

Women's and gender history in Southeast Europe in the 20th Century

Funding: Elisabeth List Fellowship Programme

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Involved researchers at CSEES: Rory Archer, Drivalda Delia, Rachel Trode, Chiara Bonfiglioli

Project information:

The Elisabeth List Fellowship Programme for Gender Research was been awarded to Dr. Chiara Bonfiglioli (University College Cork) and Dr. Rory Archer (University of Graz). They are joined on the project, "Women's and gender history in Southeast Europe in the 20th Century: Oral history, ethnographic and biographical approaches as a way to advance intersectionality", by two junior fellows, Drivalda Delia (University of Regensburg) and Rachel Trode (EUI Florence).

Gender and women's history in SEE has been witnessing a considerable interest in the past two decades, particularly when it comes to the history of women's participation to interwar religious associations, antifascist resistance movements, state socialist women's organizations, the second feminist wave, and peace movements during the Yugoslav wars.¹ Recent studies have also interrogated the interrelations between gender and women's history, social history, and labour history.² Despite such scholarly advancements in the field, however, gender is often still treated in isolation rather than in its intersection with other factors of social differentiation, even though intersectionality as a theory and as a method is well established in both the social sciences and in the humanities.³ When it comes to the application of intersectional, post-socialist and post-colonial approaches, women's and gender history does not seem to follow suit, even if several philosophical and political debates are happening within the field of women's and gender studies in the region, both on intersectionality and on the necessity to combine post-socialist and post-colonial studies.⁴

¹ F. Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European: Voluntary Associations, Gender, and Islam in Post-Ottoman Bosnia and Yugoslavia (1878-1941)*, CEU Press, 2021; J. Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: A History of World War II Resistance*, Cambridge UP, 2015; I. Simić, *Soviet Influences on Postwar Yugoslav Gender Policies*, Palgrave, 2018; Z. Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia*, Palgrave, 2018; A. Miškovska Kajevska, *Feminist Activism at War: Belgrade and Zagreb Feminists in the 1990s*, Routledge, 2017.

² N. Vodopivec, 'On the road to modernity: Textile workers and post-socialist transformations in Slovenia', *History*, 97/328 (2012), pp. 609–29; R. Jambrešić-Kirin and M. Blagaic, 'The ambivalence of socialist working women's heritage: A case study of the jugoplastika factory', *Narodna Umjetnost*, 50/1 (2013), pp. 40–73; C. Bonfiglioli, *Women and Industry in the Balkans: The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav Textile Sector*, I.B.Tauris/Bloomsbury, 2019; I. Kosmos, T. Petrović and M. Pogacar (eds.), *Zgodbe iz konzerve. Zgodovine predelave in konzerviranja rib na severovzhodnem Jadranu*, Kulturni Spomin (2020); see also the ZARAH research project led by Professor Susan Zimmermann at CEU: <https://zarah-ceu.org/>

³ H. Lutz, M. T. Herrera Vivar, L. Supik (eds.), *Framing Intersectionality. Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, Routledge, 2009.

⁴ B. Kašić, J. Petrović, S. Prlenda and S. Slapšak (eds.) *Feminist Critical Interventions: Thinking Heritage, Decolonising, Crossings*, Red Athena University Press, 2013.

'Women' and 'men' are often treated as homogeneous, pre-existing subject positions, without interrogating the formation of different femininities and masculinities in 20th century SEE in intersection and interrelation with class, ethnicity, race, political orientation, urban/rural location and cross-border connections and cultural transfers. Notably, the ongoing debates on class⁵ and race⁶ as salient categories of analysis for both socialist and post-socialist societies in SEE, are not yet fully integrated within women's and gender history.

We believe that more can be done at a scholarly level to understand how male and female citizens in SEE experienced not only political and ideological changes, but also wider economic and social processes, and how these in turn shaped their masculinities and femininities. Phenomena such as mass industrialization, urbanization and cross-republican migration under state socialism, or Europeanisation, widespread deindustrialization, loss of employment and emigration after 1989, together with the violent conflicts that affected the region in the 1990s, had a deep impact on the making and remaking of masculinities and femininities and of 'gender regimes' along specific class and ethnic lines.⁷

Through the research activities of the project team, we aim to highlight how oral history, ethnographic and biographical methodological approaches can help us challenge a simplified understanding of gendered transformations during the 20th century and to integrate ongoing debates about intersectional, postsocialist and post-colonial approaches and interpretations within women's and gender history in Southeastern Europe.

About the project team

The research activities and interests of the project team span the long 20th century with regards to gender and women's history. Here is a chronological profile of the team members and their research interests:

Rachel Trode is a PhD researcher at the Department of History and Civilization at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. In her thesis, she analyses administrative practices during the strikes of May 1906 in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to examine the nature of late Habsburg rule in the territory. As a junior fellow, her research explores women workers' experiences and strategies during the strikes, and the ways in which these moments of social conflict were gendered. Rachel completed her Master of Arts at the University of

⁵ R. Archer, I. Duda and P. Stubbs (eds.), *Social Inequalities and Discontent in Yugoslav Socialism*, Routledge, 2016.

⁶ C. Baker, *Race and the Yugoslav region: Postsocialist, post-conflict, postcolonial?*, Manchester University Press, 2018.

⁷ G. Musić, 'They Came as Workers and Left as Serbs': The Role of Rakovica's BlueCollar Workers in Serbian Social Mobilizations of the Late 1980s', in R. Archer, I. Duda and P. Stubbs (eds.), *Social Inequalities and Discontent in Yugoslav Socialism*, Routledge, 2016; C. Bonfiglioli, K. Kahlina and A. Zaharijević, 'Transformations of gender, sexuality and citizenship in South East Europe', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 49 (2015), pp. 43–7.

Toronto in European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies. Her article, “The Sarajevo Tobacco Factory Strike of 1906. Empire and the Nature of Late Habsburg Rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” was recently published in the December 2022 issue of *Central European History*.

Chiara Bonfiglioli is a lecturer in Gender & Women’s Studies at University College Cork, Ireland, where she also coordinates the one-year interdisciplinary Masters in Women’s Studies. She completed a PhD at the Graduate Gender Programme, Utrecht University, in 2012, and held postdoctoral fellowships at the University of Edinburgh, the University of Pula, and the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. She is the author of *Women and Industry in the Balkans: The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav Textile Sector* (I.B. Tauris 2019). She was recently awarded an ERC Consolidator 2023 grant for a project titled *WO-NAM: Women and Non-Alignment in the Cold War era: biographical and intersectional perspectives*.

Rory Archer is a social historian of 20th century Southeast Europe whose research focuses on labour and gender history in socialism and includes work on topics like housing, everyday life, popular culture, and the industrial workplace. Methodologically, he works through oral history, grounded theory and other qualitative, interpretive methods which link social science approaches to social history research. Rory’s current research project explores the history of intra-Yugoslav Albanian migration during socialism through an intersectional lens and he works at the Centre for Southeast European Studies in Graz as the PI. He also works as a project researcher about the Yugoslav workforce in postcolonial Zambia at the University of Vienna. Recent publications include “Albanian labor migration, the Yugoslav private sector, and its Cold War context”, forthcoming in a special section of *Labor History* of which he is co-editor, “The Cold War of labor migrants: Opportunities, struggles and adaptations across the Iron Curtain and beyond”.

Drivalda Delia is a PhD researcher at the University of Regensburg, Germany. Her thesis analyses the participation of girls and women in the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) that organised secessionist armed resistance against Serbia in the late 1990s. Based on biographic interviews, the study aims to engage in a necessary conversation about women’s and girl’s agency in armed conflict, their motivations for joining an organisation that used violence to achieve its political goals, and ways in which they contributed to the survival of their community during war and in its aftermath. A central question of the research is the extent to which empowerment is possible in a highly militarised environment. Drivalda holds a master’s degree in East European Studies from Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich (LMU) and a bachelor’s degree in International Relations from the London School of Economics (LSE).