



Call for Participation

“Precarious Internationale: solidarity network meeting“ of the Network for Decent Labour in Academia, Berlin, June 5, 2020

Deadline for application: February 15, 2020

Dear all,

many of us have made and continue to make disenchanting experiences, to say the least, in the German academic system. While it markets itself as a world of excellence, liberal egalitarianism, cosmopolitanism, freedom and generosity towards scholars at risk, the reality of its structural labour conditions and culture of ignorance betray this image to be a grotesque misrepresentation. German academia is characterised by an ingrained and almost cultivated lack of consciousness towards multiple forms of discrimination (based on race, class, gender, age, etc.) and by related modalities of exclusion as well as paternalistic and infantilizing norms and practices particularly vis-à-vis international and non-naturalized scholars and students. As a system that has never been as much as confronted with a debate on quotas or human rights, German academia expects everybody to ‘integrate’ into what is still essentially a structure normatively built around the ‘white male’ and organised according to steep hierarchies around disciplinary chairs. The consequences are direct and indirect dependencies of various kinds and precarious, fixed-term employment structures unparalleled by international comparison.

Many who came to join German academia with hopes and expectations have meanwhile withdrawn, tending to pressing political issues in other ways. While very much understandable, this inadvertently strengthens the fragmentation and division among the large class of underprivileged and precarious scholars that the system relies upon. The Network for Decent Labour in Academia (Netzwerk für Gute Arbeit in der Wissenschaft, NGAWiss) has been working for the past three years to publicise and scandalise the miserable employment conditions in German academia and to advocate for structural reforms. Its working group ‘Precarious Internationale’ aims to make intersectional discrimination a central issue of the network’s activism.

As a part of this effort, this workshop wants to bring together scholars, unionists and activists with different histories of mobility and migration to discuss and reflect on the intersection between precarious labour conditions and different forms of discrimination in the German academic system. We want to come together and learn from each other in order to come to a better analysis of the different problems and challenges faced by differently positioned scholars and activists, but also to exchange experiences and knowledges over struggles for academic freedoms and labour conditions in different contexts. The aim is both to position the question of labour in academia within broader societal struggles in Germany and to link it up to related struggles in other countries.

We propose to frame the workshop along two lines of debate and exchange. However, we are very much open to alter and adapt this proposal according to what participants consider urgent and relevant to be discussed!

- 1) Critical diversity: As against a neoliberal depoliticised celebration of diversity that follows a calculative logic of added value while blanking out structural inequalities, we want to engage in a critical discussion on the realities of diversity in German academia.

Possible questions to be discussed include: what are the effects, limitations and problems of current discourse and practices of diversity? Is it possible – and acceptable – to speak of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ in the European and especially German context? When does it make sense to speak of ‘migration backgrounds’ to address the issue of underrepresentation of scholars in high academic positions? What are the concrete problems and challenges faced by people with a variety of different migration/mobility histories? What about forms of discrimination affecting people who do not master the German language? And how do these issues intersect with other vectors of discrimination, such as class, age, gender or disability?

- 2) Network of solidarity: We want to learn from each other’s struggles and experiences, think through concrete possibilities for solidarity and envision common political actions.

How can we connect the activities of scholars, unionists, and activists struggling against precarious labour and different forms of inequality and discrimination in different academic settings? What are the larger political struggles in which these activities are involved? How and what can we learn from each other? What kinds of concrete steps towards mutual assistance could be developed and what common political actions could be envisioned?

Please let us know (alice.bieberstein@hu-berlin.de) by FEBRUARY, 15 2020 whether (1) you would like to participate in this workshop! In your answer, please indicate (2) whether there is a topic or issue of special INTEREST or URGENCY to you that you would want to see addressed in the workshop. Please also let us know (3) whether you would want to join with a specific contribution of any kind (presentation, film, artistic intervention, etc.).

We absolutely want to make sure that lack of personal funds does not stand in the way of your participating. Private accommodation can be provided, and we are looking into options of supporting travel expenses. Please do let us know your needs and we’ll get back to you with possibilities.

Contact:

Dr. Alice von Bieberstein
Institut für Europäische Ethnologie
Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
alice.bieberstein@hu-berlin.de

For information on the Network, see: <https://www.mittelbau.net/information-in-english/>