Current Issues in Sociology: Work and Minorities

Edited by
Gregory A. Katsas

Athens Institute for Education and Research
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It is with great pleasure to present this volume, which is attempting something unique: the combination of two thematic areas under one cover. The first part contains selected articles on work, while the second part includes articles on minorities. Although seemingly unrelated, both areas are at the forefront of the academic exchange, since both are undergoing fast and dramatic changes.

As such, the reader will benefit from the exposure to the various concepts and will be able to discover connections between the various topics represented in this volume.

An added value of this volume is that it reflects the latest research from a truly international group of scholars, drawing from papers presented in recent conferences organized by ATINER. The Athens Institute of Education & Research (ATINER) gives the opportunity to scholars from around the world to meet in Athens and present their work. The result is a forum for the exchange of ideas that in many cases leads to collaborations and the creation of a productive academic community. I am thankful to all the authors who have entrusted us with their work.

Part I: Work

The first part is a collection of ten papers on aspects of work. What makes this collection important and relevant is the amount of change that the world of work has been going through recently. Indeed, as recently as the last decade or so, all dimensions of work have been altered dramatically. These changes are on-going and it becomes a challenge to describe, explain and understand them. The ten papers are organized into three themes, each representing a major aspect of work: job satisfaction, structural characteristics of work, and vulnerability of work.

The first theme, job satisfaction, is represented by three studies. The first one, by Harlow & Associates is addressing work satisfaction in academia. The
authors find that gender imbalance translates to difficulty recruiting and retaining women and wider disparity in men’s and women’s salaries among other issues. Compared to women faculty, men reported more career satisfaction, and more interactional work respect, institutional positive work climate, and individual career influence. Results highlight the importance of examining the role of gender and relevant structures, to understand university work environment and faculty career satisfaction.

Focusing on the connection between perceived emotional labour and job satisfaction is the contribution of Prof. Sapuan and Prof. Ayob who studies front line workers who directly interact with the customers in their daily line of work. Examples of these are the customer service officers in telecommunications and banking industries, as well as front officers and counter crews in entertainment and fast food industries. The author found negative correlations between several facets of emotional labour and job satisfaction, hoping to provide insights to researchers and practitioners on the importance of examining the role of gender and relevant structures, to understand university work environment and faculty career satisfaction.

The connection between job satisfaction and socio-psychological characteristics is the paper by L. Gustainiene and associates. The authors aim to assess the relationship between employee’s job satisfaction, perceived organizational support, and positive personality characteristics, such as happiness, hardness, optimism among workers in Lithuania. The results to an extent indicate a departure from other studies, as they show that men and women did not differ in job satisfaction. Happier workers expressed greater satisfaction with work. However, more optimistic employees were less satisfied with their job. Finally, employees with higher scores on perceived organizational support level tended to be more satisfied with their job than employees with lower levels of perceived organizational support.

Moving on to the second theme, we find three papers on structural characteristics of work as they relate to employers, the first of which is a case study on Spain. The authors, Profs. Contreras and Bolanos, present an in-depth study on the actions that Spanish companies will have to carry out in the labour relations field in order to obtain quality distinction concerning equal opportunity in the near future. Through an analysis of specific criteria, the study examines the incorporation of equal opportunities into human resources management.

Following, there is a study arguing that patterns of work are being altered very rapidly due to the globalization of the economy, restructuring of social organizations and a variety of connected issues. Its author, J. Mishra, attempts a critical application of Ritzer’s McDonaldization thesis in the context of globalized business with specific reference to business in India, arguing that the process of globalization has acted as an incentive for the developed as well as the developing economies to establish and implement more transparent and stringent corporate governance norms in connection to the organization of work.

Last under this theme is a paper focusing on the role of employers in assessing educational skills of applicants in Estonia. The author, M. Unt &
associates, point to the major changes in this respect and argues that major factors behind these changes are growing economic globalization and economic restructuring.

The third group of papers addresses a relatively new concept in the literature: that of vulnerability at work. Three articles relate to this theme.

In the first one, the author, I. Conde, presents artists as vulnerable workers on account of professional contingencies, but also on account of their dependent identities, which are exposed to specific forms of symbolic power, inequality and gatekeeping processes if they wish to achieve recognition.

Using Portugal as an illustration, the author describes the profile of vulnerability among artists, paying particular attention to gender issues.

The topic of vulnerability is addressed from a completely different perspective by the second paper. Focusing on Danish cancer patients, B. Hauge, the author, argues that being vulnerable at work - physically and mentally - is at the core of the lives of the informants presented. Based on the experiences and life-stories of cancer patients the author reveals how their vulnerability is experienced, expressed, and interpreted.

Although not directly discussing vulnerability at work, the last paper under this theme is considering the work and family status of Romanian mothers. The authors, A. Matei and colleagues, are basing their findings on research carried out by National Scientific Research Institute for Labor and Social Protection of Romania and indicate that Romanian mothers relate the need for balance between work and family with the presence or absence of childcare services and job flexibility. This, too, is a form of vulnerability at work.

The last paper belongs to a completely different genre: the historical consideration of work and labor markets. Its author, C. Arnold, focuses at the socio-political changes at the beginnings of the twentieth century in Southeastern Mediterranean and argues that Turkey’s loss of its Greek and Armenian populations in the early twentieth century, posed several obstacles to industrial enterprise and the construction of an industrial labor force in early republican Turkey. The author discusses the structural effects this had in the form of the short-term replacement of industrial workers in individual industrial enterprises and a longer term difficulty related to the development of a skilled labor force.

**Part II: Minorities & Migration**

Given the increasing ethnic and racial diversity in all countries of the world, or maybe because of it, the academic literature addressing relevant issues is increasing fast.

The general topic of minorities and migration as presented in ATINER’s conferences represents a diversity of approaches. In this volume, these approaches are grouped into two major themes: the first is the definition of the concept of minority, while the second is the adaptation of immigrants. Each includes six papers.
The first theme opens with a study by Sharon Wray and Michelle Bartholomew. The authors look into issues of insiderness and outsiderness and how these may be interpreted in qualitative research. They apply these ideas on older African Caribbean women in the United Kingdom. The authors focus on ethnicity, age, and socio-economic class, concluding that there is a need for researchers to reflect on the extent to which prevailing representations of otherness come to be re-inscribed or altered as part of the research process.

With a rather historical twist, the following paper by Poul Duedhal examines the early attempts to define race and ethnicity. This is done in the context of introducing of the culturally-rooted concept of “ethnic group” as a more meaningful category by UNESCO. Specifically, the paper examines the political and social impact of two UNESCO statements aiming to classify race and ethnicity within a number of member states in the 1950s. It shows that UNESCO efforts played a major part in imposing a new view of mankind in the post-war era.

The next study focuses on social class as a defining characteristic among Aboriginal groups in Canada. The author, Nikos Liodakis, reviews literature that uses both cultural and political definitions of minority definition, arguing that more is needed to understand the processes of class formation, relations and structure of Aboriginal people.

Picking on the politically loaded issue of the Greek Christian community in Turkey, the next paper focuses on the controversy over the Halki Seminary. The author, Edward A. Bulut, shows how the problem, previously domestic, has recently become an international concern. By referring the certain treaties and constitutional provisions, the author argues that it is necessary to elaborate the minority rights and violations through a social perspective, and to discuss the counter-claims in order to have a better insight.

Following there is a study addressing the ever challenging issue of measuring ethnic attitudes. The authors, Irina Plotka and associates, are using ethnic relations between Russians and Latvians as a case study to argue for a move away from explicit and into more implicit measurement of definitions of ethnic attitudes toward the “other.”

The last paper in this section represents the attention given lately to the issue of heritage in defining identity. The paper, by Tiziana Destino, aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the construction of identity, diversity and the dialectic between the Self and the Other. Focusing on the heritage discourses and the Euro-Mediterranean narratives, the paper elucidates new heritage appreciations across the Mediterranean shores. It is argued that heritage has to be protected for our personal and collective enjoyment and for a sustainable transmission of our inherited and changing cultural values to the new generations.

The second theme is addressing the ever-relevant issue of adaptation of migrants. The theme is represented by a collection of six papers offering diverse applications.
The first paper studies the many changes that are taking place in Ireland as a result of the increasing wave of immigrants. The author, Prof. Loyal, points to the fact that historically Ireland defined itself as a country sending people elsewhere. As this today is rapidly changing, the paper discusses the political, cultural and social challenges this has produced.

Using an interesting twist on the understanding of student immigration, the study by Morteza Bahrani and Abol Hassan Riazi examines immigration of students within Iran and focuses on the life changes this brings. Specifically, the authors are looking into how compliance with new lifestyle, rules, standards, and laws bring about a cognitive gap and a change in students’ educational experience, in connection to behavior according to new cultural, political and social conventions.

Following there is a paper assessing the relationship between language proficiency and civic participation, by comparing immigrants to the Canadian born. Two core questions are addressed. First, what are the relationships between language knowledge and the level and type of civic participation within the immigrant population? Second, do immigrants, particularly those with low levels of language proficiency differ from the Canadian born in the type of civic participation? Using data from the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey, the author, Monica Boyd, finds that civic participation does vary by language proficiency and type of association.

Studying a relatively new move into Barcelona, skilled Romanian immigrants and how they are connected with the formation of professional networks is the topic of the next paper. The author, Prof. Petroff, finds that the social networks operate in two directions. Firstly, the family or the institutions weave a sort of security network which offers certain guarantees in the destination country. Secondly, once in the destination country, these migrants are inserted into supportive networks, for and by which their skills have been created and channeled.

The overall socio-economic situation of migrants is one of the most studied issues concerning immigrants. In this study, the authors, Yehudith Kahn, Audrey Dumas, and Yovav Eshet attempt to study this by comparing data from two North African countries: Egypt and Morocco. They focus specifically on the debate as to whether migration influences poverty on an individual level. The study investigates the link between migration and poverty, comparing household survey data from Egypt and Morocco, producing different patterns. First, past poverty positively affects migration choice in Egypt, but negatively in Morocco. Second, the determinants of migration are different in Egypt and Morocco. Third, migration was found to be a significant determinant of current subjective poverty in Morocco, but not in Egypt. Finally, for Egyptians, migration improved financial situation for those who were initially poor but not for those initially better off; in contrast for Moroccans, all migrants benefitted from migration.

The final paper, by Pam Nilan, suggests a sociological approach to understanding the problematic experiences of Muslim jobseekers in Australia. It reports on initial findings from Muslim jobseekers that indicate not only
expected obstacles to finding employment such as lack of English and required skills for recent arrivals, but widespread misunderstanding and intolerance in the labor market towards even second-generation Muslim jobseekers, reflecting wider negative community attitudes.