Las crecientes reivindicaciones de reconocimiento del trabajo sexual (con derechos laborales asociados) desafían la concepción de la prostitución como violencia y avasallamiento sexual, símbolo de la opresión patriarcal que se ejerce en contra de las mujeres. La controversia no solo moviliza interpretaciones divergentes del impacto de la prostitución sobre las personas y la sociedad. Convoca distintas aceptaciones de lo que se define como trabajo (entre otros, aquel de las mujeres) que trasparecen de los argumentos que afilian o excluyen la prostitución del campo laboral y/o profesional.

Partiendo de esta constatación, me propongo analizar las definiciones e imaginarios contradictorios del trabajo que fundamentan las posiciones de los «pro» y de los «contra» profesionalización en el contexto reglamentario de Bolivia (donde ejercen mayormente mujeres en establecimientos legales).

Se confrontarán las voces de la OIT, de los dirigentes del sindicato obrero al cual las mujeres han pedido afiliarse, de las corrientes del feminismo presentes en las ONG que trabajan con su sector así como aquellas de la asociación nacional de trabajadoras sexuales y de las mujeres “de base”. La prostitución se convierte así en un objeto privilegiado para aprehender las construcciones socio-ideológicas del concepto de trabajo, incluyendo entre las ciencias sociales. En efecto, mientras la sociología del trabajo abandonó la prostitución a los estudios de la desviación, los antropólogos nunca tuvieron problema en hablar de “trabajo” en sociedades donde este concepto ni siquiera existe (pero hasta recién se interesaron poco por la prostitución).

En última instancia, lo que se juega tras el debate sobre la profesionalización es la pugna que opone los mismos prostitutos al Estado, las organizaciones de la sociedad civil y los expertos para decidir quién produce la definición legítima de lo que es, o no es, un trabajo.
Securing the livelihood of a family is one of the major functions within a private household. Research recognized in the last decades that not the income of a single male bread winner was – in most cases – able to gain one’s living of a worker family. Indeed, workers and their families not only had one free wage labour position but combined a lot of different income sources. Depending on economic cycles, life cycle events and even seasonal cycles different forms of work of nearly all family members were performed. In addition, household strategies could also integrate the receipt of social benefits and pensions or integrate incomes from petty crime and begging. With regard to the early modern period in Europe Olwen Hufton coined the term “economy of makeshifts” for this household economy model. But a closer look on autobiographies reveals that such survival strategies could also be found in late 19th century among working class families, too. This aspect of my paper deals with questions like: How did the affected workers perceive makeshift economy? Can gender-specific, male behaviour be determined? Were makeshift arrangements repressed, since they questioned one’s strength? Or, in order to inform or stir their readership to action, did the workers mention their ‘participation’ in makeshift economy frankly, because their description so vividly reflected the social inequality experienced in everyday life? What of these economic activities were seen as “real work” and what not? How did the authors construct the difference? Autobiographies and letters from workers and social democrats in the late 19th and early 20th century build the source basis for the paper. Although most of the texts were written in a life phase when the authors gained ground they open the perspective to informal economic activities.
A work to be learned: changes in the conception of "domestic service" (Rio de Janeiro, early twentieth century)

Lerice de Castro Garzoni

In the city of Rio de Janeiro in the early decades of the twentieth century, the "domestic services" were the subject of debate, law projects and educational reforms. Inserted in a context of restructuring of labor relations in post-abolition, city fathers, employers and servants pondered the risks and benefits of regulating this activity, converting it in a formal work or a profession. In this process, the concepts of work, domesticity, gender and class have been repeatedly approached by contemporaries, showing their uncertainties about the gendered division of public and private spheres. In this paper, I discuss specifically the reform of the Institute of Professional Female “Orsina Fonseca” in 1916, when numerous disciplines have been removed from its internship curriculum to convert it into a "home school", dedicated to training of cooks, laundresses and maids. From the documentation found in the General Archives of the City of Rio de Janeiro and the news published in the press, I seek to understand how this change was interpreted by different social sectors, particularly the "poor girls" who were supposed to be served by the institute.

Prostitutes’ backgrounds during the interwar period

Magaly Rodriguez Garcia

This paper focuses on the socio-economic history of women involved in prostitution. The research is based on original material found in the archives of the League of Nations (Geneva). In 1923, a member of the League of Nations’ Advisory Committee on Traffic in Women and Children recommended the organisation of a worldwide investigation to ascertain the conditions under which human traffic was carried on. A Body of Experts was charged with the ‘study on the spot’ to compile official and non-official information from the prostitution milieu, in more than hundred cities worldwide. The report of these investigations concluded that state regulation or tolerance of brothels stimulated the national and international traffic of women. Thus brothels
needed to be forbidden. But then another problem rose: if brothels were shut down, what was to be done with ex-prostitutes? For this reason, the League of Nations started a new investigation on ‘rehabilitation’ programmes around the world. In order to better understand the problem and to assess the chances of successful rehabilitation, the League of Nations also organised a worldwide enquiry into the personal background of prostitutes.

The enquiries on prostitutes’ antecedents and rehabilitation programmes contain a unique and quasi unexplored source of information about the activities and points of view of prostitutes. There exists no other example of a worldwide enquiry which posed similar questions to almost 3,000 prostitutes from some forty countries, and which is available for scholarly research. Admittedly, the interviews are not representative for the whole sector, but provide clues to the backgrounds and experiences of women engaged in taboo activities such as prostitution. I am particularly interested in the socio-economic background of the interviewed prostitutes and their personal motivation and/or external forces that drove them into prostitution.

De gira: artistas de varieté, género y trabajo en la década de 1910
Cristiana Schettini

Esta ponencia analiza algunas trayectorias profesionales de artistas de varieté contratados para presentarse en ciudades brasileñas y argentinas. Sus experiencias laborales serán tratados a la luz del repertorio cultural disponible sobre ellos. Se buscará contrastar la indefinición contemporánea en torno a sus identidades de artistas, que circulaban entre diferentes estilos, ciudades, y actividades, con sus estrategias laborales. La intención es la de anclar los significados sociales asociados al mundo del entretenimiento en las experiencias laborales de algunos hombres y mujeres en este mercado, particularmente en la década de 1910.