
Photographable, Showable and Acceptable. Representations of Work in Ethiopia.

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Abstract

The social invisibility of work is a fruitful research theme in the social sciences. The social invisibility of work has been particularly developed by feminist studies that show the invisibility of female work. Diverse publications underline the weak recognition of care skills, assumed to be based on natural female skills and vocation or passion. However, the emerging racialization of these activities in the Global North make them paradoxically very visible in public space. Other research has linked the new visibility of work with the new management devices for controlling. Work then becomes spectacularly visible while it is less and less recognized. Visual methods, however, afford a new means for analyzing it.

Visual methods allow us to go deeper in analyzing the question of the social recognition of work. Within this perspective, I propose to study Work in Ethiopia through the prism of Bourdieu's concept 'the field of the photographable', comparing the reaction of different actors to photographs. My contribution will show that the interplay between the photographer (here, a European woman) / the subject (Ethiopian workers) / the audience (Ethiopian workers or young students) can be interpreted to understand the relationship of the various protagonists to work of the various protagonists. Thus, photographing Work and exhibiting pictures are not only ways to make work visible but they also serve as a tool for sociological observation.

My article will be based on three types of interactions. Firstly, I propose to consider the interaction during the shooting between the photographer and the models as a relevant sign of the relationship to work. Secondly, the reaction of the audience during two exhibitions reveals the representations of work of the spectators but also underlines the specificity of the European vision of Work. The first exhibition (*Women at Work*) has brought together the vision of European photographers and that of Ethiopian children. The second one (*Industrial Work Dynamics*) has moved to various workplaces, inviting the audience to react in a questionnaire. This second exhibition allows us to confront the models (and above all their colleagues in their workplaces) with the pictures of themselves. Finally, the audience perception focuses on the personalization of the picture more than on the abstraction of the activity, but also reveals the hierarchy in the field of the photographable.

Video presentation : <https://vimeo.com/548456453>

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