

The Exploitation behind Leistungsfähigkeit in Novel „wir schlafen nicht“ by Kathrin Röggla

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Abstract. This research is a qualitative descriptive study by choosing the novel "wir schlafen nicht" by Kathrin Röggla as the material object and *Kulturthema Arbeit* as the formal object. This study aims to understand the situation of the world of work and the pattern of exploitation of the modern world of work described in the novel. This study uses a literary sociology approach by utilizing Marcuse's thoughts about one-dimensional society. The research results show the birth of a neoliberal society with its subjective autonomy and efficiency. The service sector is a field that dominates the world of work by always upholding the principles of efficiency and quality of performance. Workers are willing to sacrifice everything in order to maximize performance (*Leistungsfähigkeit*).

Keywords: Novel, Exploitation, *Leistungsfähigkeit*

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INTRODUCTION

Kathrin Röggla was born on June 14, 1971, in Salzburg. In 1989, she studied *Germanistik* and *Publizistik* at Universität Salzburg then she continued her study in Berlin in 1992 and finished in 1999. Since 1992 Röggla lives in Berlin. In 1988 she has been involved in literary publications and become a member of the Salzburger Autorengruppe. Röggla was also a member of the editorial board, of the literary magazine *erostepost* from 1990-1992.

Since 1990 Röggla has started to publish her works in literary magazines and anthologies. One of Röggla's creations in the form of novel is "wir schlafen nicht" (We do not sleep) published by S.Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt a. Main, in 2004. This novel is written based on the author's interviews with several workers in the discipline of *Unternehmenberater* or corporate consultants who are then mixed in such a way by the author and then produce a novel entitled „wir schlafen nicht“. The setting used in this novel is at a company exhibition. In the exhibition, six figures are shown, all of whom work for a consulting company or *Unternehmensberatung*.

In grammatical terms, this novel generally uses *Konjunktiv I* sentences in the third person singular to declare that the sentences conveyed in this novel are the result of the figure's own words which are then conveyed by the narrator. The *Konjunktiv I* form is often used in mass media, either in print or electronic media, which rebroadcasts the utterances of the informant. Therefore, this novel can also be categorized as a documentary novel or *Dokumentarroman*. In addition, the writing technique of this novel "violates" the writing rules in German grammar that recognize the system of writing capital letters at the beginning of each noun, but in fact, this novel does not use capital letters at all, starting from the title to the last sentence of the novel.

The novel consists of 33 chapters using the interview technique between the *Erzähler* (storyteller) and the characters who tell about the intense work pressure, lack of sleep, and utilization of alcohol, supplements, and coffee to overcome all their fatigue. The six characters portrayed by Röggla in her novel are: 1) Silke Mertens is a 37-year-old Key Account Managerin or *Großkundenbetreuerin*. She has a pivotal position in the company. Her job is to communicate with important clients. She had previously worked in printing with a great career. 2) Nicole Damaschke, a 24-year-old intern or *Praktikantin*. She is ambitious and unpaid and has strong desire to find a nice place to work. Unfortunately, she has no work experience and her relationship with co-workers is not harmonious. 3) Andrea Bülow is a 42-year-old *Online Redakteurin*. She is more obsessed with being a journalist than working in consulting. When she is distressed about her work, she usually takes supplements. She also has a problem with alcohol. 4) Sven is a 34-year-old *IT-Supporter/EDV (Elektronische Datenverarbeitung)-Unterstützer* or technician. His main job is actually as a technician coordinator and assists in promoting informatics products, but he mostly gets asked to handle technician tasks directly -which makes him feel

exasperated at times. 5) Oliver Hannes Bender is a 32-year-old Senior Associate or *Seniorberater*. He works passionately hard and hopes that his co-workers will do the same. His job is to assess the performance and character of workers and fire them if necessary. He enjoys a challenge at work. When he is not at work, he usually indulges in his hobby of analyzing car accidents or complicated tax cases. 6) Herr Gehringer is a 48-year-old partner or shareholder. Herr Gehringer is married with children. He is a hard worker and has a high responsibility in his company. Having experienced mental problems and even suffered from an illness that made him lose his voice. He has a principle in the company culture and for him, everything is seen from the point of view of economy and efficiency.

The initial description of the characters portrayed in the novel "*wir schlafen nicht*" are characters who work in the service sector. The service sector, which is synonymous with modern work, provides a clear indication of the difficulty of this field, which is reflected in the novel's title, which means "we don't sleep". The presence of technology in modern times, which apparently will provide convenience in human life, is depicted otherwise in this novel. This situation becomes very interesting to study by involving Marcuse's view of a one-dimensional society that was born as an effect of the presence of technology.

METHOD

The corpus in this study is a German novel entitled *wir schlafen nicht* by Kathrin Röggla. This novel was published in 2004 by Fischer Frankfurt am Main. The determination of this novel as the object of research material based on the consideration that, first, this novel raises *Arbeit* as the main theme (*Hauptthema*) and not as a side theme (*Nebenthema*); second, this novel published in the second decade of post-unification, thus the theme of *Arbeit* is more actual.

In textual form, this study focuses on the disclosure of the conception of *Arbeit* contained in the novel that serves as the research corpus and the pattern of exploitation of the world of work in post-reunification Germany. In contextual terms, this research is concerned with the dynamic relationship between literary works and the post-reunification German society in an environment where the opus was born. Therefore, the data sources in this research consist of two categories, primary data sources summarized in the novel *wir schlafen nicht* and secondary data sources of texts in the form of studies from various scientific fields, especially sociology, economics, politics, and historical studies. These studies are indispensable to see the context of *Arbeit* outside of the opus. The importance is that the nature of the study of the sociology of literature always moves from the study of the structure within the text towards the study of the structure outside the text (read: the structure of society).

The method used in data collection is the "scrutinize" method, namely, first, scrutinizing linguistic units -such as words, phrases, sentences, and discourses- that are significant in the novel as primary data. The next step is to analyze the essential elements in the structure of the novel, either the aspects of plot, setting,

characterization, point of view, and ultimately more in-depth analysis of the theme. The critical reading process applied to the secondary data by considering the character of each text.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. The Efficiency of Work and Human Nature Mechanical

The selection of a consulting company as a representative environment in the modern world of work is no coincidence for Rögglä. According to Rögglä (Kaiser and Böhnke, 2004: 172) consulting companies are a crucial company nowadays and decisive in the social life of a society. For Rögglä, the consulting company is the idealized representation of a neoliberal society with autonomy and subjective efficiency. It explains why the characters portrayed in *wir schlafen nicht* are working in the consultant field that consistently praises the principles of efficiency and performance quality as expressed by the character Oliver Hannes Bender:

“also seine leistung überrasche ihn nicht, genausowichtig wie seine leistungsfähigkeit. die habe er immer schon einkalkuliert, die wundere ihn nicht. daß er mehrere tage durcharbeiten könne, auch das wundere ihn nicht wirklich, das sei nicht interessant. seine leistungsfähigkeit sei für ihn nicht interessant, die sei ja auch immer schon vorher da, sozusagen, bevor er eintreffe in einer situation. Spitzenleitungen seien für ihn das übliche, aber er erwarte auch von seinem gegenüber die absolute performance, er könne mit mitarbeitern nicht anfangen, die das nicht brächten.” (Rögglä, 2004: 34).

He was not surprised by his performance which was equal to his ability. He had calculated it before, so it didn't make him proud. That he had to work for days on end didn't make him feel surprised either wasn't exciting at all. His ability to work was not unusual; he already had it before he entered the workplace. High performance is familiar to him, he expects a total performance, but he can't start with his co-workers who don't need it.

The adrenaline rush of Bender's daily work is also familiar to him; even a day without stress can put him in a more stressful situation.

er komme erst gar nicht runter. meist suche er sich gleich wieder einen neuen streß, also er würde sagen: so richtig runterkommen tue er nicht. wieso auch? Das runterkommen wäre für ihn viel stressiger, als sich einen neuen streß zu organisieren. er erscheine einfacher, sich auf demselben aktionslevel zu halten, ja, ihm erscheine der eigentliche streß gar nicht so stressig wie das runterkommen. (Rögglä, 2004: 124).

He didn't take a break at all. He immediately looks for new stressors, so the point he's trying to say is: he never takes a rest. How else? Resting only makes her more stressed, rather than organizing new stress. It seems that it would be easier for him to do things with the same level of stress, so he feels that stress doesn't stress him out as much as resting.

Andrea Bülow, *Online-Redakteurin*, also shared the same thoughts:

“also leistung, effizienz und durchsetzungskraft seien bei ihr positiv besetzte werte, und es sei auch schon wahr, sie bewundere menschen durchaus, die sich überwinden könnten, die sich einer anforderung stellen könnten, die ihre möglichkeiten erst einmal überschreite. und sich dann eben überwinden können.” (Röggla, 2004: 144).

Performance, efficiency, and strong willingness are positives for her, and rightly so; she admires people who can achieve results beyond the set targets.

Herr Gehringer, who is a partner or shareholder in the company, even explicitly classifies workers based on their performance:

“wir haben definiert, welche unsere a-personen sind. also wir haben ein einfaches ranking gemacht. die a-personen, das sind unsere top-performer, das sind die, die wollen wir auf jeden fall halten, die ganz starken leistungsträger, die, die unheimlich viel wissen und lang dabei sind. das ist eben der kern des unternehmens. wenn die weggehen, kann man zusperrern. dann gibt es welche, da sagen wir, die sind auch gut, aber wenn die gehen, bricht nicht alles zusammen. die wollen wir eigentlich auch halten, denen versuchen wir auszeiten anzubieten. und dann gibt es die c-personen. das ist die gruppe der leute, die wir in der zeit, in der wir so stark gewachsen sind, aufgenommen haben. die gerade lesen und schreiben können, die vielleicht wirtschaft studiert haben, aber sonst gar nichts. und da muß man sagen: mit diesen leuten können wir nichts mehr anfangen.” (Röggla, 2004: 84-85).

We have defined the workers who qualify as A people. We have made a simple ranking. The A group are the top performers, we have to keep them, they have very high performance, they know and understand things. They are the core of the company. If they leave, we will stop. Some people can be said to be very good, but if they leave, it won't ruin everything. We also want to keep them, so we usually try to allow them to take time off. Some people are type C. They are the ones we've recruited too quickly, who are just good at reading and writing, they may have studied economics, but don't have the skills for it either. We can say: even with people like them, we can't start anything.

Consulting companies not only exist to direct a company to be efficiency-oriented in all areas but in their work environment, it must carry over as stated by *der senior associate*, Oliver Hannes Bender:

“wahrscheinlich werde er hier wieder ausgetestet. testfahrten habe er ja schon genügend gemacht, das seien ja auch ständig testprozesse, die man da durch laufe: könnte man nicht doch ein wenig schneller seien? könnte es nicht doch etwas effizienter ablaufen? wo könnte man den arbeitsprozeß noch optimieren.” (Röggla, 2004: 130).

He will probably get tested here again. He has already done enough test drives, and they are also constant test processes that you run through: Could you not be a little faster? Could it not run a little more efficiently? Where could you still optimize the work process.

The opportunity to optimize the principle of efficient work is illustrated clearly in each figure portrayed in this Rögglä novel. This impression has begun to appear from the selected title of the novel *wir schlafen nicht*, which means we don't sleep. Sleep, as a basic human need, seems to be reduced in such a way as to achieve optimal results.

“er könne es nur wiederholen: nein, man könne nicht vorschlafen, das ginge nicht. auch wenn sie es nicht wahrhaben wolle, das funktioniere einfach nicht. genetischer defekt von anfang an sozusagen – keine ahnung! Aber man müsse sich mal vorstellen, was da los wäre, wenn man es könnte, wenn man das entwickeln könnte, die fähigkeit, schlaf zu speichern. da wären die meisten doch nicht mehr zu halten. ganze kindheiten würden da investiert, nur um genügend schlaf für später zusammenzukratzen. oder wenn man schlaf übertragen könnte: so von einem menschen zum anderen, das wäre es doch, ganze schlafbanken würden da angelegt.” (Rögglä, 2004: 22).

He could only repeat it: no, people don't sleep a little; it's impossible. Even if he circumvented it, it simply wouldn't work at all. There would be genetic damage - I don't know! But one has to realize, what would happen if it were possible if people were able to develop the ability to be able to store their sleep. Most certainly would not be able to keep it. A whole childhood would be invested in sleep to have enough to compete in the workforce or if sleep could be transferred: from one person to another, then there would probably be a lot of sleep banks set up.

For the IT-Supporter, minimizing sleep is necessary and positive. He feels that most people will not be able to concentrate well if they don't get enough sleep, but the situation for Sven is otherwise. He believes that by neglecting bedtime, he improves his concentration:

“- wo jedoch jeder weiß: nach einer durchwachten nacht ist mit konzentration nichts mehr zu machen.

- *also er das gefühl, seine konzentrationsfähigkeit wird durch schlafentzug eher gesteigert.”* (Rögglä, 2004: 24).
- We all know: after staying up all night, the concentration power will no longer work optimally.
- However, he feels that his concentration power will even improve after reducing sleep time.

Besides sleep, hunger and thirst are considered causes of not optimal performance, hence hunger and thirst also need serious attention as mentioned by Silke Mertens, *die Key Account Managerin*:

“ja wasser, richtig wasser. sie trinke dann literweise wasser, als wäre der ganze körper völlig dehydriert, als würde sie am verdursten sein, aber nach einer weile beruhige sich das wieder.

das müsse irgendeine fehlfunktion sein. oder der körper melde sich einfach zurück über den durst, sie wisse es nicht.” (Röggla, 2004: 124).

Yes water, real water. She drank several liters of water as if her whole body was severely dehydrated like she was going to die of thirst, but after a while, she felt calm again.

There must be something wrong. Or the body might be responding to the thirst itself, she has no idea.

The thirst felt by Silke Mertens makes her severely dehydrated and as if she could die of dehydration, but on the other hand, her body does not have the proper mechanism to overcome this dehydration problem. According to her, this is one of the weak points in humans in optimizing their work potential.

Other issues that reduce work optimization are illnesses. Thus, some characters have various ways to avoid or at least minimize the occurrence of an illness. Oliver Hannes Bender, Senior Associate, said that illness is a deficit in a person, and a separate mechanism is needed to overcome it:

“wie man sich schmerzen erspare? er würde sagen, durch noch mehr training, man müsse sich eben noch mehr verankern in den abläufen. schmerz sei meistens ein zeichen für ungenügend übung, für fehlgesteuerte prozesse, »man hat etwas nicht richtig im griff«. er habe das immer durch ein geeignetes training kompensieren können.” (Röggla, 2004: 149-150).

How to avoid illness? He was about to say, through more practice, people should anchor themselves even more in the process. Pain is usually a sign of insufficient training, of a process gone awry, of "people not mastering something" He can always overcome it with proper practice.

In contrast to Oliver Hannes Bender, *die online-redakteurin* Andrea Bülow's way of dealing with illness is by taking supplements: *“tabletten, natürlich tabletten, was sonst”* (tablets, of course tablets, what else, Röggla, 2004: 50). The use of supplements to increase work stamina among workers in Germany has become an increasingly common phenomenon. According to the AOK-Bundesverband (see: Drautz, 2011: 42) one of Germany's health insurance agencies, there are around 800,000 workers in Germany who use supplements to reduce stress at work and regularly consume *Neuropharmaka* to increase work stamina.

B. The Exploitation behind *Leistungsfähigkeit*

The effort to reduce the natural human mechanism to pursue work efficiency and quality illustrates the process of the birth of a new society that is oriented only towards results or *Leistung* and to optimize the ability to achieve a desired outcome or often known in the German concept as *Leistungsfähigkeit*, all

things that are approximately an obstacle will be removed in such a way, even those that are natural even in human life. There are at least three things that, in the view of most human societies, are the nature of human mechanisms that Rögglä's characters try to get rid of.

The first mechanism is the nature of humans who need sleep. Sleep is one of the things deemed to be an obstacle in the effort to increase human work power or *Leistungsfähigkeit*. For this reason, Sven, an IT-Supporter who worked without sleep, still admits the importance of sleep for most people. For this reason, according to Sven (Rögglä, 2004: 22), if possible, people should utilize their childhood to get more sleep so that later when entering working age people no longer need to sleep. Another idea expressed by Sven is that if "sleep" is physical as money, people can save their sleep and take it back if they need it or take other people's sleep through "sleep" banks.

The second aspect that today's world of work is trying to reduce is relieving hunger and thirst. As vital human needs, eating and drinking are seen as something that hinder human performance. Even Silke Mertens, Key Account Managerin (Rögglä, 2004: 124), blamed her body's internal mechanism for being unable to withstand the dehydration that could only be solved by drinking as much water as possible.

Pain as a natural part of the human body mechanism appears to the characters portrayed by Rögglä as an obstacle to optimizing their performance. Although pain is relatively understandable as a mechanism that is easier to avoid than drowsiness, thirst, and hunger, the impression of the characters trying to get out of their natural state is unavoidable.

Getting out of human nature to maximize performance seems to be one of Rögglä's points of criticism in responding to the development of the world of work in Germany today. What happens to the characters portrayed by Rögglä is a form of exploitation of human beings, but the great thing is that the characters willingly do everything without giving the slightest protest. This kind of exploitation has long been suspected as a result of human admiration for capital, so consciously or not, humans are willing to do anything, including exploiting themselves.

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