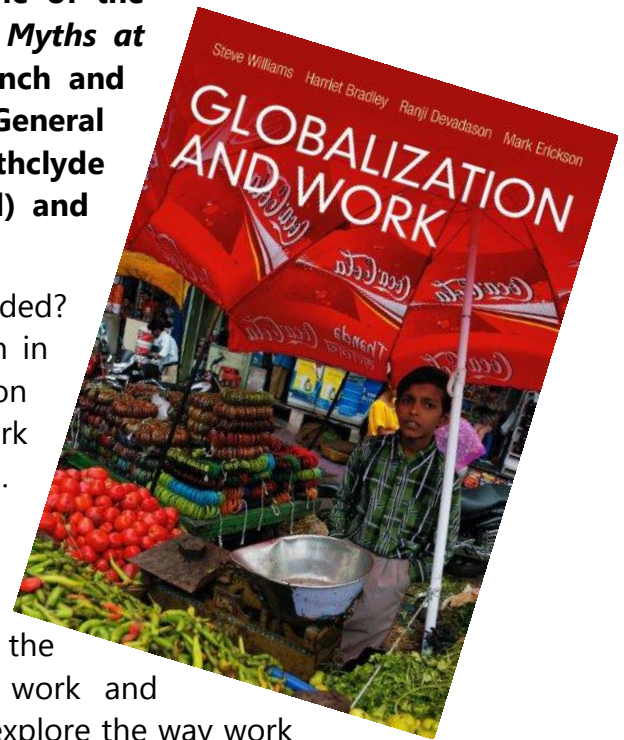


# Globalization and Work

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On January 17th 2014 CESR played host to the launch of a new book, *Globalization and Work*, co-authored by some of the team responsible for an earlier well-regarded text, *Myths at Work*. Along with the authors, speakers at the launch and symposium included Roger McKenzie (Assistant General Secretary, UNISON), Professor Phil Taylor (Strathclyde University), Bridget Anderson, (University of Oxford) and Luke Martell (Sussex University).

Why is a new book on Globalization and Work needed? Despite the extensive literature devoted to globalization in general, there is no single general text which draws on sociological insights to tackle the important subject of work and employment in the context of a globalizing world. Further, some of its key impacts on the lives of ordinary working people have been surprisingly little investigated and analysed. This book is designed to fill that gap. In doing so, it is not so much concerned with evaluating the consequences of globalization for key measures of work and employment at a macro level; rather the main aim is to explore the way work relations operate, and the actual everyday experience of workers under increasingly globalizing conditions, drawing on evidence from around the world. *Globalization and Work* challenges conceptions of globalization as a project simply orchestrated by governments, multinational companies and international agencies. We highlight the importance of taking a grounded, bottom-up perspective which recognizes that globalization is not just something that happens to working people, thereby revealing the fascinating extent to which workers actively engage in producing globalization. To challenge the monolithic image of globalization we emphasise both the importance of power relations and the contested basis of work under globalization.



## *Neoliberalism and globalization*

The book starts with an examination of the broad implications of globalization for work and employment. Crucial to our approach is a multidimensional and contextual perspective. While the processes of greater worldwide interconnectedness might take a number of forms, we argue that current globalization takes a specific shape because of the worldwide dominance of neoliberal economic thinking. Globalization then becomes a political project designed to advance neoliberal policies. Nonetheless, this is a social phenomenon which is not just influenced by working people in specific workplaces and communities, but one that is actively produced and reproduced by them. Sometimes this may mean collusion and compliance with neoliberal policies, but it also involves resistance. The actions of organizations such as trade unions and NGOs and of grassroots movements such as Occupy! are explored in later chapters in the book.

Multinational companies are viewed as perhaps the key actors in the globalization scenario, forcing governments to play by their rules. We may conceive of them as overly powerful bodies which are capable of transforming work and employment in ways that have profoundly adverse consequences for workers around the world; but we also seek to provide a slightly more nuanced view, stressing the complex nature of work and employment relations in multinationals under globalization. We show how multinationals may have to adapt their work and employment arrangements in order to comply with the circumstances of host countries and highlight the important ways in which multinationals are social entities themselves, with their objectives and the outcomes of their activities often being the product of dynamic and conflictual processes of interaction between different social actors within and around them. They are not all the same and some of them do sometimes respond to pressures to behave in more socially responsible ways, such as withdrawing contracts from local producers using child or sweated labour. Moreover, consumers in the Global North also experience globalization in a direct way and influence its development through their consumption practices, such as ethical shopping. Nonetheless, multinationals are rightly castigated for the detrimental effects their activities have on workers' rights and employment conditions, particularly in the countries of the Global South. A mitigating force is the campaign to regulate labour standards on a transnational basis, which offers the prospects for a fairer and more equitable globalization. We explore the reasons for the growing interest in international regulation and examine the standard-setting role of the International Labour Organization, while critically assessing the effectiveness of voluntary labour codes of conduct. Pressure from below, from labour unions, social movement activists, non-governmental organizations and the like, means that multinationals and international agencies have been obliged to take the matter of international labour standards more seriously. The main issue now is to ensure that they are effective, an area where unions and national governments undoubtedly have a role to play.

## *Labour under globalization*

In the second half of the book we focus more specifically on the daily experiences of workers and the organizations that represent them. Globalization undoubtedly poses problems for labour movements and their traditional ways of working; because they are heavily rooted in specific nation-states they have struggled to respond effectively to the pressures and challenges that arise from the growing power of globalized capital. Yet the adverse consequences of globalization for trade unions around the world have prompted renewed interest in how they

can operate more effectively across national borders through a more vigorous labour internationalism. The prospects for renewed international trade union organization, one based on unions acting more as social movements and more strongly linked to NGOs and other progressive groups, offer labour movements a way of regaining some of their lost power and of extending their influence.

The book highlights the use of coercive management practices in factories in the Global South, which manufacture and assemble products destined for global markets. These are aided not just by state policies, but also by the nature of labour markets and the use of gendered ideologies and practices. Women's labour is favoured by many multinationals, given that traditional gender relations foster an ideology of women as subservient to male authority and willing to sacrifice their own wellbeing to support their families' needs. Yet at the same time globalization has opened up the possibility of the development of new subjectivities and identities among the largely female workforces in such factories. As Engels argued long ago, the entry of women into employment can disrupt patriarchal control within the family: some women, at least, may be the beneficiaries of greater independence and the chance to build careers.

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One aspect of this is the feminization of migration. Clearly, the growth of international labour migration is one of the most notable features of globalization. Not only has this transformed the lives and employment prospects of individual migrants and their families, but it has effected major changes in many societies – the economic demand for labour has resulted in often unforeseen political and social consequences in destination countries. Progressively tighter immigration legislation has been introduced in North American, European and Gulf States in order to control and restrict the flow of migrants and, no doubt, to respond to nationalist hostility against migrants amongst their established populations. Yet, as we have seen in the UK, these measures are unlikely to do much to stem global flows of migrant labour. While migrants may leave their home countries not just for economic reasons, but as refugees from political oppression, wars and famine, employers are more than willing to take advantage of a source of labour they feel can be employed cheaply and which is less well organized. Trade unions have a crucial social role to play in recruiting such workers, both protecting them from exploitation and curbing the wage undercutting strategies of unscrupulous employers. While these developments may in some countries lead to increased levels of racism and xenophobia, there are counter-tendencies: we can observe a growing tolerance among younger citizens towards different cultures and an appreciation of the social richness associated with multicultural societies. There is a long way to go, but cosmopolitan attitudes are on the rise.

While studies of migrant labour often concentrate on the poor and less skilled workers, there has been less concentration on the working lives of the growing internationally mobile cadre of highly-skilled managers and professionals, who are sometimes referred to as the 'transnational capitalist class'. Our discussion explores the highly diverse nature of this under-researched group, showing how actors are differentially placed within this transnational class, depending on their identities and power within the global economy. Since multinational companies drive the mobility of capital, information and people across the world, their employees are often

represented as 'elites' who benefit from advancing the globalizing project. Yet they themselves are vulnerable to some of the insecurities and transience that are typically associated with unskilled work, albeit with much higher incomes that help to offset some of these challenges. We show that globalization is not experienced evenly by different categories of highly skilled migrants. Despite shifts in the balance of power between the Global South and the Global North in recent decades and a legacy of postcolonial and other migrations that have disrupted established relationships between 'race' and region, whiteness continues to privilege some American and European expatriates in transnational workplaces.

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Neoliberal globalization has contributed to increased levels of social and economic inequality in many parts of the world. The implications of globalization for existing relations of gender and ethnicity are complex and sometimes contradictory. Our studies of the Indian call centre industry and the global fair-trade movement examine the ways in which multinationals attempt to control and articulate occupational identity, particularly in service-sector work. However, we show how this aspect of the process of globalization is resisted through the reclaiming and reproduction of national identities by workers in the Global South. Espousing an intersectional approach, we explore how the impact of globalization on women's working lives is highly contingent upon class, ethnicity and indeed age. Women from privileged classes can take advantage of global career openings and use their wealth to buy help to relieve them of some of the burden of reproductive and domestic work. Such work is characteristically carried out by working-class women and by women of colour, based on stereotypes about differential capacities. Poor women with children continue to sacrifice their health and leisure to work in unpleasant ill-paid jobs to support their families, while older women in patriarchal societies may find it difficult to accept challenges to accustomed norms and ideas. Yet as argued above, while women from the Global South may be confined to relatively disempowering and low-paid jobs in the emergent global economy, employment outside the home gives access to independent income and higher social status, and thus challenges existing gender hierarchies and conventions

Finally, we tackle a topic that rarely features in conventional studies of globalization; indeed it is even largely absent from much discussion and analysis of work and employment – labour conflict. We highlight the manifold challenges to neo-liberal globalization evident in strikes, labour protests and other modes of contention pursued by working people. A heartening development is that workers' struggles are increasingly engaged with broader social and political contention, alongside sympathetic social movements for example, and in many parts of the world are manifest through efforts to secure the control of public space, rather than being restricted to the workplace. Squares such as Tahrir in Cairo, Tianamen in Beijing and Plaza Mayor in Madrid have become emblematic of such struggles and occupations.

*Globalization and Work* thus aims to present a readable synthesis of current theories and research studies of global change. But it also seeks to counter both the doom, gloom and pessimism of the victims of neoliberal globalization and the *gung ho* optimism of capitalist elites. We expose the negative impacts of current globalization in both Global North and South. But we also point to the complex and often contradictory effects of global change and focus on positive aspects and the contestations around neoliberal policies. We hope to convince our readers that there is an alternative: with political will we can perform globalization in a better way.

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