

World of/in chains: Labor, Nature and Uneven Development in the Globalized Economy

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Office hours: Tue 10-11.40 (register via online-form on my webpage)

Msc. Urban and Regional Research (G2_2)

HS 4 hours (every second week), Mo 14-18, S 130 (NW III)

Start: April 20th, 2020, no seminar on June 1st, 2020; end: July 20th

The globalisation of production-consumption relations is not a novelty of the last 40 years or so – the era often associated with ‘globalization’. For many centuries, the countries of the Global North have been interwoven with the production of spaces, places and the exploitation of human labour and natural resources in the Global South. However, over the past decades, these interconnections have come to expose an unprecedented social, technological and geographical complexity. Today, agricultural and industrial production and even services are globally fragmented and are being worked upon in a myriad of places, yet are functionally tightly integrated at the same time.

The approaches of global commodity chains, value chains and production networks have particularly shaped our understanding of the functioning of a seemingly borderless (yet highly integrated) global economy, both within and outside economic geography. At the same time, these analytical approaches have become prominent instruments of regional and global development policy-making, as most recently espoused by the publication of the World Bank’s World Development Report 2020 (“Trading for Development in the Age of Global Value Chains”). This practice-oriented shift has often been bemoaned in more critical accounts of a “world of chains”, which highlight the many “dark sides” of global supply chain capitalism. In this seminar, we first trace the history of chains and network approaches conventionally mobilized for the analysis of global economic processes. We then put to use a critical understanding of global value chains in order to map the shifting geographies and economic relationships of globalized production, and their implications for labour, the environment, patterns of



inequality and the accumulation of wealth at a regional and world scale. The seminar adopts the method of the three-phase seminar. In the first two double sessions (4 x 2SWS), we will familiarize ourselves with the relevant background literature. In the next two double sessions (2x 2SWS), we will work in a structured manner in-class and out-of class (the Whitsuntide week) on selected topics. These will be followed by four group presentations (4x 2SWS), before we wrap up with a 3-hour reflection and summary (3SWS).