

International and interdisciplinary conference

**“B/ORDERS IN MOTION: Current challenges and future perspectives”**

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**PANEL B3: Mobilization along Global Value Chains – The Gender Dimension**

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In this interdisciplinary panel, we will focus on the diverse ways in which gender is implicated in global production and explore means of challenging gender inequalities in global value chains. Strategies of mobilization employed by various actors such as workers, trade unions, consumers and activists will be analyzed.

Gender affects and effects globalization. The relational concept of gender intersects the commercial relations at play in global value chains. Changing consumption patterns of female consumers in both countries of the Global North and South – which are in turn brought about by the increasing integration of women in the waged labour market – impact global value chains. Undervaluation of female labour facilitates value capture further along the global value chain. At the same time, fragmentation and globalization of production have profound effects on gender relations in countries of the Global South. Changing patterns of production can reinforce existing gender hierarchies and or help to break them up.

The panel draws attention to strategies of challenging gender inequalities in global value chains. Which strategies of mobilization are used by workers, trade unions, activists and consumers and what is the role of gender in these strategies? Is solidarity possible between female consumers and producers and between female producers and women at other nodes of the global value chain? To what degree do gender aspects play a role in the complex, multi-scalar legal framework regulating global value chains? What is the role of the law in both constructing and challenging (gender) inequality?

PANELISTS:

**Economic Downgrading or Upgrading in India’s, Bangladesh’s and Vietnam’s Textiel Industry: Challenges for Gender Equity and Labor Politics**

**Christina Teipen** (Berlin)

In general, the Global Value Chain (GVC) literature implicitly assumes that economic upgrading automatically improves real wages and the living and working conditions of employees. As in the apparel industry, however, the precarious living conditions of women are often taken into account in the competition for low-wage supplier locations. National institutions in these countries are often insufficiently enforcing legal labor standards; the bargaining power of trade unions is usually low or unions are politically oppressed.

The apparel industry in Bangladesh seems to be particularly interesting, as a number of sectoral initiatives have recently emerged that could strengthen the accountability of contracting companies

along the value chain and - at least partially - limit low-wage competition. Some of the improvements seem however to be detrimental to lower skilled female employees. As in many cases around the world trade union organization does not reflect the gender composition of the workforce whose interests they represent. We can state for Vietnam that women account for 70% of the rank-and-file labor force in textile and garment. However, women make up the majority of union membership in the garment industry; yet, over 70% of union leadership is taken up by men. In India, on the other hand, the textile industry is dominated by male employees, even if the share of female workers is increasing. But this figure only relies on direct formal working contracts. Informal work is widespread and one of the special challenges for gender-equal labor politics in this country.

These brief considerations should make clear that the presentation will address consequences of economic restructuring trajectories for labor politics in the textile sector. Special attention will be given to gender relations in these three labor markets.

### **Feminised Resistances and a Politics in/of the Feminine**

**Sara Motta** (Newcastle)

As Marxist feminist political economists demonstrate reproductive labour is a key, oft, invisibilised feminised place, of value production (Federici 2004). As decolonial feminists demonstrate the raced and gendered body is faced with complex forms of onto-epistemological violences (Motta, 2018). The contemporary period has witnessed both the feminisation of precarious labour and the continuation of feminised social reproductive labour combined with the intensification of onto-epistemological violences against the raced and feminised body. Such a context leads to the intensification of the precariousness and precarity of everyday life for large sections of the Global South.

In this talk I will explore how feminist nonviolent movements in Colombia are responding to such a double burden in the context of intensifying onto-epistemological violences through exploration of the politicisation of social reproduction, precariousness and precarity into new forms of feminised resistances and a politics in/of the feminine. In particular I will discuss the prefigurative and decolonising praxis being developed by women and men in movement through enfolded epistemologies, insurgent temporalities, an ethics of care, and a politics of life.

### **Value chains, transnational regulation and international allies: women labour power in the making? Examples from Bangladesh and Myanmar**

**Sabrina Zajak** (Bochum)

Research suggests that workers at production sites in the Global South can increasingly use transnational labour institutions and actors to raise their voice and influence in disputes about international rights violations. Networked interactions with global unions and other labour support organizations help workers and factory unions to construct power in small and incremental ways through information sharing, claim reframing, increasing social recognition, and the construction of a 'shadow of protection' for trade unions. Yet this debate on labour and trade union power in the making largely neglects the gender dimension and the fact that most workers are women, which face intersecting challenges at spheres of production and reproduction. This presentation uses examples from the textile industry in Bangladesh and Myanmar to discuss in how far recent thinking about

networks of Labour Activism (NOLAs) and social movement unionism in the context of global value chains need re-thinking to reflect and take into account the gender effects in the making of labour power in the Global South.