



Centre for
**Global
Cooperation
Research**

Report of the 18th Käte Hamburger Lecture

Global Scholarship in Local Settings: Professionalism and Academia in Secular India

with Professor Ummu Salma Bava

14th April 2016, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin



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*In the 18th Käte Hamburger Lecture, Professor **Ummu Salma Bava** addressed the topic 'Global Scholarships in Local Settings: Professionalism and Academia in Secular India'. Bava is Professor of European Studies and was Director of Europe Area Studies at the Centre for European studies, SUS, Jawaharlal Nehru University. In the lecture, she mapped different factors which shape a career of global scholars based on her own experience and multicultural career. Taking place on 14th April 2016, the lecture was a part of a two-day workshop titled 'Mobile Muslim Professionals: Trans-regional Connectedness and (Non-State) Cooperation in Asia and the Middle East'. The workshop was jointly organized by Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21); Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies; Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin; re:work (IGK Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History); and Philipps-Universität Marburg.*

How international research centres make impact to professional career of the visiting scholars is, according to **Tobias Debiel**, Professor for International Relations and Development Policy at the University of Duisburg-Essen and Director of KHK/GCR21, one of the key questions that interest many research organizations including the hosting institutes. He stressed on the relevance of the lecture topic to ongoing developments at the Centre. Beyond structural factors of IR, the Centre has been shifting its research focus towards the micro level of transnational connection as well as cooperation like agencies and their contribution, Debiel explained. At the same time, the Centre also tackles the epistemological aspect of research. 'The insight to the question of how knowledge and expertise are formed and affected by identity markers of scholars is therefore quite substantial to us' noted Debiel.

In her opening remarks, **Manja Stephan-Emmrich**, Professor at the Institute for Asian and African Studies at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Fellow at re:work, underlined that the lecture well linked research topics of the Centre and her institute which investigates the entanglement between the global and the local in society and culture. Stephan-Emmrich highlighted the Lecture's unconventional methodological approach. Through 'auto-ethnography', the lecture would trace the global-local configuration in academic professionalization and professionalism.

Ultimately, **Bettina Burger-Menzel**, Professor of Economics at the Department of Business and Management at the Brandenburg University of Applied Sciences, who chaired the 18th Käte Hamburger Lecture, introduced Professor Bava and the discussant, **Claudia Derichs**, Professor of Comparative Politics and International Development Studies at the Philipps-Universität Marburg.



Lecture

At the onset of the lecture, Bava asserted that the growth and development of scholars were influenced by different factors. By applying the 'auto-ethnographic' methodology, she elaborated on how her professional growth had been shaped by the interface between personal, professional and religious markers located in the context of India. India offers an interesting setting where identities were negotiated between what is 'given' by the constitution and what was 'formed' in socially-constructed spaces. Unlike the universal narrative, the chosen approach could best capture the continuous process and thick narratives that situated profession across cultures, religions, societies and states which coexisted simultaneously. To understand individuals' process of meaning-making and distinguishing, experience of the self was to be the integral part of the consideration.



Bava continued by unpacking four major identity markers — 'female' 'Muslim' 'academic' in 'secular India' — that had shaped her meaning making and profession. India offered a totally different context for Muslim in comparison to Arabic States. While India is regarded as the most multi-ethnic state, 80% of the Indian population adheres to Hinduism. 180 Million Indian Muslims are effectively a minority. Nevertheless, the 1950 constitution defines India as a secular state and forbids discrimination based on religion, caste, creed or gender. There had been no effort to homogenize religious identities. In addition to the freedom to practise faith and to maintain religious identity, the constitution also guarantees the right to choice and the right to extend religion. Education institutions, where these identities can be taken formed, are also recognized by the state. This freedom is even extended to civil law which allows each community to practise their own personal law. This framework indicated, as Bava stressed, that **Muslim identity was locally constructed** in each country. In most 'periphery' countries (i.e. Indonesia and India), this identity was not necessarily constructed with the reference to the 'core' Muslim countries in the Middle East.

Subsequently, Bava gave background on the gender aspect of her identity through social, political and actual positions. Socially, Hinduism exerts a stronger influence on shaping the culture even in community spaces than other religions. This leads to the **blending of culture** at community level. Although at first glance religion might seem to draw the separation line, most Indians identified themselves through the blended culture and common language in the occupied country space. 'A Hindu and a Muslim from the North will have a lot more in common than a Hindu of the North and a Hindu of South India' Bava exemplified. For identity and community building in India, there is **no 'one' platform** to stand



permanently. Identities are formed, as a person constantly moves across social and cultural spaces depending on the context.

With women represented at important level across professions in India, Bava even asked whether women empowerment/gender equality were imported concepts from the West or whether there were already spaces in Indian context for women. Politically, the 1950 constitution guarantees equal fundamental rights between women and men. Yet counter to what is 'given' by the constitution; the actual position of women in India laid at the intersection of the political and social culture. 'For a woman to be experiencing the full potential depends on where she is on political, social, culture and economic space.' India is a patriarchal society and women are still underprivileged. The **given legislative equality is obstructed by social practices**. Such obstruction can be observed, for example, in education. Although equality in education is guaranteed by the constitution, parents who are more concerned about the daughters' and the family's economic opportunities induce their daughters to enter the labour market prematurely. To avoid these circumstances, state and non-state actors must create spaces to protect women's right and encourage women's important contribution to the society.

Against this background, Bava started to apply the auto-ethnographic approach. She briefly questioned the definition of professionalism whether it was a status that could be obtained, the space that could be stepped into or a qualification which a certificate could endorse. Based on her point of view, her identity and her profession as a university professor for European Studies had been shaped by different factors in her life. The primary influence forming her career path was her parents. Coming from a Southern Indian family with mixed backgrounds, military from her paternal and academic from her maternal side, both military-influenced strict discipline and academic explorative freedom constructed the norms of her family and created spaces for Bava's upbringing. Rather unusual for the Indian society, access to education and exploration into new terrain were constantly encouraged in her family. Beside her first identity marker as an Indian, religion was also an important part of her life. Yet, in multi-religion/ethnic Indian society, religion was 'kept at home' and religious education was carried out in secular context.

In addition to her self-developed identity, Bava considered the **identity markers perceived or interpreted by others** to also play an important role. Perceptions on identity were even drawn into certain spaces unconsciously. The first perceived identity always changes throughout the space a person moves. 'Some identities are brought to you by the others' noted Bava. She then raised examples how the interpretation of her gender and religious markers affected





her profession. As a female scholar, she was once advised to conduct research only on limited topics. Although her Muslim identity never produced disadvantages in her career, developments at global level and in India strongly formed the context for the view of others on identity building.

To Bava, even though Islam was a vital aspect of her life, her nationality or 'being Indian' had been the top marker of her identity. This ordering was, however, changed by mammoth external events like 9/11. The development showed how occurrences in core Islamic countries could redefine the perceived identity of all Muslims including those in the periphery. The way she carried her identity and constructed herself in the past was challenged. She has since been recognized as a Muslim Indian. Bava criticized that the **reordering of primary identity by external factors** 'de-recognized' a person. Since individuals located their identity within religion and politics, this reordering discredited them from their own community, and forced them into the imagined ones.

Nevertheless, none of her identity markers posted limitation on her career advancement and Bava never experienced any limit to grow professionally. The explorative room provided by her family as well as intersectionality between religion and politics had created spaces for her professionalism in academia. Identities were perceived and constructed, and so were the obstacles to unfold them. The perception of self and of the possibilities, as Bava summed up, was vital to overcome any posted limitation and to evolve professionally.

Comments

Claudia Derichs continued by reflecting on the three currents she observed in the delivered lecture. Firstly, the lecture presented the contrasting relation between what was given by **the constitution and the empirical world**. Secondly, the lecture provided details on how **scholars' meaning-making was influenced by their local settings**. The lecture drew attention to the generally prominent elements in shaping knowledge building. While categories in developed knowledge were required to analyze the world on a conceptual level, Derichs questioned the extent of how far these categories were applicable to different empirical realities. Thirdly, Derichs recognized that the lecture had contested **the structuring capacity of concepts** such as religion. Asking how and by whom labels such as 'Muslim' or 'Hindu' were defined, Derichs criticized that at times such categorization caused a common chain of associating people and hardly allowed for acknowledging the diversity behind the labels. Rather than static characteristics, the label 'professionalism', too, was proven by Bava's auto-ethnographic lecture to entail a great deal of plurality.





Burger-Menzel opened the discussion to the audience which evolved around the questions of internal and external identity markers as well as how global developments like 9/11 had changed the perception about personal markers such as religion.

Report written by Hannah Bollig