

Lawyers and Capitalism: The History of Lawyers as Key Actors in the Development of Global Capitalism

Call for Papers

International Workshop organized in Zurich, 12-13 June 2025

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The legal profession has long been identified as a power broker between political, corporate, state-bureaucratic and academic elites. Recent research has focused on the emergence of new professionals who are willing and able to work across national frontiers (Seabrooke and Henriksen 2017). As professional go-betweens, lawyers – alongside accountants, financial advisers or wealth managers – have become essential actors of the emerging “transnational legal field”, coordinating strategies across jurisdictions and forming a strong component of professional services firms.

While earlier research in the field of socio-legal studies has highlighted the fundamental changes in the legal profession (Legal Big Bang) that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s (Dezalay 1990; Galanter and Palay 1991; Dezalay and Garth 1995; Flood 2013), the study of lawyers has regained scholarly attention in the wake of the 2007/2008 crisis and renewed discussions on inequalities and justice. The influence of law and lawyers on global wealth inequalities, and their ability to protect and produce private wealth has more recently been widely discussed (Pistor 2019).

The objective of this workshop is threefold. First, it aims to take stock of the ongoing international and interdisciplinary debates. Second, it intends to focus on the historical dimension and to deepen our understanding of the changes over time of the legal profession and its role in the development of global capitalism. Third, it endeavors to promote an actors-centered approach of the role of law and law firms as a key component in the business world.

We welcome contributions from scholars in a variety of fields: history, sociology of law, socio-legal studies, anthropology, political science, legal studies. We invite scholars at all stages of their careers to submit paper proposals which engage any of the following questions:

- How and why did lawyers become powerful actors in the development of capitalism and as go-betweens in the business world?
- In what forms have law firms and lawyers partnered with multinational companies? What role have they played in tax optimization and evasion practices?
- What positions have lawyers held in international organizations linked to the business community?
- How did the local markets for legal services (in a given national case) evolve in response to the emergence of transnational law firms and more generally to the internationalization of law? Was there a difference between smaller markets – i.e. smaller jurisdictions and bar organizations – and larger markets?
- What was the socio-professional profile of partners of business law firms (gender, nationality, education, previous and subsequent career steps, etc.), and how did it change over time?
- How and why did other legal professionals, such as tax experts, big 4 consultancies, or in-house counsels compete and/or collaborate with lawyers?

Please apply by submitting a 350-word abstract and a one-page CV to thibaudgero.giddey@uzh.ch by **21 June 2024**. Presenters will be expected to pre-circulate a paper of between ~2,000 and 4,000 words by April 2025. The contributions are expected to be published in the form of a special issue or an edited book. Funding for travel assistance may be available; preference will be given to scholars who lack other sources of institutional funding.