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