

## Changing Boundaries and Definitions of Work over Time and Space

Comment by Gro Hagemann

The papers presented to this session cover a wide range, both in time, space and subject. In my comment I will concentrate on two aspects, present in some of the papers, absent in others, but with evident relevance for all discussion on meaning, valuation and definition of work. The first aspect is that of gender; the second one has to do with the role of the market in defining the meaning and boundaries of work. The two aspects are separate, but also interrelated. I will argue that an important change has occurred over the centuries in the relation between them. The importance of gender in organizing and valuation of work in premodern economies in modern economies has been taken over by the market.

Discussions on work are inevitably based on some gender premises, whether that is explicit or not. Sexual division of labour in every society seems to be in some way related to sexual division of worth and authority. Opposite it may also be claimed that work plays an important role in the social construction of gender, in defining what is masculine and what is feminine. Toshiko Himeoka has in her paper demonstrated how femininity among homeworking weavers was defined by the ability of weaving. A woman lacking this ability was not only a bad wife, but also a woman without essential feminine qualities. Although this more seldom is stated, a similar kind of valuation has worked for male workers as well: their work has defined their masculinity. Himeoka touches upon this when stating how doing women's work was looked upon as shameful for male weavers. There are also a lot of other expressions that manliness is confirmed by distinction from the female as well as company with other men.

This message can also be deduced from the activity and self-image of modern, wage-earning workers, for instance from the modern idea of common class interests, which is the subject of Klaus Tenfeldes paper. In discussing the problems of forming structures of solidarity in large scale factories, he seems to touch upon the problems of forming a solidarity which could include differences among the workers. These are also problems in realization one central norm of 19th century ideas of class-struggle: the leading role of a certain strata of (male) workers to define the common interests of all workers. Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly's paper indirectly affects a corresponding problem. They are analyzing the changing perceptions of work, ending up with the breadwinner's model of the 20th century. In this model as well as

the idea of common class interests there has been a close connection between the comprehension of normal work and manliness. Not only has the normal worker been a man; having normal work, earning enough to support a family, has also been an essential male quality. Manliness has been defined by the kind of work one has been doing and the ability to earn enough to support a family.

In my comment on the role of the market I will not primarily refer to the obvious role of distribution and valuation, but to the way market economy influence on our concepts of meaning and worth. Undoubtedly the growth of market economy has influenced a lot on definition and valuation of work. This process is being elucidated from different perspectives in several papers. Tirhankar Roy is analyzing the role of traditional institutions, family and master-apprenticeship system, in creating a modern labour market. Authorities of the traditional institutions are gradually undermined during this process. Reduced role for craftsmanship weakened the authority of competence, while the loss of parental and gendered authority within the family enterprise changed the employment of children and (married) women from family labour to a casual labour market. Richard Biernacki demonstrates in his interesting case study how intellectual writing is made «real work» through commodification. Increased market influence, then, in one sense meant a devaluation of intellectual activity, since the value of this activity was no longer measured by the content of thinking and contributions to human spirit and understanding, but by the quantity of written paper. On the other hand Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly present a history of success where the modern dominance of the market opened up for a higher valuation of ordinary, manual work. Commodification of labour meant both a devaluation of handicraft competence and a guarantee for the success of modern labour movement in establishing self respect for the workers. Honour and meaning no longer were defined from what the elites were doing. It came to be more respectful to live as an honest worker than as a rentier with a lifestyle similar to the nobility of previous centuries.

Other exclusions are bedded into this definition, however. The breadwinner model estimates as work what gives money to provide for yourself and your family. What is defined as non-work, then, is the activities going on outside the market. Unemployment, therefore, is looked upon as a tragedy within this model, even when the unemployed has access to cash benefit from the state. This definition of being non-working has also included a large group of housewives and daughters being active in different ways within the household. Growing market economy has made access to work, i.e. market work, a key to social worth. Within a

time span of a millennium this has involved a loss in social status for married women. Within the household economy of pre-modern societies married women were on the top of hierarchy among women: in status, authority and influence, surpassed only by widows who could even have direct influence over income and property. This changed during the the 19th and 20th centuries: in the modern society married women were the last individuals to get access to economic rights, and they found themselves in a position where their labour was not valued as real work.