
Work in a Globalizing World: Gender, Mobility, Markets. 5th Annual Seminar in History and Sociology of the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology (BGHS)

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Although global labour is not a new phenomenon for the disciplines of social sciences and history, it has recently gained attention due to novel approaches to certain dichotomies, such as work and non-work or translocality and nation state. Furthermore, classic analytical axis of ethnicity, gender and social class, paired with crucial importance of human cross-border mobility have provided new aspects for advanced theoretical and empirical studies of globality, as it pertains to international migration, labour markets, changes brought to employments and beyond-border gender orders. As such, the 5th Annual Seminar of BGHS, held between 8th and 10th of April 2013 brought together experienced scholars as well as doctoral researchers from across disciplines, providing a space for peer-exchange of ideas and inviting contributions on conceptual, analytical and practical levels.

The opening lecture by Marcel van der Linden (IISH, Amsterdam, NL) set a tone for the entire seminar, as the speaker demoted several misconceptions we often have about the "novelty" status of global issues, arguing that a long view across history challenges assumptions we have about working class, often oversimplified within Western definition as waged employees. Van der Linden's talk opened a debate on multiplicity versus accuracy in the conceptual usage of sociological and historical terms, with many definitions and assumptions questioned. The increased human mobility, for instance, was addressed as potentially viewed as such due to visibility of its contemporary occurrences.

The first plenary session included two papers in socio-legal history, making links between labour law and temporal/spatial contexts. Virginia Amorosi compared the emergence of labour law through the analysis of legal acts set in place in various European countries in the early 20th century, while Philipp Reick tackled how a common notion of "eight-hour work-day" has been initially constructed. As he showcased visual material that often highlighted unexpected resistance from various groups, he illustrated key links between the two papers as addressing issues of women and children's positions in labour in the past centuries and setting the tone for debates on work and family held later on.

The following morning panels addressed a range of topics broadly related to the globalized labour markets impacting families in various specific localities. Paul Atkinson took on a case of German migrants in the English woollen industry between 1861 and 1914, Charles Dube looked at the crucial role of female cross-border trading for gender relationships in Zimbabwe, Lisa Berntsen presented her findings on the marketization and masculinities in the context of Polish construction workers in the Netherlands and, finally, Junchen Yan illustrated how the meaning of a career is culturally constructed among managers in modern China.

The afternoon presentations focused on contemporary studies, often adopting a comparative or multi-sited approach. Confronting the notions of modernization and typicality of East-West/South-North mobility streams, Heidi Bludau shared her anthropological work on Czech nurses traveling for work to Saudi Arabia. This paper on an unlikely geographical channel contributed to broader debates on a need for terminological specificity, as Heidi coined the term "global nurse" and focused on the role of "intermediaries/recruiters". Paula Pustulka's paper also talked about women, this time on those involved in the 'expected' population flow of Polish women working in Germany and United Kingdom, often finding themselves in employment scenarios that concatenated their 'femininity' and 'professionalism' (i.e. caring positions), but primarily using mobility as means for escaping gender discrimination on the labour market in their country of origin. The two papers both tackled issues of gendered care orders on one hand, yet on the other hand they illuminated female agency as both Polish and Czech females benefited from mobility beyond making economic progress.

Continuing with the transnational focus within gender studies, the last two papers of the day outlined case studies of global men and masculinities. Dani Kranz presented her research on non-Jewish highly-skilled husbands of Israeli women who followed their wives and subsequently struggled to find their place in the unlikely destination country. Young male Muslims in a deprived upcountry area of India were studied by Raphael Sussewind, who talked about his analytical personas used for capturing the entanglement of love, longing and aspirations, conflicted by structural conditions on the one hand, but determined by imagined dreams on the other. Both papers highlighted the importance of social capital (i.e. education) and kin networks (family support), which continue to play a vital role in a presumably individualized global era.

The framing of female identities in relation to work once again returned in the afternoon session. Luciana Pontes shed light on the nexus of local, national and transnational, presenting results of the content analysis of female migrants' presence in Catalanian television, usually viewed as a forefront for being progressive and non-normative, but, sadly, continuing to reproduce stereotypical notions of migrant women as dependents. In the same panel Funda Ustek talked about Turkish women who either choose or are forced to be invisible in their informal labour. Building on the notion of non-work, she discussed how cultural and religious components of gendered obligations and identities influence trajectories of women who are not recognized in their labour market activities.

Completing a range of approaches, the final session consisted of two papers with a focus placed on the arts. Seemingly unrelated issues of artists and global labour were discussed in papers by Jacob Diggle, who looked at mobile theatres - touring companies in the British World between 1870 and 1914, and MeLe Yamomo, who examined the process of professionalization affecting musicians in Manila. The figures and stories of 'global artists' once again shifted the scope of what globalization and labour are usually indicative of in scholarship of predominantly economic prominence.

Issues of theoretical frameworks and their implications, raised in the introductory key note address, resonated throughout the Seminar. They were discussed once again during the final plenary session, raising awareness of still unresolved tensions within approaches structure and agency, globalization and locality, synchronic and diachronic study. The session chaired by BGHS director Thomas Welskopp and including contributions from Ursula Mense-Petermann, Klaus Weinbauer and Marcel van der Linden primarily called for more interdisciplinary links being built across disciplines and institutions. Advice on reaching advanced conceptual clarifications, such as the very meaning of global labour which still lacks a single and all-encompassing definition translatable from sociologists to historian, was given to the participating young researchers. The papers given during the Seminar proved that the concept of work remains indispensable for social scientists representing various approaches and tackling diverse issues. Consequently, discussing multiplicity of intersections and meanings of work globally should be placed in the core area of interest for research projects, even when may oscillate around seemingly unrelated issues.

While the event was not a traditional conference, its format should be commended and encouraged as an excellent set-up for young researchers to gain feedback on their work, network with expert scholars, as well as obtain experience as peer-reviewers. As such, the seminar has resulted in research and writing collaborations on the practical level, while also ensuring a high level of scholarly debate on the key topic in labour market history, anthropology and sociology of labour, as well as various constellations of gender, ethnicity, labour and social class re-framings.

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