

LOVA International Conference on 'Ethnographies of Gender and Mobility'

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I attended the 4th International LOVA Conference at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam between July 5-7, 2017. LOVA is a network for gender studies and feminist anthropology based in the Netherlands and organizes a tri-annual conference, and an annual summer school. This year's theme was 'Ethnographies of Gender and Mobility'.

Mobility was interpreted in a broad sense. There was a strong focus on physical mobility, such as cross border migration, but papers also focused on mobility of discourses, shifting between on/offline and rural/urban areas. Gender was a cross cutting theme in all 13 panels and in the 4 ethnographic films that were shown. Furthermore, there were two high quality keynote speakers, which provided a more theoretical lens to gender and mobility. I also attended the evening program, organized by LOVA, Atria and Worldhouse, which centered on gender and migration in the Netherlands and refugee women's experiences. The conference was small scale – around 50 participants -, and therefore it was easy to network with the other participants. There was an informal atmosphere, and an enthusiastic group of organizers.

My paper presentation focused on the mobility of a global discourse – The Girl Effect - and the limited upward mobility of adolescent girls in Malawi. The paper was a work-in-progress, and it was very useful to present my ideas and discuss it with a variety of people. Although I initially thought, I was the only presenter focusing on this topic; I quickly learned that more scholars were interested in adolescent girls and neoliberal policy discourses. One of the founders of LOVA – Marina de Regt – is planning on starting a research project on child marriage in Jordan, and the prize for best master's thesis was awarded to a critical research on the 'Girls Not Brides' initiative. Furthermore, one of the ethnographic films, which had received funding from 'the Girl Effect', followed the migration of two adolescent girls in Ethiopia and Bangladesh. The conference proved to be a great opportunity for networking. It, furthermore, helped me to reflect on the use of theoretical concepts in my own work.

The conference is very useful for anthropologists interested in gender issues. The LOVA network welcomes paper presentations from a variety of angles, including health. This year's focus on gender

and mobility was a welcome addition to my PhD education. I can recommend the conference to other PhD students interested in this topic and who have an anthropological focus in their work. However, for other PhD candidates the topic might be too specific.



Paper presentation in panel on 'gender dynamics in trade, tourism and development'. Photo credit: Irene Arends