

[Wo]Menpower!

Frontier Research Approaches in Gender and Labour Histories

13-14 May 2021

Abstracts

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Sabine Rutar (Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies – IOS, Regensburg)

Epistemology of Labour in the North-eastern Adriatic Border Region

In my keynote, I focus on the meaning of the “border” in both labour history and historiography, taking the North-eastern Adriatic as a case in point. I have worked on shipyard and port workers’ shop floor relations in the cities of Koper and Rijeka during the Cold War, and in doing so I looked towards the shipyards in Trieste and Monfalcone to see whether common threads of motivation and action existed that transcended the border. In historiography, conceptual mental maps have largely separated shop floor relations in state socialism from those in capitalist (western) Europe. In the northeastern Adriatic during the Cold War, the border was one of the most open ones between “East” and “West”, but the respective historiographies in Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia still remain mostly nation-state-defined (and also linguistically apart). I am interested in the actual workings of shop floor relations after 1945, that is the workplace as a place of socioeconomic patterns and engagement. I look at concepts and repertoires of social action valid and applied among industrial workers of analogous industries on both sides of the border, taking moments of social protest and confrontation with the management and/or governing authorities as examples.

1st SESSION AGENCIES AND SUBJECTIVITIES

Tanja Petrović (Institute of Culture and Memory Studies – ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana)

An Ethnographic Perspective on Gender and Labor in Socialism: Women’s Agency in/through Labor

My contribution focuses on the ways we understand and discuss “the women’s question” in socialist Yugoslavia and argues that these understandings and discussions are significantly shaped by two dominant sets of discourses that both foreclose the possibilities of observing complex gender dynamics in the second half or the 20th century. The first insists on the failure of the socialist state to provide complete emancipation of women, pointing to the alliance between the socialist state and patriarchal structures. The

second denies the possibility of agency of women in state socialism, interpreting their efforts to improve their position in society as simply an instrument of the Communist party. In this contribution, I ask in what way discrete, ethnographic accounts of women's labor in diverse fields, such as industry and social and political work, intervene in these dominant sets of discourses, challenge and complicate them. I will focus on discursive strategies of women's self-representation, their understanding of their labor and the ways they reflect on tensions and ambiguities that constituted their experience of work in socialism. I will pay particular attention to the concept of agency and the ways it unfolds ethnographically and discursively.

Urška Strle (University of Ljubljana)

Workers in the Spotlight of Migration, Subjectivity and Gender

The paper brings about some epistemological and historiographical findings based upon personal experiences of migrant workers. It follows the principle of labour historians who have researched history of workers beyond formal archival records, usually executed by employers and trade unions. Such an impetus stems from the hypothesis, that migrating workers are often engaged in the grey zones of administrative spotlight, thus failing to be fully recognized in classical historical sources relevant for the history of labour. Instead, the paper brings closer oral history interviews presenting a noteworthy empirical basis to elucidate a diversity of perception the interviewees laid upon various aspects of work. They mediate meanings given to the occupational activities, which both shaped and were shaped by workers with a migratory background themselves. In order to avoid generalizations, the paper touches upon three perspectives on migration, based on common spatio-temporal specifics: North-Eastern Adriatic territory in the long post-war period. The first perspective relates to the periodical border-crossing of housemaids, who were based in Yugoslavia, but executed work in rather well-known Italy, the second recounts post-war Slovenian emigrants who carved their way overseas, to Canada, and the third details workers who came to Slovenia from other parts of former Yugoslavia. The central focus is given to women's narratives, which do not present themselves in a social vacuum, but lay much focus to family relations, interpersonal interactions, network activities etc. Paper's main intention is to stimulate discussion on the validity of observational framework that unites various migratory aspects with the concept of work and gender with the colleagues from the field.

2nd SESSION (POST-)INDUSTRIAL TURNS

Susan Zimmermann (ZARAH – Central European University)

Labor Movements and the Emancipation of Women

Foregrounding the activism and demands of women identifying with working class struggle, this presentation discusses, in a long-term perspective, the engagement of (non-communist) labor movements with women's emancipation. The first section provides insight into the contours of the complex relationship between labor movements, gender, and women. It focuses on the negotiation of gender and class interests, and the position and the available organizational-political choices for socialist women and their allies within the workers' movement and in-between the labor and the women's movements. It argues that the organizational and activist choices of women identifying with any of the currents of socialism and advocating class and gender interests of

working-class women were limited and demonstrates that each option came with both opportunity and considerable drawbacks. The second section discusses the socialist program of women's emancipation and related struggles. For women and men identifying with the labor movement, women's "social individuation" and the equalization of the status of women and men could and would only be attained when connected with overall economic liberation, and via putting women into the position to earn their own living via full and equal participation in the world of work. This section foregrounds the evolving socialist program of women's economic liberation and the politics of women's work. It discusses how socialist women and men construed and delimited women's interests, the tensions between straightforward vision on the one hand and retarding and conflicting interests on the other, and some of the limitations of the socialist program of women's emancipation.

Alina Bartscher (University of Bonn)

It Takes Two to Borrow: The Effects of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act on Homeownership and Mortgage Debt of Married Couples

Until the 1970s, U.S. mortgage lenders commonly discounted the wife's income when a couple jointly applied for a mortgage. This changed with the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation in the 1970s. In particular, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA) of 1974 prohibited credit discrimination related to marital status and sex. It constitutes a historical natural experiment to study the relaxation of income-related borrowing constraints, since married couples could now use all of the wife's income as collateral for a mortgage. I examine the effects of the reform based on data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), and find positive effects on mortgage borrowing and homeownership rates of married couples with working wives. My results imply that upon its introduction, the new equal credit opportunity legislation enabled 1.4 million couples to move into their own home. On impact, the new reform mainly benefited households in which the wife had already been working, as lenders were still allowed to consider factors such as income stability and employment continuity when making lending decisions. However, a young woman planning her financial future at the beginning of her adult life in the post-reform world faced different incentives for labor supply than she would have without the reform. On the one hand, a woman suddenly had to work less in order to afford the same house. On the other hand, her return to working in terms of borrowing capacity increased. I use a simple theoretical economic model to study these counteracting effects. The results imply that the reform incentivized married women to join the labor force in the medium to longer run, which in turn amplified the positive effect on married couples' homeownership.

Eloisa Betti (University of Bologna)

Engendering Working From Home: Production, Reproduction and Precarity

The contribution focuses on the history of working from home and its development in industrial and post-industrial societies, trying to understand continuities and changes occurred in homeworkers' experiences thanks to a gender perspective. Empirical research on the pervasive role of home-based industrial work in Western countries, such as 1960s-1970s Italy, have contributed to understand the dark sides of working from home for women workers, unveiling their struggles to be recognized as workers and to obtain adequate social rights. The voices of homeworkers are particularly interesting to understand how production and reproduction intersects within the household, unveil the

impact on working hours, family life as well as women's health. The lack of labour rights and a proper contract increased the level of exploitation along with the perception of precarity, pushing homeworkers to mobilize in the 1970s for a new regulation and its implementation. The history of Italian homeworkers is an interesting term of comparison to better understand contemporary debates on digital forms of working from home, especially telework which has increased enormously in the shadow of Covid-19 global pandemic.

Stefano Agnoletto (Fondazione ISEC, Milano – BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo)
Disseminating Industrial Labour History Outside Academia. An Experience with Italian Schools

This presentation deals with the teaching of labour history in schools and with the significance of including this subject in school curricula. It also aims to propose some strategies by which the subjects can be profitably taught to students and shared with teachers.

It focuses on an activity proposed for the Italian schools between 2015 and 2018 at the ISEC Foundation (Institute for the history of the contemporary age) in Italy. It was an experience of workshops, lectures, laboratories and courses on industrial labour history planned with modular paths and structured according to a blended learning perspective. It consisted of both activities for students on one side and schoolteachers' training experiences on the other. This experience involved thousands of students from elementary school to high school. Emphasis is on educational strategies based on collaborations between schools, the heritage sector, some protagonists/key-informants and labour historians. These strategies at ISEC Foundation have taken the form of practice-based teaching and 'hands-on' learning experiences. The educational experience described in the presentation was also aimed at aggregating a new collaborative public, in particular young students, around the historical industrial patrimony. It is meant to overcome a conservative vision of industrial heritage and labour history, in favour of a dynamic, open-culture vision that is a vision of historical culture and historical heritage as a public good. The aim is the transformation of industrial heritage into a 'community' in order to build a space for social aggregation and for younger generations that are growing up in times and spaces of post-industrialisation.

3rd SESSION MICRO & MACRO - GENDERED & UNGENDERED

Chiara Bonfiglioli (University of Cork)
'Some went on holiday, but not us from the sewing department': Gender and Labour History in Socialist Yugoslavia From an Intersectional Perspective

The presentation will reflect on the possibility to apply an intersectional perspective to gender and labour history. Intersectionality is both a theoretical concept and a method in feminist research – mostly used in the social sciences – and its application to historical research has been recently discussed but not fully explored (Shaffner, Mills and Mills 2019; Boris 2012; Tschurennev 2013). The presentation will apply an intersectional perspective to socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1991), arguing that education, urban/rural background, geographical location, political affiliation, and social class are to be considered major axes of power alongside gender when it comes to working women's lives in the socialist era.

Against the homogenising idea of women's lack of agency under socialist "state patriarchy", intersectionality can be used to highlight the complexity and diversity of women's lived experiences. Even in the textile sector, which presented a similar "industrial structure of feeling" for several generations of female workers across ethnic and republican borders, different factors of social differentiation led to very different outcomes when it came to accessing labour, social mobility, and welfare services, as highlighted by both archival sources and oral history interviews.

Christian G. De Vito (University of Bonn)

Micro-spatial Perspectives on Labour History and Intersectionality

The tumultuous changes experienced by the fields of labour and gender history during the last decades call for new theoretical and methodological approaches. These should allow us to deal with the complexities that labour and gender scholars have highlighted, without losing ourselves in the sea of empiricism. How can we make sense of the multiplicity of entangled labour relations that has been the standard across human history? How can we study the continuous intersection among gender, class, ethnicity/race and age that is at work in the historical fabric? And how can we connect the study of labour and gender with the global-historical imperatives to move beyond eurocentrism and methodological nationalism?

This presentation suggests that these questions can be fruitfully addressed from a micro-spatial perspective that brings together two approaches: on the one hand, it foregrounds the micro-historical idea of the necessity to avoid predefining the categories and the temporal and geographical units of research; on the other hand, it connects to those strands within global history that highlight the importance of spatiality – the construction of place; connections and disconnections; mobility and immobility. At the cross-roads of these two approaches, the micro-spatial perspective permits to view labour and gender as processes, rather than fixed entities: "relations of labour" made of the practices of several individual and collective actors, rather than static labour relations based on predefined sets of characteristics; the construction of discourses and practices at the crossroads of gender, class and race, rather than prefabricated juxtapositions of clear-cut categories.

Erica Mezzoli (WeCanIt – University of Ljubljana)

'In this Woman's Praises'. The (Un)Gendered Dimensions of the Upper Adriatic Shipping Industry, 1879-1923

*In this Woman's Praises i'l [here end my Song,
Whose Heart was approved [in valour most strong;]
Let all sorts of People whate[ver they be,]
'Sing forth the brave Valours [of Mary Ambree.]*

**THE / Valorous Acts performed at Gaunt, /
By the Brave Bonny Lass Mary Ambree, / Who in Revenge
of her Love's Death, did play her part most gallantly**

Albeit the maritime world is traditionally considered as a solely male – and extremely virile – domain, starting from the second half of the Nineteenth century several women as ship-owners boldly "rode the waves" of the Upper and Eastern Adriatic. The aim of the paper is to present and analyze the main characteristics of female ownership of offshore navigation ships in the *Österreichisches Küstenland* (in particular Trieste-Trst and

Kvarnar-Quarnaro) from 1879 – year of the reorganization of the Austro-Hungarian maritime law – to 1923, date that marked the beginning of Kingdom of Italy's official sovereignty on those territories. This active role of the women in the shipping industry was crucial in framing the social and economic environment where the religious, national, and economic stakeholders' groups of the Upper Adriatic interacted. Moreover, their presence in the Imperial maritime enterprise allow us to address the issue of the variations in the distribution of power between genders – in family and socio-economic contexts – in maritime environments, that of the inclusion-exclusion paradox of women as seafarers and, finally, that of the dichotomy sea-“Iron men” vs. shore-“Wooden women” (Creighton & Norling, 1996) that still largely characterize maritime scholarship. As for the sources, the paper will be based on the maritime logs of the *Central-Seebehörde in Triest*.

Sonja Bezjak and **Sergeja Masten** (Slovenian Social Science Data Archives)
Data on Gender and Labour in Social Science Data Archives

The beginnings of archiving social science data date back to the 1940s. In Europe, social science data archives have been collaborating as an international network, specialized for research data services already since 1976. Today the European Consortium of Social Science data Archives brings together 22 member and 14 partner states. The common Cessda Data Catalogue (CDC) includes more than 30.000 studies from various countries and represents a source of quality research data. In this presentation we aim to show, how to discover and use the relevant quantitative and qualitative studies on gender and labour from trustworthy repositories and how to archive and publish research data. In the conclusion we will draw attention to the role of researchers in the era of big data and discuss challenges related to datafication and data justice in relation to gender, minorities and migrants.