Renegotiating Gender: Affective Labour and the Transformation of Public Services

Birgit Sauer (birgit.sauer@univie.ac.at) & Otto Penz (otto.penz@univie.ac.at)
University of Vienna
Department of Political Science
Universitätsstrasse 7
1010 Wien

Paper presented at the panel
„European Integration and Gender Norms, Institution and Policies“
IPSA Conference, Montreal 2014

First draft. Please do not quote!

Abstract: The process of European market integration has been accompanied – inter alia – by the privatization of public services like railways, postal services and labor market administration. These policies of neo-liberal reorganization did not only lead to changes in welfare state institutions (due to New Public Management, entrepreneurial governance or workfarism) but also to new work relations in the indicated semi-state institutions. Our paper will investigate new forms of immaterial and affective labor that characterize contemporary front-line workplaces of the public service sector. We will argue that shifting modes of state regulation and governmentality correspond with new ways of subjectivation (towards entrepreneurialism, e.g.) – and that this includes new practices of negotiating femininity and masculinity. Hence, the aim of the paper is to show how processes of Europeanization lead to the transformation of nation states, to new institutional settings and to new gender relations. The paper will draw on our empirical study on affective labor, state transformation and gender relations with the example of the Austrian Mail.

1 Our research has been funded from 2009-2011 by the Austrian National Bank (Jubiläumsfondsprojekt Nr. 13319) and is currently funded by the Austrian Science Fund (Projekt P 2529-G22). We want to thank both institutions for their generous support.
1. Europeanization, neoliberal transformation of states and gender. Introduction

EU Directive 97/67/EC led to the privatization of former public postal services across the European Union (Flecker 2014: 145ff.). This process of European (market) integration induced the spin-off of the Austrian Mail from the national administration in 1996 and its conversion into a stock corporation. In 2006 the corporation went public and the state reduced its shares to 53%. In this process of Europeanization and privatization former state bureaucracies have been remodeled as modern service providers governed by New Public Management (NPM). Europeanization, privatization and New Public Management introduced the idea of competition in former state bureaucracies – competition on the service market as well as competition within the corporation and between employees of the Austrian Mail.

The concept of Europeanization is widely discussed but it lacks clarity of definition. For some scholars the European Union’s domestic impact is seen as a “variety of political, social and cognitive phenomena” (Forest/Lombardo 2012: 1). Especially in the field of gender equality policies Europeanization has been analyzed as a discursive process. Frames, this body of literature claims, are important factors in implementing European Union policies into nation states (ibid.: 3 and 6). Our paper wants to add to this body of literature and the conceptualization of Europeanization an affective dimension. We claim, that Europeanization needs to be seen as processes of struggles, negotiations and conflicts which encompass not only rational but also affective dimensions and practices. Particularly neoliberal changes of states in the process of Europeanization create new zones of affective labor – which are inextricably entangled with gender relations.

We are interested in the implementation and realization of state transformation and privatization (induced by Europeanization) by “street level bureaucrats” (Lipsky 2010). Front-line workers of the postal service are no longer state officials but have to perform service work in order to serve the customers and, even more important, to sell additional goods over the counter through attempts of up- and cross-selling. Hence, traditional teller work is transformed into seller work (Regini et al. 2000). Privatization of the former public mail service is characterized by a new emphasis on customer orientation (Korczinsky 2009), communicative skills and friendliness. One of the major tasks of front-line employees and a major factor of success at the work place is to ‘enchant’ customers in order to raise the profit and the share-holder value of the corporation. Our research assumes that employees of the
Austrian Mail embody the new corporatized state and perform and implement new state policies in the interaction with clients.

What are the implications of the Europeanization and state transformation process for the required work skills, i.e. the communicative and social competences of employees? The corporatization of former state bureaucracies and their service orientation resulted – we argue in this paper – in a growing demand for affective labor in public services. One dimension of European integration and Europeanization is the rising importance of ‘affective labor’ and new ways of affecting state bureaucrats as well as citizens. The new labor processes also give rise to tensions between the standards and demands of the management of the Austrian Mail and the street level front-line service work at the counter, which creates new challenges for affect management. Therefore we ask, what affective consequences the regime of market orientation, commercialization and competition has for front-line employees of the Austrian Mail. Following Michel Foucault (2006) we will argue that shifting modes of state regulation and governmentality correspond with new ways of affective subjectivation (towards entrepreneurialism, e.g.).

Moreover, affective labor is a central mode of a gendered division of labor – a way of producing and reproducing gendered work positions, to produce and reproduce femininity and masculinity. Our investigation of the Austrian Mail is of specific interest with regard to gender questions as it is concerned with an occupational field which evolved from a male bureaucratic terrain into service work, a field of affective labor, which has traditionally been seen as female work, connected to practices and discourses of femininity. Therefore, our study asks if and how Europeanization and marketization of public services are modulated by affects and by gender. What consequences do the new affective demands have on the gendered nature of public service and states? Our study aims at detecting processes where the meanings of gendered affective labor and „hegemonic masculinity“ (Connell 1995: 77f.) are renegotiated in the transformation of a former ‘rational male bureaucracy’ into ‘feminized’ service work. How do front-line employees of the Austrian Mail ‘do gender’ while they ‘do state’, ‘public service’ and service work? Does Europeanization lead to a ‘feminization’ of former state bureaucracies? Or does the new entrepreneurial spirit of neoliberal Europeanization of former state bureaucracies lead to a ‘re-masculinization’ and to new forms of hegemonic bureaucratic masculinity? Moreover, we ask if and how the introduction of New Public Management leads to a ‘modernization’ of hegemonic masculinity, „which rejects
old-style bureaucracy and believes in ‘flatter’ organizations, equal opportunity, and family-friendly employment policies“ (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005: 853). Thus, the aim of the paper is to show how processes of state transformation in the context of European integration lead to new ways of gendered institutional settings and to new gender relations in public services and that new institutional practices of doing state and doing gender emerge in the process of Europeanization.

Our paper is based on the analysis of training materials and internal documents on human resources of the Austrian Mail. These documents provide information concerning the desirable conduct towards customers and ‘feeling rules’ of the organization – what Stephen Fineman (2008) calls „emotionologies“. Furthermore, we conducted in 2010 expert interviews with nine people in leading positions in the human resource department of the Austrian Mail focusing on required personal skills and qualifications of front-line employees. In addition, we conducted observations of work processes in post offices in Vienna as well as 14 structured interviews with front-line employees and branch managers in Vienna (8 male and 6 female interviewees). These interviews focused on work requirements and the workload, on job satisfaction and wellbeing as well as on experiences with customers and formal and informal rules of conduct in interaction processes with customers. Our data were interpreted according to the rules of a “focused” or “sociological ethnography” (Knoblauch 2005) and by following Kleres’ (2010) “emotions and narrative analysis” approach. The main interpretative focus of the latter was on two affective dimensions of our interview transcripts: on the one hand, the „lexical level“ of „emotion words, which refer ... descriptively to emotional states“ (Kleres 2010: 194), and on the other hand on the syntactic level, i.e. on entire sentences which refer to emotions. Our main interpretative idea is that emotions and affects „are inextricably interwoven with the meaning dimension of texts to the point where the distinction between cognition and emotion becomes blurred“ (ibid.: 197).

2. The male state. Doing state and doing gender
Serving the public and common good is the basic law of the „bureaucratic field“, Pierre Bourdieu writes (1998a: 150, own translation): A world, where the social actors do not pursue their personal interests but sacrifice them for the sake of the public, for the service of society, for the general good (ibid.). Therefore public servants shall serve the law and implement laws without passion and self-interest – „sine ira et studio“ as Max Weber points out characterizing the work and decision-making of state bureaucrats (Weber 1992: 32). Bureaucrats are
supposed to respond to the needs of individual citizens and set aside their own private political, moral or other commitments to devote themselves to the general public interest. Overall, this form of modern state bureaucracy contributed vastly to the depersonalization of state power as well as to its justification and legitimization by relying on secular methods and norms.

However, the „Leviathan“ was double-faced: One face was the public and state sphere of male subordination under the state power, and the second face was the so-called private sphere of subordination of women under the pater familias. Based on the separation of social spheres the state apparatus – military, police and administration – emerged since the 18th and 19th century as exclusively male terrain – legitimized through a gendered codification and polarization of emotionality and rationality or heart and mind. The formation of such modern state bureaucracies in the 19th century coincides with the construction of opposing but complementary gender roles that were informed by the lifestyle of the bourgeoisie. The public sphere and state institutions were ascribed to men according to their presumed rationality, whereas the role of creating a private home filled with love and other positive feelings was assigned to women. The bureaucrat was therefore perceived as a man embodying those ideals of rationality, guided by routines and rules – devoted to fulfill the tasks the state had assigned to him and implementing political decisions and aims without getting caught up in his own interests. Thus, the state and its institutions were gender-typed as exclusively male in a double sense: firstly, state bureaucracies were literally ‘manned’ and secondly, modern state bureaucracy was associated with emotionless and rational masculinity, i.e. governed by male rules and norms (Bologh 1990; Sauer 1999, 2001). To put it differently: While ‘doing state’ bureaucrats also do gender and thus reproduce the male bias of state organizations. Since the 1970s this 19th century ideal of state bureaucracies and the “ethos of the office” (du Gay 1996: 164) have changed tremendously. The transformation of the Fordist gender regime (of a male bread winner) and the integration of women into labor markets – where public institutions were one site of integration – had an impact on state arenas and bureaucracies. States became ‘feminized’ in the sense that more women entered state bureaucracies.

The establishment and development of the Austrian Mail as a public institution in the early 19th century – „Staatliche Post- und Telegraphenverwaltung“ (public postal and telegraph administration) – explains its male bureaucratic character as well as the high social status and authority of the (male) postal civil servants until the mid-20th century. Service work in the
public postal service was perceived and enacted as bureaucratic work with bureaucratic rationality and therefore as male practice in accordance with male norms. Although emotions were certainly present, public service work was not conceptualized as affective work. Working as a postal civil servant meant to suppress one’s own passions and feelings because this work was regarded as a sovereign duty – a service to the general public and a “vocation”, as Weber (1992, 1995) calls it. In contrast to the private service sector, which became a feminized labor market since the 1960s, the public services in Austria remained a male domain until the 1990s – despite the legendary female telephone operators of the inter-war years, the so-called ‘Fräulein vom Amt’, who had to connect callers in a friendly way and thus add a human touch to the technical process of telecommunication. Being a postal civil servant was a male job, and only since the 1990s women have been integrated in this setting in a gender hierarchical manner.

3. Europeanization of public services and neoliberal state transformation. Corporatizing the Austrian Mail

EU postal legislation started with a Council Resolution in 1994 on the development of Community postal services (COM/93/247), which led to the first Directive on common rules for the development of the internal market of Community postal services in 1997 (Directive 97/67/EC), i.e. in short, to the liberalization of the postal market and the end of state monopolies. The main objective of the Community postal policy framework was to ensure “efficient, reliable and good-quality services (that) are available throughout the European Union to all its citizens at affordable prices” (ec.europa.eu/internal_market/post/legislation/index_en.htm, accessed on July 3, 2014). With two additional Directives in 2002 and 2008 the EU finished the liberalization, i.e. the full market opening of all areas of postal services among its Member States. In 2010 the European Commission established the “European Regulators Group for Postal Services” to control the competition of European postal service providers.

In Austria the European policies led to the spin-off of the postal and telecommunication services from the state administration in 1996 and to the conversion of the Austrian Mail into a stock corporation (Atzmüller/Hermann 2004: 34ff.). Until 2006, when the postal service went public, the state reduced its shares from 100 to 53%. The process of liberalization and privatization was accompanied by the closing of post offices, predominantly in rural areas, a considerable reduction of the postal work force (ibid.) and the implementation of ‘change’-
programs and new management strategies like New Public Management (NPM) and output control.

In general terms, Europeanization resulted in the restructuring of former public institutions according to a market and managerial logic – put into practice by the introduction of competition at all levels of performance and performance management like NPM. Former bureaucracies thus underwent considerable changes by incorporating a service sector logic that differs vastly from a traditional bureaucratic logic. Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert attribute the dawn of NPM to a fast-spreading policy since the 1970s “to make government more businesslike – to save money, increase efficiency, and simultaneously oblige public bureaucracies to act more responsively towards their citizen-users” (Pollitt/Bouckaert 2011: 6). Traditional bureaucratic work also changed in terms of labor control. The authors point to a number of general practices that characterize the reform process, like the introduction of market-type mechanisms into the public sector – competition between administrative units or even individual employees, e.g. –, the measurement of outputs, management by objectives, performance agreements, or the emphasis on treating service users as customers (ibid.: 10; also du Gay 1996).

In Austria the transformation of the public postal service into a corporation and managerial control to achieve greater efficiency and better service quality changed the working conditions of former state bureaucrats, the work processes and the work requirements of front-line workers fundamentally. The reorganization of public services brought about new professional aims for public employees, changes in job security and career expectations. As indicated above, the most salient strategy to raise the profitability of the Austrian Mail was the reduction of the work force, the closure of unprofitable postal offices and their replacement by so-called ‘postal partners’ like grocery shops and gas stations. This resulted in growing fear of postal employees to loose their jobs – a feeling of insecurity, which Pierre Bourdieu (1998b: 113) sees as a general characteristic of neo-liberalism. Insecurity, he argues, is a means of the neoliberal agenda as it legitimizes the tremendous intensification of work, which is subjectively a source of anger and stress. This is reflected in one of our respondent’s answers:²

„In former times it was a mutual giving and taking. Nowadays it is taking from above and giving from below. I call this ’vampirism’: They suck your blood, and when you are

² The following quotes are taken from our interviews.
done, you are thrown away (...) Work pressure definitely has been increased, because you are assigned more and more tasks, but you do not get more time to fulfill them.”

Our research shows, in accordance with Pollitt and Bouckaert’s (2011: 91) findings, that careers became less secure in the reform process of public management. They also point to a growing emphasis on short-term objectives and an increasing measurement of performance, tied in with the introduction of information technology (ibid.: 92 and 106f.). While job security of public employees declines, the expectations and control mechanisms with regard to work commitment and goal attainment rise. The privatization of postal services aims not only at greater efficiency and effectiveness (at lower costs) but also at better service quality. Hence, the work of front-line workers is no longer restricted to administrative tasks but has to be market and customer oriented and does now entail interactive service work in cooperation with a client or customer.

The introduction of new technologies and the computerization of work processes enabled an efficient capacity management. To cope for instance with fluctuating customer frequencies (most of the customers drop by at the end of the office hours) working hours had to be more flexible. This resulted in rising part-time and minor employment contracts, which enable more flexibility than fulltime workers. For the first time in history jobs of the Austrian Mail became insecure and precarious (Atzmüller/Hermann 2004: 36; AK 2009: 60f.). And the precarization led to the feminization of the work force within the Austrian Mail. Today, women are the majority of front-line workers in Austria’s postal offices.

The corporatization and the transformation from ‘office’ to ‘service’ entailed a loss of authority and prestige for the (former) public servants. As one of our interviewees puts it: „25 years ago we were well recognized (...) Today, although postal services became much quicker, we are not respected any more.” Similarly, another respondent said: „The public image of the Austrian Mail is ‘They are all lazy, they do not work, they are stupid’”.

Following Michaels Lipsky’s (2010) concept of “street level bureaucracy” we conceive the state as being produced in the interactions between front-line employees of the Austrian Mail and (citizen-) customers. Our understanding of the state is based on the concept of ‘doing state’. Furthermore, we see state transformation as a shift to activation policies for front-line employees who have to adopt the principles of the corporatized state in their own subject position. The yardstick for success of the Austrian Mail is its shareholder value and the
amount of profits. Post employees are granted an annual premium and thus share the success and profits of the postal corporation. Therefore, profit sharing constitutes one of the economic incentives to strengthen the involvement of employees and to foster the identification of the staff with the corporation. Moreover, this strategy aims at creating an identity as postal employee through commercial success. Hence, the new image of the postal employee includes the idea of an entrepreneurial self or of an entrepreneurial identity.

However, the logic of the service sector can be highly contradictory aiming at consumer-orientation on the one hand and rationalization and efficiency on the other hand (Kerfoot/Korzynski 2005: 390). This conflict is well-captured by Marek Korczynski’s concept of the “customer-oriented bureaucracy” which states that modern service workers have to reconcile the bureaucratic logic encompassing rationalization, efficiency and a focus on quantitative aims with the logic of customer-orientation that aims at giving the customer a sense of sovereignty and enchant him/her by appealing to his/her irrationality (Korczynski 2009: 78f.). Therefore we conclude, that the Europeanization of former state services can also be perceived as a process of “customer-oriented bureaucratization” – which leads to conflicting demands for front-line workers.

Following Foucault (2006) we label this process of state transformation and the emergence of new contradictory and paradoxical subjectivities – the entrepreneurial self – and new forms of governance of oneself and of others as “governmentality”. Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality allows us to conceive at once the self-constitution and subjection of such a work force. Governmentality refers to historically specific power regimes and “neoliberal governmentality” to current societies where power is de-centered and its members play an active role in their own self-government (Foucault 2006). Governmental rationality consists of ways to govern others (through norms and regulations of the economic competition, e.g.) and to induce a corresponding self-government (so that individuals seek to enhance their own ‘employability’). In the following chapter on immaterial and affective labor in capitalist service societies we will try to provide the social context for our Foucauldian concept of ‘affective governmentality’ and ‘affective subjectivation’.
4. Europeanization and state transformation as processes of affective governmentality and affective subjectivat

The process of European integration and privatization of public services coincides with the gradual transformation of industrial into service societies. Michael Hardt argues that the rising service orientation and rising service work shows in the growth of “immaterial labor“. Immaterial labor includes the production of immaterial goods such as cultural goods, knowledge, cooperation and networks (Hardt 1999: 90). Both developments, the neoliberal transformation of governance and states – fueled by European integration – and the formation of “cognitive capitalism” (Moulier Boutang 2011; Lorey/Neundlinger 2012), based on knowledge, communication and creativity, lead to the growing importance of affects in the labor process. Affective labor, that is the active creation of personal relationship, becomes more and more important for economic productivity (Hardt 1999).

We decided to use the concept of ‘affective labor’ and not emotional labor. Our notion of affect does to some extend reflect the ‘affective turn’ in cultural studies as it refers to the inextricable interplay of body and soul, of corporeal and cognitive dispositions, of rational cognition and affective valuation, of being affected and affecting others. Therefore, we do not conceive rational assessment and affective evaluation as opposing counterparts but as interwoven elements. However, in contrast to the work of Brian Massumi (2002), for instance, we regard affects as bodily expressions that are always social, discursive and context related. By using the concept of ‘affective labor’ we want to go beyond Arlie Hochschild’s important work on emotional labor.

In The Managed Heart Hochschild focuses on alienation through emotional work and discusses cases of estrangement from the job in her investigation of flight attendants (Hochschild 2003: 132ff.). Kristin Carls in her study on affective labor in retailing indicates quite the opposite, though: that the affective character of front-line service work constitutes “an important source of recognition and satisfaction” (Carls 2007: 52). Following the latter findings we want to stress that work, which involves affects, also encompasses positive aspects as interaction and cooperation with clients contributes to work satisfaction and gives meaning to service work. Hence, the notion of affective labor also stresses the empowering dimensions of wage labor.
As indicated above, the core of the transposition process in the EU consists in the restructuring of bureaucratic work into service work, i.e. form civil service into service work. Europeanization reflects a general trend in European societies, “a shift from a bureaucratic logic towards a market logic. In this market logic, competitive edge, customer needs and customer sovereignty are important” (Forseth 2005: 441). “As individual employees have to orchestrate themselves in customer interaction, personal aspects have become more important” (ibid.: 443) – and this includes affective as well as gender aspects. With the rising importance of affective labor at the counter of postal offices the demand for affective skills of front-line employees grows. The new Mission Statement of the Austrian Mail prioritizes customer orientation. Its main directives read as follows: “We enchant our customers”. “We stand for reliability, confidentiality and efficiency”. This communication strategy, modulated by a collective “We”, shall first of all motivate to sell. At the same time this form of communication rests on and evokes identification and affective ties, like in the following passages: “We work outcome oriented and we secure our market position”, we “are committed to reach our goals”, and we “use new technologies to generate surplus value”.

One important dimension of affective labor of the postal front-line service jobs consists in the management of affects for the purpose of profit maximization. This form of affective labor resembles traditional affective labor in private market sectors like retailing. However, the new characteristics of affect management by employees under neoliberal conditions result from attempts of the corporation to generate an entrepreneurial spirit at all hierarchical levels of the company – from the management down to the front-line worker. Hence, postal employees need “competitive skills and emotional skills” (Forseth 2005: 441). The central sentence of the new Mission Statement, which targets the professional self-conception of postal employees, reads therefore as follows: “We act efficiently and economically and make our individual contribution to the success of the corporation”. Social science literature refers to such processes of mobilization of employees as “subjectivation of work” (Moldaschl 2003: 31). This includes the notion that as part of the flexibilization of capitalism since the 1980s an organizational transformation of work has taken place, which aims at releasing the “bureaucratically submerged subjective potentials” of the work force (ibid.). And of course, subjectivation of work aims at intensified economic exploitation of subjective skills. Such governmentality of work tries to gain access to the innovativeness and creativity of the work force, to the social and communicative competences of workers, their enthusiasm and

---

3 The following quotes are taken from the document „Mission Statement of the Austrian Mail“ from October 11, 2010.
affectivity in order to exploit their potential, including their affective skills. However, this ‘affective governmentality’ does not only point to processes of governance and domination by others but also to techniques of the self to govern oneself (Foucault 2001: 297ff.). This new form of subjectivation, which also encompasses affects, corresponds with changes in the work environment. And the new forms of subjectivation transcend the boundaries between work and life as affective entrepreneurialism tends to govern people’s whole way of life.

We conceptualize this process as the ‘work of subjectivation’, which is fueled by processes of affective labor, i.e. of affecting others and being affected in a double sense: first, as a new way of subordination and exploitation under capitalist working conditions, accompanied by force and fear. Second, as a new way of using affects in the labor process, which might generate sociality, cooperation, attachment and solidarity and perhaps resistance. Good sellers – in contrast to tellers – have to embody the service ideology. A certain, i.e. profitable affectivity shall become part of the habitus of postal employees in order to sell with enthusiasm. This neoliberal form of subjectivation or subordination and subject-formation is labeled according to Michel Foucault as “entrepreneurial self” (Foucault 2006: 314). This figure that does not refer to an empirical entity, but indicates the norm, which individuals shall achieve. The term refers to a whole way of working and living, guided by competition and an entrepreneurial spirit, which implies also a specific self-management of affects. The mobilization towards an entrepreneurial self encompasses the whole life and permanent availability of people – including their affects. We therefore suggest to call this new form of self-government ‘affective subjectivation’ – a regime of affects, which can generate affective dissonances and pathologies (Fineman 2003: 137ff.).

5. European Integration, corporatization of the state, affective governmentality and doing gender

All those changes had an impact on the gendering of public service work – and on doing gender while doing state. Gender relations within state bureaucracies and gendered subjectivation in public services are re-negotiated and lead to new forms of a gendered division of labor in public administration. While public services and the work of civil servants are traditionally considered as emotionless terrain, particularly suitable for men as the ‘rational gender’, state reorganization and the Europeanization of public services leads to a transformation of the masculinist state (Sauer 2007; Cooper 2011). The privatization of the
postal service has been accompanied by a growing number of female front-line employees, which accelerated the loss of prestige and authority of the postal workers.

However, our study also shows that the privatization of the Austrian Mail created new forms of gender segregation and a new gendered division of labor at the counters of post offices. Traditionally, standard sales jobs like letter-post service were more likely to be done by women while service jobs demanding more expertise like financial services were more often tasks of men. New information technology led to the flexibilization of front-line work as former separate working areas such as financial or parcel services were pooled at so-called universal counters. Therefore all counter clerks are responsible for all types of postal services. This resulted especially for male employees in de-qualification and a loss of expertise in former specialized areas, and forces all postal workers to regularly take up further training to update their knowledge. However, the cooperation of the Austrian Mail with Telekom Austria and the merger with the Austrian bank BAWAG P.S.K. created new areas of specialized work and expertise. A new group of employees is responsible for telecommunication services and the banking business, a type of work that demands time-consuming consultation. This segment of postal services developed as a male domain. In short, the corporatization of the Austrian Mail created new forms of masculinization and feminization of work areas, which reproduce to some extend but also challenge the traditional division of labor as well as gender images.

Entrepreneurial activities, behavior and identity are usually regarded as male (Kovalainen/Österbrg-Högstedt 2013: 19) or, as Pierre Bourdieu writes, as part of a competitive „male game“ in which masculinity is negotiated and constructed (2005: 90ff.). This form of male economic competition is associated with business captains, CEOs and business entrepreneurs – but not with „entreemployees“ (Flecker/Hofbauer 1998; Voß/Pongratz 1998). These entrepreneurs of the self appear to be much more feminized because they lack economic agency and power resources. The work of affective subjectivation thus poses the question of re-negotiation of masculinity and femininity through the interpellation of an “entrepreneurial self” at the counters of Austrian postal offices. Although the subjectivation as an “entrepreneurial self” prima vista seems to be male, the affective dimension and the request for affective labor might indicate a process of de-gendering of the division of labor or of social relations in general, as Andreas Reckwitz (2010: 71ff.) claims.
Women have almost always done immaterial and affective labor, on the job and at home, Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt note, often with little recognition in both fields (Gill/Pratt 2008: 11). Stephanie Shields and Leah Warner call the gender specific discourse on emotions “velvet glove of patriarchy” (Shields/Warner 2008: 170) as it rather maintains than transcends existing power relations. But indeed, in the process of transforming the state administration into customer oriented service bureaucracies affective competences – traditionally seen as female dispositions such as friendliness, empathy, patience or politeness – become central for men and women who offer postal services – and these affects are the basis for professional success and social recognition. Also men have to develop affective competences and to deploy affectivity in order to be economically successful, powerful and effective. Patricia Lewis and Ruth Simpson (2007) therefore speak of “masculinization of emotions” by pointing to the use of feelings for efficiency and productivity.

Our study shows more ambivalence. Front-line service workers at the Austrian post offices are confronted with rather contradictory gendered standards in the process of affective subjectivation. Male service workers, however, are facing much higher challenges than women because they have to perform feminized practices now, namely affective labor. By the same token, affectivity and empathy entails the risk to minimize the chance of success in the “male game” of competition. However, we found that male postal employees reinterpret the new affective job requirements. They see affective skills not as ‘their nature’ – skills that the “velvet glove of patriarchy” assigns to the ‘nature’ of women – but as important job competences. Male front-line workers play the “emotion manager” or “conductor” rather than a deferential servant (Forseth 2005: 444). Daniela Rastetter (2008: 134) calls this the “rationalization of emotional work”, which is indeed a male characteristic. In contrast to the male arguments and practices, women in our study followed the patriarchal discourse and regarded the affective requirements less as skills but as a natural part of their personality.

Finally, our study found evidence for the emergence of a new subordinated masculinity in the neoliberal service economy, a sort of ‘feminized masculinity’. Such a feminized masculinity can be found in specific work areas related to the economization of affects. According to Raewyn Connell’s typology we suggest that practices of affective subjectivation in the process of state transformation leads to the emergence of a “marginalized masculinity” (Connell 1995: 76ff.) in former state institutions – a marginalized masculinity, obliged to perform affective labor similar to female employees. This class of entrepreneurial affective
workers is still subordinated to “hegemonic masculinity”, realized as „business masculinity“ (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005) at the management level of the Austrian Mail – now also partly accessible for women.

We may conclude that the work of affective subjectivation challenges on the one hand the dichotomous and hierarchical gender order. But on the other hand the assumption of a process of de-gendering has to be doubted as affective labor contributes to the reconstruction of a gendered hierarchy in the mode of marginalized and hegemonic masculinity (and femininity).

6. Conclusions

European market integration results in the liberalization and corporatization of Community postal services. The process is accompanied by the remodeling of former bureaucratic work into customer-oriented service work. One of the core characteristics of interactive service work, like at the counters of postal offices, is the involvement of affects: in attempts to enchant customers and to gain their trust. Affective skills of front-line workers thus become important occupational competences, and they become commodified with the new corporate aim to increase sales to raise the shareholder value of the Austrian Mail.

The restructuring of work processes towards customer orientation and new forms of labor control like NPM provide the basis for new forms of governmentality and subjectivation. Neoliberal governmentality, according to Michel Foucault (2006), aims at fostering an entrepreneurial spirit and subjectivates employees as entrepreneurial selves. We draw on Foucault’s concept and point in addition to the affective dimension of subjectivation in times of immaterial and affective labor and with regard to service jobs. We call this new form of self-government ‘affective subjectivation’. The work of subjectivation fueled by affective labor shows in affective workers who are guided by an entrepreneurial spirit that shall, wherever possible, determine the whole way of life.

Affective competences like empathy and caring are historically regarded as female skills. Due to the rise of service work and the corporatization of state bureaucracies these subjective ‘female’ qualities also become important in former male terrains of paid labor like the state administration. Work results, personal success and professional status of male employees increasingly depend on affect management and affective labor. However, the appellation of men as entrepreneurs or rather “entreployees” and affective workers creates ambivalence and
establishes a class of rather powerless and feminized male service workers that we categorized, in accordance with Raewyn Connell, as “marginalized masculinity”.

Does this indicate a de-gendering or feminization of public services? Will privatization and neo-liberalization lead to feminized services and state institutions? We conclude that there is a shift of masculinity taking place. The corporatization of states through Europeanization shows in new forms of hegemonic masculinities in former state institutions like “business masculinities”, also modulated by affects, and new forms of subordinate feminized masculinities, as indicated above.

We assume that some state apparatuses and institutions get feminized, while others get masculinized, according to Loic Wacquant’s discussion of state transformation under neoliberal conditions:

“One can diagram neoliberalism as the systematic tilting of state priorities and actions from the Left hand to the Right hand, that is, from the protective (feminine and collectivizing) pole to the disciplinary (masculine and individualizing) pole of the bureaucratic field. This proceeds through two complementary but distinct routes: (i) the transfer of resources, programmes and populations from the social to the penal wing of the state (…); (ii) the colonization of welfare, healthcare, education, low-income housing, child services, etc., by the panoptic and disciplinary techniques and tropes of the Right hand.” (Wacquant 2012: 73)

We may encounter a new form of “touching state” (Cooper 2011), an ‘affective state’, which is less protective and less redistributive – see cuts of social expenditures or cuts in the postal infrastructure and personnel – albeit at the same time more affective and disciplining. Eventually, we propose to include an affective perspective in the study of European integration and Europeanization as rational decisions are always inseparably intertwined with affective orientations.
References


