

15th Conference of the Commission of Women and Gender Studies of the German Association of Folklore Studies (dgv)

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Politics of Care – Care as Politics

The Commission of Women and Gender Studies of the German Association of Folklore Studies in cooperation with the Institute of Cultural Anthropology, Hamburg University and the Department of Anthropology and Cultural Research, Bremen University

25. - 27.2.2016

Venue: Hamburg University

In German, 'care' (Für_Sorge) is a term rich in meaning and use – ranging from support, treatment and maintenance to welfare and concern. Most current developments in the field of 'care' are marked by contradictions and conflicts: privatization and economization, state interventions and control, but also the withdrawal of the welfare state, the asymmetric globalization of care as well as harsh political fights about models of child care are just a few aspects to be mentioned. The public discourse is dominated by crisis scenarios: (health) care crisis and neglect are located in private and family contexts as well as in institutional, state or church contexts, affecting human beings but also more-than-human animals, plants and environments. In the perspective of the social and cultural sciences 'care' appears as a field in which belonging and self-positioning are continuously (re) negotiated alongside ethics and affects, emerging subjectivities and social forms, inequalities, resources and interests.

The conference asks: What actually is at stake in contemporary discussions about 'care'? What kinds of politics of care are emerging? Who is participating in care? Who is under the obligation of caring for whom? Who is lacking care and who is completely excluded? Moreover, how can we grasp care as a dynamic, reciprocal relationship, as an attitude of being-in-the world, as ethics, politics and economy? How can we think and understand the complex entanglement of 'gender' and 'care' historically and for contemporary societies?

Following Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, our initial point is a very broad understanding of 'care', moving far beyond ideas that take 'care' as equivalent with reproduction (understood as the work and effort needed for the recovery of workers and their working power). Rather, 'care' is here

understood as relating to all practices directed towards the making, maintenance and 'care' of all kinds of creatures and their environments (e.g. objects, infrastructures etc.). Coevally, 'care' can be conceived as an attitude towards the world, standing in contrast to social abandonment (Biehl 2005).

We claim that ethnographic research can make a specific contribution to an even more complex understanding of 'care'. At this point we can draw on the rich history of kinship studies and feminist social sciences / anthropology while trying to avoid some problematic dichotomies brought forth in this research (such as public and private, family and state, human and technology, traditional and modern etc.). In particular, in the feminist debate on reproductive work, which mainly influenced the establishment of women's and gender studies in Germany in the 1970s, questions of reproduction and further aspects of 'care' (such as 'moral economies of caring') were at the center of the discussion. The entanglement of the discussion on domestic work, migration studies and gender theory since the late 1990s shows the redistribution of care work at a transnational scale as well as from an intersectional approach – keywords here are 'transnational care chains' (Hochschild) or the 'new global division of reproductive labour' (Parrenas). Recently there have been a number of discussions and research projects on 'care economies' in the sphere of motherhood and in providing for the elderly, located at the interface of research on work, gender, and aging.

These emerging strands feed back into the analysis of post-Fordian and neoliberal employment and living conditions, adopting also intersectional, transnational and postcolonial perspectives.

Besides, the concept of 'care' is also discussed in the field of science and technology studies (STS). Most prominently, Annemarie Mol's broadly discussed study 'Logics of Care' (2008) on diabetic patients in a Dutch hospital invigorated the debate. By conducting empirical research on the practices of care, Mol came to think of care differently when she emphasized two distinct, but interwoven patterns: a 'logic of care' and a 'logic of choice'. While the 'logic of care' is understood as a process of 'attuning to, respecting, nourishing and even enjoying mortal bodies' (Mol 2008), the 'logic of choice' addresses the neoliberal individual increasingly burdened with self-responsibility in difficult situations. With this perspective on care, infused with practice theory and ANT, Mol argues for an experimental mode of care that enables a shared responsibility far beyond paternalism. Finally, the concept of 'care' is critically discussed in the research field of 'humanitarianism'. Studies show how 'care' and the 'protection of life' (of women, children, LGBTs ...) became an ethic, determining international politics, especially in the context of postcolonial regimes of interventions, (Didier Fassin). Relating to these developments, Miriam Ticktin states in 'Casualties of Care' (2011) that by fighting for the acknowledgment of sexual violence and abuse as grounds for asylum, the international women's movement also (unintentionally) contributed to a 'politics of care' which only in exceptional cases grants care, but in general tends to terminate or limit rights.

The conference 'Politics of Care' invites further reflections and discussions on 'care' as severely gendered and always shaped by ontologies, ambiguities, power relations and thus politics. In this context 'politics' is used in open and diverse ways. It refers not only to 'politics WITH care' in the sense of decision-making processes, distribution of resources and conflicting interests, but also to 'care AS politics' in the sense of dynamic and reciprocal relationships between different actors and environments, which are ethically positioned in contrast to imperatives of choice and consumption and newly emerging patterns of neglect and abandonment.

The conference Politics of Care is targeted not only at the process-driven dynamics and practices of (self-)government in their gender theoretical dimensions, but also at new forms of participation and connecting. It raises questions about the relationship of care, economy and law; the distribution and instrumentalization of care in global entanglements and post-national configurations; the expansion of care to non-human actors, species and environments; new and historical practices of care; and different politics of care as well as methodical innovations and collaborations to conduct research on these questions.

To encourage and facilitate discussions and mutual commenting during the conference, conventional lecture formats as well as short presentations, comments, disputations amongst other formats are planned.

We are looking forward to contributions and proposals for workshops or more uncommon formats of discussion that argue historically as well as focus on the present. The proposals can cover, but are not limited to the following topics:

- From Logics to Politics: New Perspectives on Care
- Gendered Politics, Practices and Figures of Care
- Care as Self Empowerment and Resistance
- Genealogies of Care: Power, Gender and Normalization
- Care for Vulnerable Groups
- Entanglements of Care and Gender in Post- and Neo-Colonial Figurations/ Interventions in the Context of Humanitarian Regimes
- Caring for Natures/Cultures: Conviviality with More-Than-Human Actors
- Politics of Care for Machines, Socio-Technical Systems and Infrastructures
- Care in Crisis or the Crisis as Enabling: New Socialities in Ongoing Crisis
- Do WE Care? Methodical and Epistemic Dimensions of Politics of Care in Science

About the abstracts:

We are looking forward to proposals for lectures and/or workshops of all empirically working social and cultural sciences. The abstracts (max. length 2000 characters) should include the question, empirical background, hypothesis and brief personal details.

Please send your proposals or abstracts until the 31.08.2015 to politicsofcare@uni-hamburg.de

A publication of the contributions is planned.

Conception and Organization:

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