

Affinities between epistemology and ideology in the comparative study of capitalism

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A puzzle

Why, in the **mainstream of contemporary comparative research** on employment systems, production systems, welfare regimes, and political-economies more broadly is there an **overwhelming emphasis on difference rather than commonality** between cases?

Structure of the presentation

1. overview of my PhD project
 2. reflections on commonality and difference, and epistemology and ideology
- all work-in-progress

PhD brief overview

- 2nd year
- men's experiences of precarious forms of flexible work: steel workers and supermarket cashiers, UK and Germany
 - temporary agency contract, fixed-term contract, or variable hours work
- interviews:
 - union and management figures
 - Workers – men, core working age, settled residency, 25 hours+ per week

Four themes of interest

Four themes on the intersection between varieties within capitalism and precarious forms of flexible work are of particular interest:

1. Two claims of recent articulations of Varieties of Capitalism
2. Buffers and worker's experiences
3. Fragmented working histories and self-narratives
4. Narrative precarity and gendered displacement

Potential three paper thesis

One paper of three:

- comparative framework for studying individual precarity in precarious-flexible work
- here commonality and difference, and epistemology and ideology come in

Commonality and difference (1)

- institutional analysis – stability and change
- institutional analysis – commonality and difference
- critical neglect of commonality:
 - neglect of system-level explanations for commonality between capitalist political-economies.
 - restricted field of political vision

Commonality and difference (2)

- the Regulation School and commonality
- differences are also important of course
- methodological nationalism
- bringing commonality back in

Ideology and epistemology (1)

- What is the (often implicit) external point of reference for a researcher's judgment of dominant difference or commonality between cases?
- affinities:
 - difference and holding an existing point of comparison
 - on commonality and utopian point of comparison

Ideology and epistemology (2)

- relations between researcher's ideology and comparative judgements: not answerable empirically, but raised by empirics
- call for openness
- multiple 'yardsticks'

Closing reflections

- need for reflexivity in comparative research
- the field of political vision