A JOINT SEMINAR

Topic: Global Retail: Transformation of Work and Gender in Global Production Networks

ABSTRACT

The expansion of global retail has significant implications for the analysis of work and gender. Within the retail sector supermarkets as well as large agri-food and manufacturing suppliers play a central role in transforming production, processing, distribution and consumption across the global North and South. Women play a critical role in retail value chains as: consumers, customers, commercial actors, service providers; as workers in shops, manufacture, farming and packing; and in sub-contracted SME and smallholder production. Global retailers are driving fragmentation of work, with women often concentrated in more insecure and poorly remunerated segments. Retail expansion often involves 'commercialising' reproductive activities traditionally carried out unpaid by women within households, transforming the gender profile of waged work.

Global production network (GPN) and value chain (GVC) literatures often overlook analysis of work and gender (with notable exceptions). Drawing on GPN/GVC and feminist political economy literatures, this paper draws on analysis of gendered global (re)production networks (GGPN) to examine how global retail is reshaping embedded gendered societal relations in the global North and South. It assesses the gendered dimensions of economic and social upgrading and/or downgrading within GGPNs and the implications for women's empowerment. This frames an examination of comparative case studies of agri-food and apparel goods sourced in Africa and Asia.

A GGPN analysis helps to unpack how the advance of global retail is transgressing traditional divides between women's (unpaid) reproductive work and (paid) productive work, and contributing to disruption of prevailing gendered socio-economic norms in many countries. However, this is an uneven process, leading to both economic and social upgrading as well as downgrading outcomes for women along retail value chains. The paper considers to what extent this process can enhance women's economic empowerment and re-shape processes of development within and across emerging economies.

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SPEAKER:

Professor Stephanie Barrientos
Global Development Institute
University of Manchester, UK

CHAIR:

Professor Neil Coe
Department of Geography
National University of Singapore

DATE:

Friday, 12 February 2016

TIME:

3.30pm – 5.00pm

VENUE:

Earth Lab
Department of Geography, NUS
Block AS2, #02-03,
1 Arts Link
Singapore 117570

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Stephanie Barrientos is Professor in the Global Development Institute at the University of Manchester. She has researched and published widely in the academic literature on different aspects of global production networks and value chains including: gender, agribusiness, employment, trade and labour standards, corporate social responsibility, fair and ethical trade. She has undertaken research in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. She was PI on research for Cadbury mapping socio-economic sustainability of cocoa production in Ghana and India. This informed the Cocoa Partnership/Cocoa Life to support cocoa farmers, and adoption of Fairtrade. She led with Professor Gary Gereffi (Duke University) the DFID funded international research network Capturing the Gains: Economic and Social Upgrading in GVCs/GPNs, linking researchers in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and USA. She has advised a large number of companies, NGOs and government organisations. Stephanie has a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship (2013-16) examining Gender and Transformation in Global Retail Value Chains and is a Visiting Prof at NUS January to April 2016.

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