

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

2021. "Informalisation of Work and Workers' Voice in Welfare Markets for In-Home Domestic Care Services in Germany" (with Birgit Apitzsch). In: *The Dynamics of Welfare Markets: Private Pensions and Domestic Care Services in Europe*, edited by Clemence Ledous, Karen Shire, and Franca van Hooren. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 345–69.

2020. *The Social Order of Transnational Migration Markets*. Global Networks 20 (3): 434–53.

2020. *The Origins and Transformation of Conservative Gender Regimes in Germany and Japan* (with Kumiko Nemoto). *Social Politics* 27 (3): 432–48.

2018. *Transnationalisierung der Arbeit* (mit Sigrid Quack, Ingo Schulz-Schaeffer und Anja Weiss, eds.). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Die Vorträge finden jeweils um 17 Uhr im Konferenzraum des MPIfG statt (Ende ca. 18:30 Uhr).

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Titelfoto: An Huy Tran

Die öffentlichen Vorträge am MPIfG finden im Sommersemester 2022 nach Möglichkeit wieder in Präsenz statt. Tagesaktuelle Informationen finden Sie auf unserer Website www.mpifg.de.

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Karen Shire
Regulating Transnational Labor

Scholar in Residence Lectures
2022



Regulating Transnational Labor

In her lecture series Karen Shire develops an economic sociological approach to the making and regulation of transnational labor markets in the global economy. What makes the cross-border mobility of migrant labor possible is the subject of migration infrastructures research, while labor market scholars have restricted their analyses to migrants in the context of national labor market institutions. In their approaches to regulation, migration scholars often advocate for free movement, while labor scholars focus on how cross-border labor threatens hard-won labor protections. Karen Shire's three lectures seek to gain leverage on the contradictions between liberalizing labor mobility and regulating employment across territorial jurisdictions by drawing on research exploring the organization and coordination of cross-border labor markets, and the interface between legal and illegal market exchanges. Empirically the talks draw on historical research on the emergence of modern labor markets, contemporary research on labor governance, and her own empirical studies of cross-border labor mobility in the Asia Pacific and the European Union.



DIENSTAG, 7. JUNI 2022

Theorizing Regulatory Challenges of Transnational Labor

An increasing share of migration no longer results in immigration and settlement, but takes the form of temporary and circular exchanges of labor across borders. Examples include posted work, labor subcontracting, cross-border temporary staffing, illegal forms of forced and trafficked labor, but also "medium-skilled" industrial and service work. Building on theoretical discussions in the economic sociology of markets and labor sociology, Shire proposes a reconceptualization of migration as the organization of cross-border labor markets. The lecture focuses on the multiplicity of market-making actors, the coordination problems specific to the transnational exchange of labor power, and regulatory challenges and solutions in a comparative transnational perspective. Recent research has focused mainly on the private governance of labor in the global economy. The talk explores the evidence of an expanding role for public governance and the extension of associational capacities for labor representation across national borders.

DIENSTAG, 14. JUNI 2022

Cross-Border Labor Market Intermediaries

In this second lecture Shire draws on global historical research to show how the creation and maintenance of an industrial labor force was rooted in forms of indentured migrant labor, recruited and transported by profit-taking intermediaries. The historical record, and a global perspective, challenges the association made between the emergence of "free" wage labor and direct employment with the rise of industrial capitalism. These historical insights into the origins of modern labor markets are important for two reasons. First, debt is shown to play a central role in understanding how migration creates vulnerabilities, becomes a source of profit, and is used as a mechanism of control. Second, where intermediaries are in play, labor power is not exchanged by those who embody it; rather, labor power is being sold. International conventions from the interwar period in part recognized the key role of private intermediaries

Karen Shire ist Professorin für Vergleichende Soziologie und die Gesellschaft Japans und Mitglied des Instituts für Ostasienwissenschaften an der Universität Duisburg-Essen. Sie ist Direktorin des Essener Kollegs für Geschlechterforschung und 2021/2022 Scholar in Residence am MPIfG. Ihre Forschung befasst sich mit Beschäftigungsveränderungen und deren Auswirkungen auf soziale Ungleichheiten in der globalen Wirtschaft.

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in the commodification and control of migrant labor, with solutions rooted in establishing a monopoly for public labor exchanges. This course was reversed in the 1990s, when the ILO nullified previous conventions and enacted a new one legitimating private fee-charging employment services. The lecture examines how private intermediaries have become dominant actors again in cross-border labor markets, the multiplicity of forms now taken by cross-border intermediation, and the struggles to protect workers who "use the services" of intermediaries. While most studies of regulatory efforts have been situated on destination countries and enterprise-level interventions, recent research on intermediaries in the Asia Pacific and cross-border labor subcontracting in the European Union points to the regulatory agency of sending states and the importance of licensing and monitoring commercial labor businesses for improving labor protections.

DIENSTAG, 21. JUNI 2022

Trafficked, Forced, and Informalized Labor

The extreme exploitation of labor in the form of trafficked, forced, or informalized employment has pervaded the labor-intensive, low-wage segments of labor markets across the global economy. While the discussion of regulatory pathways in this series of lectures so far has attributed challenges to gaps in international conventions and national/sectoral regulations, in this domain, international rules and normative principles are extensive and widely shared. Moreover, extreme exploitation is not confined to the institutionally thinner labor market contexts of the developing world. The available statistics suggest that a large share of trafficked labor is situated in Europe and occurs between the EU member states. Why, then, does extreme exploitation persist, even where conventions are ratified, norms become guiding principles, and employment is heavily regulated at the national level? In this last lecture the persistence of forced and informalized labor in the advanced economies is explained in reference to an intersectional understanding of social inequalities that involves an analysis of gender and global inequalities as well as post-industrial capitalism in the constitution of the global economy. The relative weight given to regulations designed for protecting the class-based vulnerabilities of dependent wage laborers in the postwar settlements and institutions of industrial citizenship in part accounts for why states with strong regulatory capacities have been caught off guard in addressing contemporary forms of triangular and indebted labor, both of which exploit vulnerabilities based as much on inequalities rooted in gender and citizenship as on the inequalities fundamental to the fictional commodification of labor power. The dynamics of forced and informalized labor are discussed in reference to Shire's recent research on the regulation of prostitution and welfare markets for domestic/care labor in Europe.