiler 1995; Jenson 1997). If regulation theory claims to be a critical theory of society, then critically accounting for gender relations and gendered forms of power, domination and exploita-

tion should be an integral part of the theory. Indeed, many regulationists have acknowledged the role of gender relations and mentioned them at certain points, but failed to systematically include them in their studies. Relatively recently, Lars Kohlmorgen (2004) has attempted to systematically extend regulation theory and include the analysis of gender relations on all conceptual levels, from the most abstract level of capital accumulation and social reproduction as such, over the intermediate level of accumulation regimes, modes of regulation and institutional forms, to the concrete level of ways of living, power balances and social struggles. I have dealt with this attempt earlier (Hauf 2006) and now just want to summarise my ambivalent argument briefly. On the one hand, Kohlmorgen has opened up regulation theory for feminist interrogations of gendered divisions of labour, the interrelations between class and gender, and the relevance of modern gender relations for the reproduction of capitalist social relations. The central feature of his theoretical extension is the introduction of a new institutional form: the household and family form, which is supposed to express the general norm of the gendered division of labour in the private sphere and the hegemonic family model (Kohlmorgen 2004: 59). Kohlmorgen has, thus, partially overcome the class-reductionism of regulation theory by referring to and incorporating a wide range of feminist theories, such as Regina Becker-Schmidt's *Doppelte Vergesellschaftung* (double societalisation) and many more. Introducing concepts like gender order and gender regime means an important improvement for regulation theory. Trying to convey an understanding of gender that goes beyond lip-service to a political-economic macro theory is a meaningful project. The work of Kohlmorgen, however, is also problematic in some ways that I want to take as a starting point for reflecting the transition from regulation theory to Cultural Political Economy from a feminist perspective.

Kohlmorgen approaches patriarchal gender relations from a narrow societal perspective and neglects implications for subjectivities and cultural-symbolic dimensions. The way he integrates Becker-Schmidt's theory of the double societalisation is an example for how its economic aspects – the contradictory separation/connection of capitalist production and social reproduction – are incorporated while the cultural-symbolic and subjective dimensions of the double societalisation are lost, because they do not fit to the templates of regulation theory, like a jigsaw piece that has to be cut up in order to make it fit. Kohlmorgen rarely asks about the meaning of gender hierarchies for the concrete lived experiences of subjects. The level of cultural meaning systems and symbolic orders is important not only to Becker-Schmidt but also to other feminist theories

Kohlmorgen tries to incorporate. He does mention it, but it does not play a significant role in his work. After all, his feminist extension is limited to the aspect of the gendered division of labour and its relevance for capital accumulation and, thus, reproduces the objectivity-surplus and the economy-centredness of regulation theory in a gender-sensitised manner.

In the next section, I want to discuss the question of whether or not Cultural Political Economy as a successor to regulation theory is able to integrate feminist perspectives and concepts in a better way, without reducing them to their economic aspects.

Towards A Feminist Approach to Cultural Political Economy

I refer to a certain strand of Cultural Political Economy (CPE), mainly developed by Jessop (2004; 2009) and Sum (2006; for others cf. Best/Paterson 2010), that attempts to perform the *cultural turn* within the framework of a materialist and critical theory of society. Unlike other but similar attempts, for example Laclau/Mouffe's (1991) post-Marxism, they stress the interrelatedness of discursive and non-discursive elements of political economy instead of dissolving material relations completely into discourse and language. This is a promising project that opens up a theoretical space for a more fruitful integration of political economy and discourse theory as well as, therefore, for a more adequate integration of feminist perspectives that avoids the problems just discussed. In order to take advantage of this opportunity, I argue, it is necessary for CPE to take on feminist theories from the outset and learn from them, because they have begun to reflect the dialectic relations between objective, subjective and symbolic levels of analysis and to combine neo-Marxist and poststructuralist theories much earlier. One example is the approach of Regina Becker-Schmidt and Gudrun-Axeli Knapp that stands in the tradition of Critical Theory of Adorno/Horkheimer but refers to Foucault and other discourse theories as well, in order to extend it by a gender perspective. The emerging paradigm of CPE can and should draw on feminist approaches like this. First, I introduce the conceptual outline of CPE. Second, I will elaborate on my argument that feminist perspectives are necessary for the advancement of the paradigm.

Regulation theory has always stressed the meaning of cultural norms and values for stabilising accumulation regimes and modes of regulation. Only the transition to CPE, however, provides a conceptual framework for analysing how such norms and values

are discursively constructed. Regulation theory can broach the issue of how everyday practices of individuals are subjected to a routine and made compatible with the requirements of capital accumulation. CPE can start one step before and analyse how normative orders emerge discursively, which discourses become hegemonic, and how certain norms and values become articulated with the interests of relevant social actors and how they may become condensed in institutions. Jessop and Sum do not give up the idea of the dialectic of structure and agency (like Laclau/Mouffe, cf. Wullweber 2009: 5), rather, they shift the focus from how actions are normalised through structures and institutions to how norms and institutions are structured by actions. Regulation theory's own standard to capture the mediating movement between social structures and subjective practices is, thus, better met by CPE.

Jessop and Sum suggest the term 'semiosis' in order to grasp all forms of the social production of meaning (cf. Jessop 2009: 20). They prefer this term to the concept of discourse because the latter can have various meanings in different contexts. Discourse can (1) be used in the general sense of the social production of meaning systems and symbolic orders (semiosis); it can (2) denote the specific language of a certain social field (e.g. political discourse), or (3) refer to a certain aspect of the discursive construction of social reality (e.g. the neoliberal discourse of globalisation), as Norman Fairclough (2009: 162-163) puts it. CPE systematically allows for discursive or semiotic dimensions and analyses them in their interrelations with non-discursive dimensions. It understands economic categories as inherently semiotic and (at least to some extent) discursively constructed, but it does not neglect their structural and material dimensions. It takes up and critically re-articulates concepts and notions of regulation theory. Regulation, for instance, is then understood as a process that operates partly discursively and constitutes the objects of regulation through the very process of regulation (cf. Jessop 2004: 163). Joachim Becker (2009) proposed to use the term 'dispositif of regulation' instead of mode of regulation in order to capture both the material and the discursive dimensions and move away from the presupposed stability entrenched in the latter. CPE could benefit from this kind of poststructuralist interpretation of regulation theory (for Foucault's definition of dispositif/apparatus, cf. Foucault 1978, S. 119-120). CPE reformulates the basic question of regulation theory of how capitalist social relations are being reproduced and transformed by referring to discourse theory and evolutionary economics. Key concepts of this extension are *economic imaginary* and variation, selection and retention. CPE not only asks about the institutional forms, in which social

practices are subjected to norms and routines, but also about the symbolic-cultural forms, discourses and imaginaries that flow into the constitution of such institutional forms. Fordism and the Keynesian welfare state, for instance, entailed not only institutional arrangements and material compromises, but also discourses and ideas of a social market economy that were equally important in stabilising the formation. Economic imaginaries are discursive elements that may materialise and be condensed to institutional forms, but they do not do so necessarily. Jessop defines the concepts as follows: *'An economic imaginary is a semiotic order, i.e., a specific configuration of genres, discourses and styles and, as such, constitutes the semiotic moment of a network of social practices in a given social field, institutional order, or wider social formation.'* (Jessop/Oosterlynck 2008: 1157-1158). He applies the CPE approach to the knowledge-based economy, a master narrative that has the potential of becoming a hegemonic discourse shaping economic strategies on various scales as well as steering hegemonic and state projects (Jessop 2004: 168). The knowledge-based economy, thus, has good prospects of being translated from an economic imaginary to material reality (ibid.: 169). Which imaginaries become hegemonic, which are being selected and retained by relevant actors, which become discursively reinforced and finally materially condensed and institutionalised, is largely dependent on social balances of power and interests. Sum adds the moments of embodiment and resistance to variation, selection and retention. Economic imaginaries may not only be materialised in institutions, but also within the bodies of those subjects, the social practices of which are being regulated. What is more, hegemonic discourses are only ever partial and unstable, which is why there is always a moment of resistance and space for counter-hegemony that primarily lies within the gaps between discourse and practice (Sum 2006: 20). The human rights discourse is a classical example. It can be unmasked as ideological given the capitalist order of inequality, on the one hand, but it can be used for counter-hegemonic mobilisations and resistance strategies as well, on the other. Societal conflicts, thus, are not only fought out using material resources, but they also take place fundamentally on the discursive-symbolic level as a 'battle for ideas' (Jessop 2009: 22).

These are theoretical innovations that are necessary and welcome, but what is missing so far is a feminist perspective within CPE, as I shall argue. This is especially deplorable as the emergence of Cultural Political Economy might contribute to overcoming two kinds of splits within the field of political economy: the split between feminist and male-stream political economy and the split between neo-Marxism and poststruc-

turalism. Feminist scholars have worked on bridging the gaps between historic-materialist and discourse-theoretical approaches earlier in order to grasp the complexities of gender relations. I want to elaborate on the advantages of this for political-economic analyses and how CPE might learn from these kinds of feminist theories, taking the approach of Gudrun-Axeli Knapp as an example.

Knapp stands in the tradition of the Critical Theory of the early Frankfurt School, which she critically built upon when she, together with Regina Becker-Schmidt, developed a feminist approach to a critical theory of society. These scholars have developed the concept of the *double and contradictory societalisation* of women (cf. Becker-Schmidt 1987, Knapp 1996). This approach is interesting for advancing the CPE paradigm for two reasons. First, it involves from the outset a theoretical perspective that puts the mutual interrelatedness of objective-societal, subjective-individual and symbolic-discursive levels at the centre of the analysis. Gender hierarchies and inequalities are explained in a non-reductionist, multi-dimensional way. One important factor is the gendered division of labour, both within the private household and the labour market, mediated by patriarchal law and mutually reinforcing inequality in both spheres. Women are doubly societalised because they are integrated both in the public sphere of wage labour and in the private sphere of care work. Inequalities in the home reinforce inequalities at the workplace and vice versa. What has been separated by power – commodity production and social reproduction – has to be reconnected by individuals in their everyday life. Not only does this mean that doubly societalised women face tremendous problems in organising life and work. It also fosters a symbolic order in which the female gender appears to be devalued and subordinate in general. The gendered division of labour cannot be explained without referring to this symbolic order. *Indeed, the symbolic order is related to the material relations of reproduction and production, but it is also a relatively autonomous world of imaginations* (Becker-Schmidt 1987: 223, my translation). The materiality of social structures in which gender inequalities – e.g. gendered divisions of labour – are embedded, is always thought in relation to its individual and psychological preconditions and effects as well as to its interplay with a symbolic order that devalues reproductive work contrary to its factual meaning. Second, in more recent works Knapp (2009) does not eschew to combine different theories from various scientific traditions in order to grasp the specific ways in which European modernity combined capitalism, (secondary) patriarchalism (cf. Beer 1990: 249), and colonialism/imperialism. Even if there seem to be ontological and epistemological

obstacles to combining Adorno/Horkheimer (including the references to Marx) and Foucault, she adopts concepts from both traditions. The fundamental subject-object-dialectic of bourgeois societies, or the interrelations between macro and micro levels, can be captured by Marxian and Adornoian concepts (value form, capital, alienation, commodity fetishism, etc.). Foucault and his concepts (discourse, dispositif, knowledge/power, governmentality, etc.) can be used for the intermediate meso level. This kind of approach is an example for feminist theories of society that, starting from political economy discussions about (re)production, came to a specific understanding of the constitutive role of 'questions of the symbolic order and cultural processes that do not add up to the concept of ideology put forward by Marxist approaches' (Knapp 2009: 22). In combining Marx and Foucault, Knapp's approach may be criticised for being eclectic. She might answer something similar to the following quote: *'Where it makes sense there is no reason not to be conceptually eclectic. [...] It is the tendency to erect one interpretation as all explanatory that leads to analytical dead-ends'* (Chabal/Daloz 2006: 319f.). Knapp's approach has the further advantage that the integration of feminist perspectives does not necessarily lead to an all-out reconstruction of a single theory of society. It may as well be done, similar to my suggestion, in the sense of 'constellative analyses', that is, not as an abstract incorporation, but concretely related to the object in question. This kind of perspective is compatible with and can be utilised for the transdisciplinary paradigm of CPE, from which a feminist perspective has been largely missing so far.

Next, I want to give an example of an object that may be analysed using a feminist CPE approach in order to clarify the analytical value-added of such an approach. The phenomenon of Decent Work, for example, can be approached from a feminist CPE perspective much better than in traditional IPE terms, because it neither neglects gendered discourses, imaginaries and meanings nor does it neglect the specific materiality and force of capitalist social relations and their gendered dimensions. In the last section of this paper, I will briefly illustrate a feminist CPE approach to Decent Work.

The Case of Decent Work

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopted Decent Work (DW) as its new platform of action in 1999 (ILO 1999). This platform is the result of a major revision process within the ILO and it was developed as a response to the challenges of neoliberalism.

eral globalisation in order to strengthen the social dimension of globalisation (Sengenberger 2001). The process of global restructuring – to use a more precise term for what I mean by globalisation in this context – transformed the world of work by means of deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation and, thus, changed the very field of action of the ILO in profound ways (Vosko 2004). The erosion of the standard employment relationship in Western countries (including the embedded gender regime), the emergence of new forms of labour relations (e.g. part-time, temporary, and self-employment), changes in patterns and scope of labour migration, and what has often been referred to as the informalisation and feminisation of labour (cf. Sauer 2008) required a completely new strategic framework for the ILO's institutional action (Vosko 2010).

What is new about Decent Work, it can be argued, is less its actual content in terms of hard law labour regulation than its discursive form that symbolically proclaims the right to decent work for all. DW does not codify any new legally binding agreements and subsequent possibilities of sanctions. Rather, it uses moral persuasion and voluntariness to promote compliance with existing conventions (Vosko 2002). What is more important, it creates a new normative framework or discursive order not only for the ILO itself but also for other social actors working on the field of (transnational) labour rights or struggling to improve the working and living conditions of workers worldwide. Hence, Decent Work does not provide new formal rights that can be enforced by legal action in court rooms. Rather, it proclaims the “right to labour rights” that can be used by local actors in factories or within social and political struggles in order to appropriate those rights. On the one hand, DW can thus be seen as a typically neoliberal soft law instrument lacking force. Dulcet promises without mechanisms for realisation can be seen as mere window-dressing. On the other, DW can be regarded as an ‘economic imaginary’ (Jessop/Oosterlynck 2008), which symbolically proclaims the right to decent work for all and, thus, opens up new avenues for social actors to struggle for better working and living conditions. If, for instance, emerging unions or union-like organisations within the informal sector, women’s organisations and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are using DW in order to locally appropriate basic economic and social rights, the platform itself can become a vehicle of counter-hegemonic, post-neoliberal politics. One important question that remains to be answered, is whether DW indeed is employed by social movements and union activists seeking to build global coalitions to counter the hegemonic strategies of crisis-solving and develop alternative strategies altering social power balances and potentially pointing towards post-

capitalist modes of production, or whether it by and large remains window-dressing. So, is Decent Work simply an ideological sleeping pill for workers suffering under the neoliberal working conditions of globalised capital? Does it merely stabilise capital accumulation by promising the idea of good work and the good life might be realised under capitalist conditions, a “good capitalism” might be possible? Or does Decent Work, by invoking these ideas, simultaneously transcend the logic of capital accumulation by raising workers aspirations, their awareness of their own needs and the fact that capitalism ultimately is the barrier to the full satisfaction of these needs?

Decent Work entails a promise of “good work” speaking to the idea of the “good life”. We know that this promise won’t be realised under capitalist conditions for at least two reasons. First, capitalist wage labour is essentially alienated and exploited labour. The primary purpose of wage labour is the production of profit for capital owners, not the fulfilment of human needs. Therefore, neither the purpose of production nor the production process itself can be fully controlled by the producers themselves. Labour can only seek compromises with capital in order to construct institutions mediating their antagonistic relationship in a way allowing for both capital accumulation and a certain extent of wealth and social security for the working class. The historical formation of Atlantic Fordism is a well-known example for such a class compromise which combined mass production and rising profits with mass consumption and rising wages, mediated through the Keynesian Welfare State. Second, every progress in the social regulation of capital accumulation, like Fordism, ultimately finds its barrier at the accumulation dynamic itself which will inevitably roll back such progresses in times of crises. The crisis of Fordism in the 1970s and the subsequent process of neoliberal restructuring shows how quickly social achievements, themselves being results of fierce social struggles, can be rolled back when capital can no longer afford them. The current world economic crisis, then, is expected to be a situation of further restructuring with capital profitability once again being restored by socialising losses (e.g. the bank bailouts) and shifting the costs to the working class and the poor (lowering wages and cutting social services). Paradoxically, in the midst of the crisis Decent Work is being promoted by international labour rights advocates as the adequate strategy to overcome the crisis. Like in the case of Fordism, when innovations in the labour process demanded by workers in order to improve working conditions were key in raising productivity and restoring profitability, DW is believed to have similar potentials (Sauer 2009: 30). But Decent Work cannot simply mean to uphold the ideal of the Fordist standard employ-

ment relationship and to campaign for the return to national Keynesianism as some European unionists seem to believe – like the German IG BCE (mining, chemical and energy industry) promoting the “Modell Deutschland” of the 1970s. Not only does this retrospective neglect the forms of domination implicated in the German system of industrial specialisation and export orientation (Röttger 2010: 36-37) as well as the forms of gendered exploitation and domination institutionalised in the male-breadwinner family model of the Fordist era. It also neglects the fact that capitalism is a very dynamic mode of production that reproduces itself precisely through its constant remodelling, driven by small and big crises necessarily produced by its own accumulation dynamic. Going back to an older model simply seems to be impossible and Decent Work seems to have the potential for limiting the scope of desirable change to returning to other, more social democratic modes of regulation.

Especially when taking feminist perspectives into account, Decent Work has to go beyond the standard employment relationship and include workers formerly excluded from labour and social standards such as women workers in the informal economy, home workers, migrant workers, and self-employed. If it is to succeed in terms of substantially and sustainably improving working and living conditions worldwide, however, it cannot limit itself to extend existing labour rights formally to formerly excluded groups of workers, but has to be articulated as a ‘counter-tendencial’ strategy (Pickshaus 2007: 24) as part of larger counter-hegemonic project that aims at progressively enlarging the scope of democracy to the workplace and private businesses, thus raising the question of control over the means of production (Röttger 2010: 40), and ultimately posing the “question of power”. Both potentials of Decent Work – limiting the scope of desirable change as well as transcending the logic of capital accumulation – are potentials of Decent Work as an *economic imaginary*, not as an instrument of labour law as conceived in classical terms. Decent Work, here, is no more than an example for why IPE has to be opened up for poststructuralist interventions and why CPE is a promising way of introducing the cultural turn into political economy without dropping the key concepts of historical materialism in the process.

Decent Work is also a good example for why the CPE paradigm can only win from integrating feminist perspectives. Decent Work, unlike the narrow focus on Core Labour Standards (CLS), recognizes the needs of informalised workers and explicitly aims at extending labour rights to informal economies (Senghaas-Knobloch 2007) in order to realise the right to decent work for all (especially with respect to developing countries

and to women, who form the majority of informalised workers), whereas CLS usually have been enforced mainly within the realm of protected formal employment – especially since the implementation of fundamental labour rights is increasingly governed by (transnational) corporations themselves through Corporate Codes of Conduct (Blackett 2004). Such codes have very rarely, if at all, been extended to sub-contractors and suppliers within the production chain (Seifert 2009: 95), which is a major obstacle in the quest for decent work for all, because sub-contracting has been an important strategy of global capital to evade legal regulations of employment relationships and production processes, especially in the global South (Sobczak 2003). Feminist political economy scholars have extensively written on the gendered nature of global restructuring, the feminisation of labour, and the feminisation of migration. If Decent Work is an economic imaginary promising better working conditions for informalised workers, then women are the primary addressees of this promise. Decent Work is an economic imaginary clearly affected by gendered norms and meanings.

What is more, there are good reasons to argue that each and every economic imaginary is gendered or should be conceived in gendered terms. Gender is a structural category of modern societies invading all social spheres and underlying all social processes. The meaning of gender is not limited to phenomena revealing their gendered nature at first sight. Feminists have long argued that especially those entities of the social world presenting itself as gender-neutral or universal are expressions of an androcentric symbolic order or patriarchal gender relations. The same holds true for feminist economics and the androcentric concepts and categories of both classical and critical political economy. Whether we talk about financialisation, the economic crisis, food sovereignty, the knowledge-based economy, or decent work, terms and categories like these are never gender-neutral. Neither are they neutral to hierarchies and inequalities along ethnic or citizenship lines. That is why feminists argue for an intersectional perspective in political economy that not only investigates how different class, gender and ethnic identities intersect to constitute subjectivities subjected to complex inequalities, but also how capitalism, patriarchalism and racism interact as forms of social domination to form the complex web of power relations shaping our social world (cf. Aulenbacher/Riegraf 2009). As a first step towards capturing this intersectional complexity, it is necessary for international political economy to be cultural and for Cultural Political Economy to be feminist.

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