

GLRC



# Global Labour Research Centre

## Symposium Proceedings

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*The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Global Labour Research Centre or of York University.*

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## Preface

The Global Labour Research Centre (GLRC) at York University is very pleased to publish this collection of papers from our second annual Graduate Student Symposium, which took place on 27-28 October 2016. The symposium showcased graduate student research on a wide range of issues related to the study of work and labour in a global context, and created an interdisciplinary forum for graduate students and post-doctoral fellows to share their research in a collaborative environment.

The GLRC promotes the study of work, employment, and labour at York University. The Centre's mandate is to support engaged, interdisciplinary, and accessible research on pressing issues of economic and social justice, to foster a collaborative intellectual community, to cultivate and expand new knowledge mobilization activities around work, employment and labour research, and to develop international linkages with leading research and learning centres. Graduate students play a vital role in the life of the GLRC and it is our hope that the annual symposium provides an environment conducive to the development of graduate research in the study of work and labour.

The papers in the symposium proceedings offer a reflection of the vibrant and diverse range of topics covered by symposium participants. The proceedings begin with an essay from Professor Ethel Tungohan. Dr. Tungohan presented the keynote lecture for the symposium titled 'Imperialismo, Ibagsak ("Down with Imperialism"): The Migrant Domestic Workers' Movement in Canada'. Her contribution to this proceedings documents the vulnerabilities and labour abuses experienced by women working in Canada's caregiver program, and illustrates how these conditions are sustained through recent policy changes to the program.

As an interdisciplinary conference, participants explored a wide range of social, political, economic, and geographic factors shaping the organization and experience of work. Several essays in the proceedings examine the working conditions and work experiences of particular groups of workers in public and private sector workplaces, including public transit workers (Kritee Ahmed), workers in the cultural industries (Kait Kribs, Jacqueline Ristola), and yoga instructors (Judith Mintz). The spread and impacts of precarious work, a widely-noted tendency in contemporary labour markets, are explored in the context of both temporary help agencies in the Greater Toronto Area

(Aujla) and forms of informal employment in Italy (Marco Marrone). The ways in which the experiences and conditions of work are shaped by social location is a central theme throughout the proceedings, with contributions that highlight dimensions of race and racialization (Candies Kotchapaw), dis/ability (Danielle Landry), age (Marrone), and the intersections of gender, race, and citizenship status (Aujla). Finally, the ways in which the state shapes work and working conditions is raised in a number of contributions, including through occupational health and safety laws (Matt Corbeil), as well as state policies on im/migration (Tungohan), youth employment (Marrone), sheltered workshops (Landry), and through the management of public sector workforces (Ahmed). Taken together, the articles in this collection present a complex and nuanced analysis of the changing nature of work in the contemporary economy, both within and beyond Canada.

The 2016 GLRC Graduate Symposium and this publication were made possible through the efforts of a number of members of the GLRC community. Thank you, Rawan Abdelbaki, Matt Corbeil, Lacey Croft, Jordan House, Jolin Joseph, Adam King, Loren March, Ives Polking, Stephanie Ross, and the anonymous reviewers of the papers published in these proceedings.

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# **Blood, Sweat, Ink, and Tears: Exploitation of Labour in the Japanese Animation Industry**

Jacqueline Ristola

In 2014, the renowned Studio Ghibli announced it was shutting down for “restructuring.” While it’s sad to see such a great film studio end, what’s more disheartening is that the studio set a high standard for labour conditions in the anime (Japanese animation) industry. Animators were paid a regular salary, an exception, not the norm, when it came to Japanese animation studios. Ghibli’s decline is an ominous sign of what’s to continue in the Japan: the continued rise of exploitative, precarious work within the anime industry.

What are the labour conditions of working animators today in Japan? How are they extensions of the industry’s origins and neoliberal practices? Foregrounded by a historical inquiry into the origins of anime labour practices and the rise of Japanese neoliberalism, this paper explores attempts to answer these questions. Through case studies, industry data, and published interviews, this paper examines current precarious labour conditions for animators in Japan, and how animators often consent to exploitative working conditions through misconceptions about artistic labour. This paper will also highlight some small but substantial ways animators resist exploitation and present some recommendations for combating the rise of precarious work in this sector of the cultural industries.

## **The 1960s: Trends and Tribulations**

To talk of the anime industry today, we must first discuss the historical precedents set by studios Toei Dōga and Mushi Productions, some of the first prominent television animation studios in the early 1960s, and their historical influence on labour organization. As Jonathan Clements (2013) notes, while Toei’s previous film output took

deep aesthetic inspiration from Disney, Toei television prospects eventually took inspirations from Disney's division of labour as well (p. 99). The studio, in severe arrears post-WWII, adjusted their industrial model of animation production in conscious imitation of Disney's apprentice program. The assembly style of animation production combined with the Disney style of organizing also coordinated with Japan's post-war Americanization. By adapting the Disney model of "apprenticeship," this system helped train the large number of inexperienced animators, while also creating a hierarchical model within the studio to justify the pay disparities between salaried and freelance animators.

It was this staffing policy, however, that stirred up the underpaid animators, recognizing this system not as a means of training but a justification for low wages through classifying younger animations as "students" or "low ranked" employees. The harsh working conditions at Toei even produced the phrase "anime syndrome," a condition that still plagues Japanese animators today, where animators had to be hospitalized for exhaustion as a result of the "unremitting late nights, irregular diets of junk food and cramped, repetitive labour" (Clements, 2013, 103). While Toei workers successfully went on strike for better working conditions, after the union ratified, Toei changed its recruitment of animators, overwhelmingly favouring freelance workers over full time staff. This important change in staffing cemented the anime industry's labour practices for the future, as Toei's basic model of freelance work still dominates the industry today, with few salaried animators working amidst a swathe of freelance animators who are overworked and underpaid.

While union agitation and negotiations were still in process over at Toei Animation, Osamu Tezuka's new studio Mushi Productions was poaching many of Toei's best and brightest with offers of good pay and a kinder environment. Tezuka's kindness, however, belied his business inexperience. While paying his staff members better pay than Toei, as a new studio with only one property in play (*Astro Boy*), decent pay meant losses were covered through cheaper animation and risky investments. As a new production company, Mushi Pro also suffered from understaffing, with some of these problems temporarily fixed through outsourcing. But this did not fix the labour problems, as this "'outsourcing' often involved overtime by staff members who already had day jobs in the industry" (Clements, 2013, 123). Mushi Productions eventually collapsed in the 1970s, but as Clements (2013) notes, "Tezuka's arrival in the industry created a series of structures, assumptions and expectations that Japanese TV animation in particular would never shake off" (p. 130). His devaluation of anime has



left a lasting legacy of tight budgets, hurried productions, and overworked staff.

Alongside Toei's reliance on freelancer labour, Tezuka's cost cutting measures made an indelible mark on the anime industry, creating a culture of precarious work. These labour models continue today, with worker precarity the norm for most animators in the anime industry, augmented by the expansion of neoliberalism in Japan in the 1990s.

### **The Rise of Neoliberalism**

While precarious freelance work has already become a standard in the anime industry, the rise of neoliberalism in Japan particularly exacerbated the exploitative working conditions in anime studios. After the Japanese bubble economy burst in late 1990, Japan turned to neoliberal policies to combat the following recession. Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto (1996-1998) embarked on a neoliberal project of privatizing industries and deregulating the economy, invoking "the rhetoric of freedom to offload what up to the moment had been responsibilities of the state and corporations onto citizens" (Hayashi, 2011, 180). As part-time, contract, and temporary employment rose dramatically, labor laws were "systematically loosened to benefit companies wanting to replace their full-time regular workers with less expensive temporary employees" (Hayashi, 2011, 181). Today, at least 30% of Japanese employees are non-standard workers, including part-time, contract, or temporary workers. As precarious work increased throughout Japan, the culture of neoliberalism served to strengthen the proliferation of non-standard work in the anime industry, a legacy that still continues today.

### **Contemporary Labour Conditions**

In 2015, The Japan Animation Creators Association (JAniCA) published the results of its new study of the working conditions, average income, and working hours of animators in the Japanese animation industry. Surveying 759 animators, the results were staggering. 84% of animators (both full and part-time) report working more than 8 hours a day. 15.9% of animators work more than 350 hours per month. Data about pay, hours worked, and more all indicate the same conclusion: those in the most precarious positions often provide the most work for the least pay. What's more concerning is that these results are nearly identical to JAniCA's study in 2009, illustrating the continuity of these exploitative labour practices. Individuals within the industry, however, are beginning to speak out about their precarious working

conditions, giving further insight into the working conditions of the anime industry while also demonstrating resistance to neoliberal ideals.

One of the most egregious comments comes from Henry Thurlow, an American animator working in Japan. Thurlow notes that he was advised by industry professionals that the industry is harsh, later noting that such a comment was an understatement:

It's not a 'tough' industry... It's an 'illegally harsh' industry. They don't pay you even remotely minimum wage, they overwork you to the point where people are vomiting at work and having to go to the hospital for medicine. They demand that you come in whenever they realize a deadline isn't going to be met. That probably means about a month and a half of nonstop work without a single day off. Then you will be allowed to go back to your regular six-day workweeks of 10-hour days (Meth 2015).

Other animators speaking out illustrate more labour problems within the anime industry, highlighting the egregious amount of overtime often expected by the lowest wage earning animators as reported by JAniCA. For instance, one animator at Studio Xebec for instance posted an image of his pay stub online in 2015. The animator was expect to work "as much as you can in 24 hours" (Loveridge, 2016), and for three months of work, the animator received a dismal pay of 131,330¥ (USD \$1,103). Such low pay for an egregious amount of expected hours highlights how "overtime rules remain so nebulous and so weakly enforced that the United Nations' International Labor Organization has described Japan as a country with no legal limits on the practice" (Harden 2008). This connects to larger cultural practices of overwork and other labour issues that also structure exploitation in animation studios.

### **Cultural Challenges**

Further compounding problems, particularly in the cultural industries, is the cultural acceptance of precarious labour conditions, particularly overwork, due to workers achieving their dreams as animators. When JAniCA's asked why animators continue to do their current job, 65.1% of respondents said, 'because the job is fun,' and 60.9% said 'in order to earn money.'

Henry Thurlow highlights this emphasis on doing what you love in his interviews about the anime industry, noting that when working at Japanese animation studios,

“everything about my life is utterly horrible, however the artist in me is completely satisfied” (Meth, 2015). As Miya Tokumitsu (2014) explains, the mantra of “do what you love” is a means of extending neoliberal individualization and obfuscating collective labour struggles. As Masahiro Abe (2012) notes, in Japan “hobby-like labour . . . triggers overwork” (p. 250), with the anime industry serving as a key example of this. Animators in Japan are cultural workers, however, their self perception as “artists” ignores workplace struggle and fails to recognize the toxicity of such highly individualized, neoliberal notions of work. As Thurlow’s comment highlights, such perceptions can lead cultural workers to accept pain and suffering as a necessary component of making good art. Stahl (2012), however, debunks this myth, illustrating that there is “a legacy of the proliferation in and appropriation of Romantic myths of the artist as rebel and outsider by our culture” (p. 4), and that mystifies the (exploitative) labour involved in artistic endeavours. This mystification of cultural work enables greater exploitation in the animation industry. By focusing on the “art” instead of the “labour”, animators such as Thurlow subsume horrendous labour practices under the pursuit of art, seeing these workplace issues as part of the artistic process rather than problems of labour exploitation.

Labour issues such as overwork not only proliferate in the anime industry, but are culturally structured in Japanese society. *Karōshi*, or “death from overwork,” is a visible trend among Japanese workers, a cultural expectation where individuals workers are expected to work hard with determination as the company burdens them with intense workloads. It is the negative result of Japanese cultural expectations of diligence and hard work, whereby “doing one’s best and enduring difficult situations patiently in order to achieve one’s goals—to *gambaru*—is considered to be one of the highest virtues” (Davies and Ikeno, 2002, 88). It is also a cultural force that is no doubt at work in Japanese animation studios today.

### **Industry Challenges**

This kind of labour exploitation has also been exacerbated by the industry's failure to adapt to contemporary anime aesthetics in terms of waged labour, as certain labour and wage practices do not reflect current workloads created by aesthetic innovation. In the past few years, there has been controversy surrounding the workload and wages of in-between animators, animators that draw transition frames in between key animation. Historically, these frames often hold less detail and thus often devalued as artistic labour. But as veteran animator Akihito Kanayama identifies, anime aesthetics today

are often very detailed and therefore more work for animators to draw, including in between animators. Kanayama describes how “movement and action was more prominent in [animation from the 80s and 90s]. . . [Today,] you see that the characters and art are very, very intricately detailed... but the actual motion, the animation, looks relatively stiff in comparison to the past” (Kemps, 2014).

While anime aesthetics, and the resulting workload for animators, have changed, the compensation for such work has not. In-between animation positions are entry level and low wage, and Sachiko Kamimura, another veteran animator, argues that living on these entry-level wages are nearly impossible. In a blog post in 2015, Kamimura notes how animators tend to be paid per frame of completion, rather than by a fixed salary or an hourly wage. She notes that while low wages were more livable earlier in the anime industry when aesthetics were less detailed, contemporary anime styles focused on intricately detailed character design means animators can rarely earn above Japanese hourly minimum wage (888¥, or USD \$7.45). JAniCA reported that the average yearly income of in-between animators as as low as 1.113 million yen (USD\$9,259) in 2013. Furthermore, it’s historically been rare for in-between animators to be promoted to other animation work, as in-between animation is often devalued, meaning in-between animation positions are poorly paid with little hope of promotion. In short, while the amount of work per frame has increased, the compensation per frame has not, creating a culture of precarious work where animators are overworked and under paid.

### **Potentials for the Future**

When asked about the low wages in the anime industry, Kanayama shifted blame to the production committees taking a substantial portion of the profits from a show, rather than address the systemic problems of precarious work in animation studios. This kind of obfuscation must be resisted if animators are to struggle and improve working conditions. As Studio Ghibli director Hayao Miyazaki (2009) noted, “it’s false to assume that just because animators love their work, we can keep their wages so low. That just isn’t right” (p. 89). Instead, animators must recognize themselves as cultural workers at the intersections between art and labour, and that the latter needs strategic organizing in order to improve working conditions in the anime industry.

From the anime industry’s beginnings within Toei Dōga and Mushi Productions, to the rise of neoliberalism in the 1990s, to the precarious working conditions today, animators in Japan have worked in exploitative environments with low wages,

egregious workloads, and precarious employment. While there are large institutional and cultural impediments ahead, outcries on social media and initiatives like JAniCA are starting to build labour consciousness among animators, the reality is that a large portion of overtime is unpaid and obscured. Animators will need to own their roles both as artist and worker, and unite together to push for better labour conditions. The aforementioned JAniCA serves as one form of action, forming in 2008 with the sole purpose of improving work conditions in the anime industry. Initiatives like these are a vital site of further investigation, as they critique labour conditions and will hopefully serve as a stepping stone for organized labour struggles in the future.

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**Navneet Aujla** completed both her BA and MA in Sociology at York University. She wrote her Master's thesis on the experiences of South Asian immigrant women working through temporary employment agencies in Ontario. She is also a workers' rights activist organizing in Brampton for the Fight for \$15 and Fairness Campaign. This campaign seeks to raise the minimum wage in Ontario to \$15 and to change employment and labour legislation so that all workers in Ontario can access decent wages and fair working conditions.

**Matt Corbeil** is a PhD student in the department of Political Science at York University. For his dissertation, he is studying how the relationship between mining corporations and the Ontario Ministry of Northern Development and Mines (and its predecessors) has affected policy outcomes over the postwar period.

**Candies Kotchapaw** is a Master of Social Work student at York University. Her current research looks at how social work education has been constructed to inadvertently replicate colonial practices that the profession itself fundamentally opposes. Candies' aim is to further study the absence of social work in the practice space of Canadian Public Policy. In so doing, she hopes to create a space for racialized social workers to



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**Danielle Landry** is a lecturer in the School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University, currently teaching the online course Mad People's History. Her SSHRC-funded doctoral research at York University aims to re-theorize how we understand accessibility for people with psychiatric disabilities in the workplace. This research will involve conducting a case study of social enterprises currently operating in Ontario that are run by psychiatric consumer/survivors. Bridging sociological approaches, critical disability studies and Mad Studies, this inductive inquiry will take up and work from disabled workers' everyday experiences. The findings of Danielle's MA research, which applied a critical discourse analysis to investigate survivor research in Canada, were published in a recent issue (2017) of *Disability & Society*. As an active member of the consumer/survivor community, Danielle is secretary of the board of the Empowerment Council, an independent systemic advocacy group operating within Canada's largest mental health and addictions hospital (CAMH).

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**Judith Mintz** is a PhD Candidate in the Gender, Feminist, and Women's Studies program at York University, Toronto (expected March 2018). The working title of her dissertation is "Gender, Health and Cross-Cultural Consumption in North American Yoga Communities: A Post-Colonial Feminist Ethnography." As yoga teacher and shiatsu therapist for over 15 years, Judith turned to the academic world to examine the conflicts and contradictions in the holistic health world. Judith has published her work with Demeter Press, Athabasca Press, Canadian Woman Studies, and *Pivot: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies and Thought*. As a feminist and empowered mother of two, Judith explores conscious relationship in both personal and global contexts. Judith is developing policy and practice innovations toward intersectional equity in the wellness communities for both labourers and consumers.

**Jacqueline Ristola** is a Masters student in Cinema and Media Studies at York University. Her masters research project examined the cross-cultural aesthetic exchanges between *Samurai Champloo* and *The Boondocks*, and how such transnational exchange structures political critiques of national identity. Her work can be found in in Animation Studies and Bright Wall/Dark Room. She will pursue her PhD in Film and Moving Image Studies at Concordia University Fall 2017.

**Ethel Tungohan** is an Assistant Professor in the Departments of Political Science and Social Science at York University. Her research looks at migrant labour, specifically assessing migrant activism. Her forthcoming book, *From the Politics of Everyday Resistance to the Politics from Below*, which will be published by the University of Illinois Press, won the 2014 National Women's Studies Association First Book Prize. Her work has been published in academic journals such as the International Feminist Journal of Politics, Politics, Groups, and Identities, and Canadian Ethnic Studies. She is also one of the editors of *Filipinos in Canada: Disturbing Invisibility*, which was published by the University of Toronto Press in 2012. She is the founder of Canadians for an Inclusive Canada and is actively involved in grassroots migrant organizations such as Gabriela-Ontario and Migrante-Canada.



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