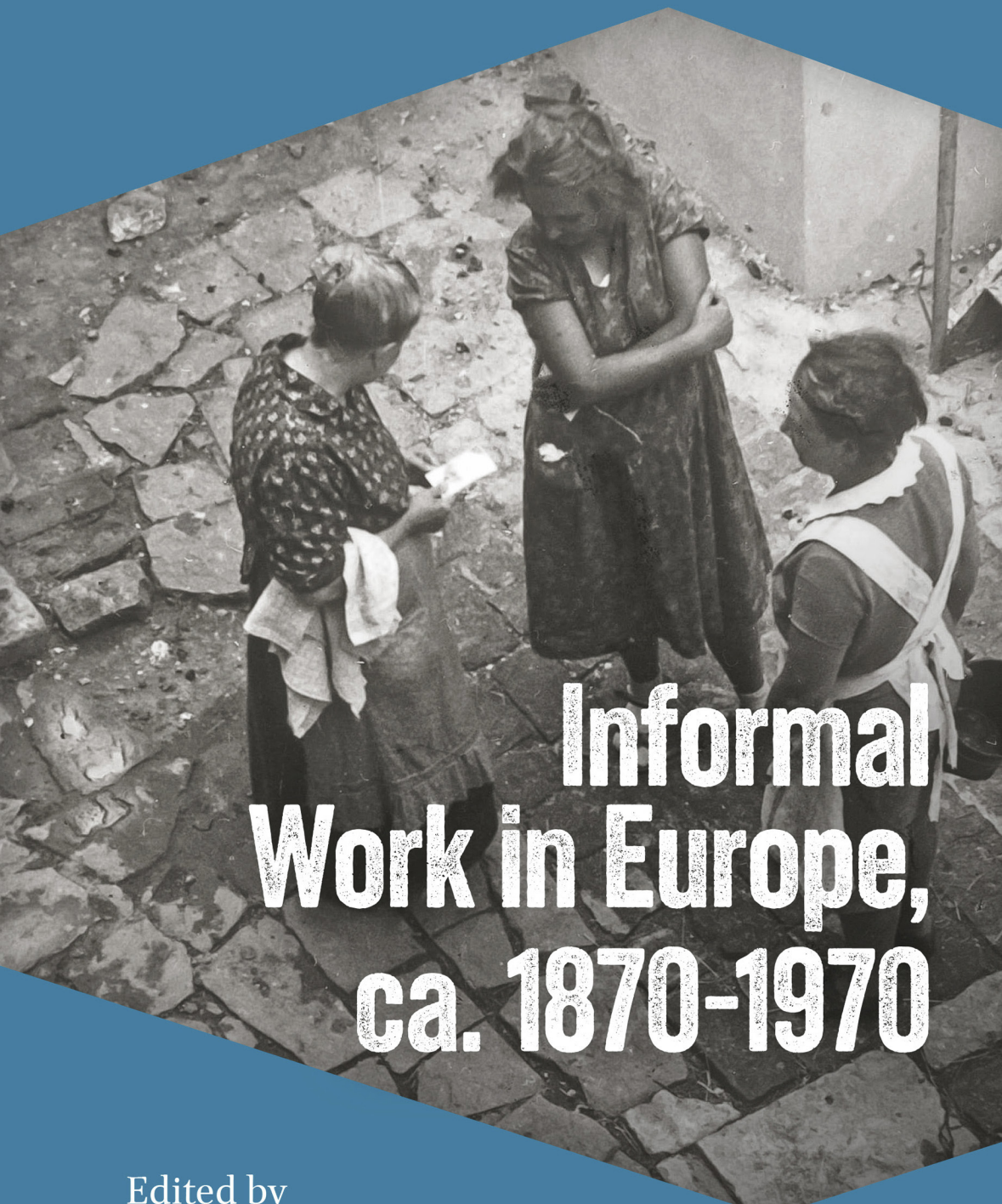


Work and Labor – Transdisciplinary Studies for the 21st Century



Informal Work in Europe, ca. 1870-1970

Edited by
Sibylle Marti and
Christof Dejung

 CEU PRESS

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Work and Labor – Transdisciplinary Studies for the 21st Century

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Bern, April 2026, Sibylle Marti and Christof Dejung

1. Informal Work in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe

Sibylle Marti and Christof Dejung

Abstract: This chapter offers an analytical definition of the concept of informal work and explains the connections between informal work and precarity, gender, and migration. It identifies key factors that play a crucial role in the processes of in-/formalization of work, making it clear that neither labor formalization nor informatization are hidden-hand processes, but that informality and formality are co-produced by various actors and interests. The chapter also places the contributions to the volume in the context of major economic, social, and political developments in Europe before and between the world wars and in the postwar period. It argues that informal work was an integral and constitutive factor of labor and labor politics in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe.

Keywords: Informal work, precarity, gender, labor formalization, Europe, 1870–1970

In European labor history, formal wage labor is often presented as the focus, if not the very core, of labor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Emphasis is typically placed both on the rise of free wage labor in the nineteenth century and on the first labor and social laws of the late nineteenth century, which laid the foundations for the regulation of formal labor in various European nation states; many of these arrangements are still in force today. Historical studies also tell us much about how these legal and social models of gainful employment were consolidated throughout Europe over the course of the twentieth century until they were thrown

into a prolonged crisis: in the countries of Europe's Western hemisphere from the 1970s onward; in Eastern European socialist countries somewhat later.¹ The overriding impression presented in historiography is thus of an era of increasing labor regulation and protection lasting roughly from 1870 to at least 1970.

This general historical account certainly covers some areas and forms of work, especially in the industrial sector. However, it neglects crucial aspects of labor in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe. Our volume challenges and moves beyond this narrative by focusing on multiple forms and fields of *informal work*. In parallel with the rise of formally regulated wage labor from the end of the nineteenth century, various types of unregulated or feebly regulated work persisted in European countries alongside the emergence and continuous transformation of non-formalized or barely formalized occupations. These included farm hands, unskilled laborers, home-based workers, and domestic servants, or various forms of crafts, trades, and other self-employed activities. The rise of complex sets of labor regulations affected the ways in which informal workers—who engaged in types of work that were not, or were only partially, covered by these regulations—lived and experienced the labor relations in which they were involved. Furthermore, these regulations had an impact on how informal work was perceived by authorities and employers, workers in formal labor relations, and the broader public. The development of informal work and formal wage labor was thus closely interlinked and interrelated.

With its focus on the history of informal work in different parts of Europe in the period from around 1870 to 1970, our volume brings forms of work and labor relations to the fore that have so far received limited attention in European labor history. There are at least two reasons for this. First, informal work is still rather a blind spot in labor history in general; for a long time, the focus of historical studies was primarily on formal (industrial) wage labor, which was seen as the core feature of capitalism.² Second, as regards to

1 On Western Europe after the boom, see Lutz Raphael, *Jenseits von Kohle und Stahl. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte Westeuropas nach dem Boom* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2019); Sebastian Voigt, ed., *Since the Boom: Continuity and Change in the Western Industrialized World after 1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021). On Eastern Europe, see Marsha Siefert, ed., *Labor in State-Socialist Europe, 1945–1989: Contributions to a History of Work* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2020).

2 Jürgen Kocka, *Capitalism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Thomas Welskopp, "Kapitalismus und Konzepte von Arbeit. Wie systemisch zentral ist 'freie Lohnarbeit' für den Kapitalismus?" *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. 2 (2017): 197–216.

(Western) Europe, unregulated or weakly regulated work is usually depicted as a phenomenon that came about in the last decades of the twentieth century only. Due to deindustrialization, the rise of neoliberalism, and the flexibilization of labor, it has been argued that the so-called standard employment relationship declined while insecure labor regimes became ever more common.³

The impetus to pay more attention to informal types of work came from two areas of historical research in particular. One of these is global labor history, which has emphasized the global diversity of work, workers, and their labor relations beyond formal wage labor.⁴ Global labor history in turn developed in close relation to the new history of capitalism with its claim that industrial capitalism relied not least on various forms of coerced labor.⁵ However, at first, studies in global labor history were mostly concerned with forms of work and working conditions in the so-called Global South; in fact, informal work was mainly regarded as a phenomenon that was characteristic of this part of the world.⁶ Gradually, labor historians started to pay attention to informalized forms of work in the United States and Europe, too; in their studies, they generally referred to these types of work as atypical and precarious labor.⁷ More recently, scholars have begun to

3 One of the first studies on non-standard employment in Western Europe is Janine Rodgers and Gerry Rodgers, eds., *Precarious Jobs in Labour Market Regulation: The Growth of Atypical Employment in Western Europe* (Geneva: ILO, 1989). Very well-known became Pierre Bourdieu, "Job Insecurity is Everywhere Now," in *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of our Time*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 81–87; Robert Castel, *From Manual Workers to Wage Labourers: Transformation of the Social Question* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

4 Karin Hofmeester and Marcel van der Linden, eds., *Handbook Global History of Work* (Berlin: De Gruyter, Oldenbourg 2018); Andrea Komlosy, *Work: The Last 1,000 Years* (London: Verso, 2018); Andreas Eckert, ed., *Global Histories of Work* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016); Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

5 See Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2014); Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds., *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) as two influential examples from this field.

6 See, e.g., Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Jan Lucassen, eds., *Workers in the Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History 1800–2000* (New Delhi: Macmillan India-SEPHIS, 2005). An early exception, which also dealt with Europe, was Andrea Komlosy et al., eds., *Ungeregelt und unterbezahlt. Der informelle Sektor in der Weltwirtschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes und Aspel; Wien: Südwind, 1997).

7 An excellent overview on the research on precarious work is Eloisa Betti, "Historicizing Precarious Work: Forty Years of Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities," *International Review of Social History* 63, no. 2 (2018): 273–319.

discuss similarities between informal and/or precarious work regimes in the Global South and the Global North.⁸

A second area of historical research that—with regard to the history of labor in Europe—has advocated a more comprehensive idea of work is feminist-inspired labor history. Various studies have dealt with female-dominated forms of (paid) work that were unregulated or only weakly regulated, such as domestic servants, laundresses, seamstresses, industrial outworkers, and other forms of domestic and home-based work.⁹ However, these contributions of women's and gender historians always remained on the fringes of European labor history, and global labor historians also made little reference to this (Western) tradition of feminist labor history.¹⁰ It is only in the last couple of years that there has been a growing number of studies looking at women's (and men's) informal work from a global perspective, including in Europe and the West, covering areas such as home-based, domestic, and agricultural work.¹¹

8 Very influential is Jan Breman and Marcel van der Linden, "Informalizing the Economy: The Return of the Social Question at a Global Level," *Development and Change* 45, no. 5 (2014): 920–40. See also Hans-Jürgen Burchardt et al., eds., *Arbeit in globaler Perspektive. Facetten informeller Beschäftigung* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2013); Frederick Cooper, "From Enslavement to Precarity? The Labour Question in African History," in *The Political Economy of Everyday Life in Africa: Beyond the Margins*, ed. Wale Adebawale (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 135–56; Nicole Mayer-Ahuja, "Die Globalität unsicherer Arbeit als konzeptionelle Provokation. Zum Zusammenhang zwischen Informalität im 'Globalen Süden' und Prekarität im 'Globalen Norden,'" *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. 42 (2017): 264–96; Andreas Eckert, "Von der 'freien Lohnarbeit' zum 'informellen Sektor'? Alte und neue Fragen in der Geschichte der Arbeit," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. 2 (2017): 297–307; Sibylle Marti, "Precarious Work – Informal Work: Notions of 'Insecure' Labour and How They Relate to Neoliberalism," *Journal of Modern European History* 17, no. 4 (2019): 396–401; Christian G. De Vito et al., "From Bondage to Precariousness? New Perspectives on Labor and Social History," *Journal of Social History* 54, no. 2 (2020): 644–62.

9 For an overview on female labor in Europe, see Deborah Simonon, *A History of European Women's Work: 1700 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1998).

10 Eloisa Betti et al., in their "Introduction: Thinking the History of Women's Activism into Global Labor History," in *Women, Work, and Activism: Chapters of an Inclusive History of Labor in the Long Twentieth Century*, ed. Eloisa Betti et al. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022), 1–31, have argued that the reception of this feminist strand of labor history by global labor history has been hampered by an unfavorable historiographical conjuncture.

11 Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Eileen Boris and Elisabeth Prügl, eds., *Homeworkers in Global Perspective: Invisible No More* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Dirk Hoerder et al., eds., *Towards a Global History of Domestic and Caregiving Workers* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Malin Nilsson et al., eds., *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers (1800–2021)* (Leiden: Brill, 2022); Rolf Bauer and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, eds., *Global Agricultural Workers from the 17th to the 21st Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2023).

Our volume builds on the suggestions put forward by global and feminist labor history for a broader understanding of work. It contributes to existing research both by examining different forms of non-formalized or barely formalized work in a wide variety of European countries and by focusing on these types of labor in a period which is usually portrayed as characterized by labor formalization. By showing that informal work in Europe was neither a temporary nor a residual phenomenon, the contributions to this volume make informal work visible as an integral and constitutive factor of labor and labor politics in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe.

Informal Work as Analytical Concept

The term informal work as used today emerged only around 1970 in the context of development studies and the International Labour Organization's (ILO) World Employment Programme.¹² The ILO has figured as the most important international arena where the regulation, protection, and statistical recording of informal labor relations was promoted from the 1970s onwards.¹³ Even though informal work only emerged as a distinct and perpetual notion at the beginning of the 1970s, this does not mean that forms of work and labor relations that are nowadays referred to as informal employment were not previously recognized, discussed, studied, and/or governed by the ILO, state authorities, or other actors such as employers and organized labor. In fact, types of work that were only weakly covered by labor and social law, such as home-based work or industrial outwork,

12 Keith Hart, "Small-Scale Entrepreneurs in Ghana and Development Planning," *Journal of Development Studies* 6, no. 4 (1970): 104–20; Keith Hart, "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 11, no. 1 (1973): 61–89; ILO, *Employment, Incomes and Equality: A Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment in Kenya* (Geneva: ILO, 1972). On the "invention" of the concept of informality in the early 1970s, see Paul E. Bangasser, *The ILO and the Informal Sector: An Institutional History* (Geneva: ILO, 2000); Desmond McNeill, "The Informal Sector: Biography of an Idea," in *Global Institutions and Development: Framing the World?* ed. Morten Bøås and Desmond McNeill (London: Routledge, 2004), 41–55; Aaron Benanav, "The Origins of Informality: The ILO at the Limit of the Concept of Unemployment," *Journal of Global History* 14, no. 1 (2019): 107–25; Stephen J. Macekura, *The Mismeasure of Progress: Economic Growth and its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 138–65.

13 Jennifer N. Fish, *Domestic Workers of the World Unite! A Global Movement for Dignity and Human Rights*, (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Eileen Boris, *Making the Woman Worker: Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Sibylle Marti, "The ILO, the Politics of Statistics, and Changing Perceptions of Informal Work, 1970–Present," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History* 21, no. 1 (2024): 98–116.

have repeatedly given rise to debates at both the international and national levels as to whether they need to be (more strongly) regulated.¹⁴

However, the “discovery” of informal work in the early 1970s and the subsequent proliferation of the term provided a new reference point for conceptualizing work activities outside formal wage labor and led to more attention being paid to such occupations. As a result, numerous anthropological, sociological, and economic studies on informal labor have been published since the 1970s.¹⁵ Initially, informal work was considered a phenomenon of the Global South, involving occupations that were not, or only lightly, regulated by law. These included professional activities for which there were either no employment contracts, or which were not subject to labor law, such as street vendors, or service providers in areas such as transportation, home-based work, or shipping. From the 1980s onwards, the worldwide spread of neoliberal labor market policies led to an increase in weakly regulated and poorly protected employment in the Global North, too. These included phenomena such as temporary work, mini-jobs, and bogus self-employment. Against this backdrop, a “reformulation of informality as a global problem” took place at the start of the new millennium.¹⁶

For the examination of informal work in Europe from about 1870 to 1970, we use the notion of informal work as an analytical concept in the sense of what Nicole Loraux has dubbed a “controlled anachronism.”¹⁷ This allows us to make the term productive for the period before 1970. As is inherent in the term, the concept of informal work is linked to notions of formal labor. Informal work is thus a relational term that constitutively refers to certain (constantly changing) norms of formal labor. It is therefore particularly

14 On the regulation of (industrial) homework, see Nilsson et al., *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers*, chapters in Part 2.

15 For research overviews of social science studies on informal work, see, e.g., Stuart Henry and Stephen Sills, “Informal Economic Activity: Early Thinking, Conceptual Shifts, Continuing Patterns and Persistent Issues – A Michigan Study,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 45, no. 4 (2006): 263–84; Klarita Gërxhani, “The Informal Sector in Developed and Less Developed Countries: A Literature Survey,” *Public Choice* 120, no. 3/4 (2004): 267–300; Marcel Erlinghagen, “Informelle Arbeit. Ein Überblick über einen schillernden Begriff,” *Schmollers Jahrbuch. Zeitschrift für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften* 120, no. 2 (2000): 239–74.

16 Sibylle Marti, “Thriving Small-Scale Entrepreneurs or Precarious Own-Account Workers? Concepts and Politics of Informal Work Since the 1970s,” in *Platform Labour and Global Logistics: A Research Companion*, ed. Immanuel Ness (London: Routledge, 2022), 80.

17 Nicole Loraux, “Éloge de l’anachronisme en histoire,” *Le Genre humaine*, no. 27 (1993): 23–39. See also Caroline Arni, “Zeitlichkeit, Anachronismus und Anachronien. Gegenwart und Transformationen der Geschlechtergeschichte aus geschichtstheoretischer Perspektive,” *L’Homme: Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 18, no. 2 (2007): 53–76; Jakob Tanner, *Historische Anthropologie zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2004), 65–74.

useful to speak of informal work when there were already established or emerging standards of formal labor, as was the case in Europe from the end of the nineteenth century.

In this volume, we consider informal work to be a form of (usually) remunerated employment which, in contrast to the predominant or expanding forms of formalized labor, is less strongly regulated by law, especially, but not only, in relation to labor and social law.¹⁸ This is not to say that informal employment is not legally regulated per se—that is why informality is not to be equated with illegality—but it is comparatively less so. When we talk about processes of formalization and informalization of work, this legal dimension of labor regulation is at the forefront. However, the concept of informal work, as we understand it, goes beyond the dimension of formal legal regulations: it also refers to informal arrangements and informal settings that are the preconditions for taking up certain types of informal work. Informal work is thus linked to social relationships and dependencies, especially family and kinship, and to village, rural, or other communities, which we see as forms of sociocultural regulation outside the realm of law. We therefore consider informal work activities to be subject to *varieties of regulation*¹⁹ that are both legal and non-legal in nature. These varieties of regulation can overlap, contradict, and be contested. Such an approach ties in both with studies in institutional economics and with research on the embeddedness of economic activities, as it proposes that labor regulations are not regulated by formal institutions alone but also by informal institutions and social ties.²⁰

18 Here and in the following, we draw on definitions offered by Nicole Mayer-Ahuja, “Die Globalität unsicherer Arbeit als konzeptionelle Provokation,” 264–96; Nicole Mayer-Ahuja, “Labor, Insecurity, Informality,” in *Capitalism and Labor: Towards Critical Perspectives*, ed. Klaus Dörre et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2018), 257–68.

19 We owe this term to Susan Zimmermann. The section on state social policy in her *Divide, Provide and Rule: An Integrative History of Poverty Policy, Social Policy, and Social Reform in Hungary under the Habsburg Monarchy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011) exemplifies the usefulness of this approach in developing an inclusive and relational history of formalized and informalized labor.

20 The classical study in institutional economics is Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). See also Mark Casson, “Institutional Economics and Business History: A Way Forward,” in *Institutions and the Evolution of Modern Business*, ed. Mark Casson and Mary B. Rose (London: Routledge, 1998), 151–71. For a discussion of the concept of embeddedness, see Christof Dejung, “The Problem of Embeddedness Revisited: Self-Interest as a Challenge in Ethnographic and Historical Research,” in *Historicizing Self-Interest in the Modern Atlantic World: A Plea for Ego?* ed. Christine Zabel (Milton Park: Routledge, 2021), 117–38.

In order to describe labor relations in Europe that are weakly regulated and poorly protected (by law), terms other than informal work are sometimes used (synonymously.) These include, in particular, the terms “irregular,”²¹ “atypical,” and, especially, “precarious” work. In our view, the concept of informal work offers an analytical advantage over these terms, as it merely emphasizes the varieties of regulation mentioned and does not imply any substantive statements about whether and to what extent (legally) non-regulated or barely regulated forms of work were precarious and insecure, not typical, or were outside common societal norms and rules. Moreover, using the concept of informal work as an analytical bracket is of heuristic value, as it enables a joint analysis of different forms of (legally) only weakly regulated work. In this way, common characteristics and factors as well as key actors that shaped processes of both the formalization and informalization of work can be identified for the historical examination of labor relations in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe.

Distinguishing Informal Work from Formal Labor, Moonlighting, and Unpaid Forms of Work

Since the end of the nineteenth century, and then especially during the post-war boom, it was, first and foremost, factory work and several kinds of regular industrial employment in which the majority of formal (legal) regulations were established. Likewise, the degree of labor organization was much higher among regular industrial and factory workers than among other types of workers.²² Work that was only slightly covered by labor law, or not covered at all, included itinerant trades and (occasional) occupations in crafts, vending and services, as well as work that was conducted in agriculture, or work carried out in someone’s household. In contrast to the usually centralized production sites of industrial factory work, all these different work activities have in common that they were performed in

21 Thomas Buchner and Philip R. Hoffmann-Rehnitz, “Nicht-Reguläre Erwerbsarbeit in der Neuzeit,” in *Geschichte der Arbeitsmärkte*, ed. Rolf Walter (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2009), 319–43; Thomas Buchner and Philip R. Hoffmann-Rehnitz, eds., *Shadow Economies and Irregular Work in Urban Europe 16th to early 20th Centuries* (Vienna: LIT, 2011).

22 On the collective regulation of labor relations, see Marcel van der Linden and Richard Price, eds., *The Rise and Development of Collective Labour Law* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000).

dispersed or remote, sometimes even hidden, intimate and private spaces. Furthermore, households and farms were places where there was usually no clear separation between the workplace and the worker's place of residence. As a result, the boundaries between productive and reproductive labor were often blurred.

A common feature of many informal forms of work is therefore that work locations, working hours, and work activities cannot always be clearly defined and differentiated from one another. These characteristics of informal work have been repeatedly cited by state and international authorities, representatives of employers and of organized labor, but sometimes also by informal workers themselves, as providing an argument for not (legally) regulating informal work activities, or only regulating them to a limited extent. For example, as several contributions to this volume show, most European states refrained from establishing or enforcing effective labor standards in the areas of agricultural work, domestic work, and homework. As for (industrial) homework, many trade unions and other representatives of the labor movement believed, at least in the first half of the twentieth century, that this type of work should be eliminated. They supported legal regulations aimed at curbing or restricting homework, but not promoting it through formalization.²³ The ILO also only produced weaker recommendations and resolutions and a limited number of conventions for work outside regular industrial labor, as the organization, especially before 1945, had an "industrial bias."²⁴ In terms of labor standards and labor rights, numerous types of informal work therefore often suffered from a considerable lack of recognition and visibility.²⁵

This (deliberate) invisibility and non-recognition, which was created and/or perpetuated by very different actors and interests, contributed to the fact that informal workers were often only weakly organized, if they were organized at all.²⁶ The problem of a lack of political representation made

23 See, e.g., Elisabeth Luif's chapter in this volume.

24 Daniel Maul, *The International Labour Organization: 100 Years of Global Social Policy* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg; Geneva: ILO, 2019), chapter 1. While the first attempts to regulate agricultural labor date back to the interwar years, it was only in 1996 and 2011, respectively, that the ILO adopted conventions on homework and domestic work: Amalia Ribí Forclaz, "A New Target for International Social Reform: The International Labour Organization and Working and Living Conditions in Agriculture in the Inter-War Years," *Contemporary European History* 20, no. 3 (2011): 307–29; Boris, *Making the Woman Worker*, chapters 5 and 6.

25 On the issue of in-/visibility, see Malin Nilsson et al., "Introduction: History– Visibility– Recognition– Organizing," in Nilsson et al., *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers*, 1–24.

26 See, e.g., Jessica Richter's chapter in this volume; Jessica Richter, *Die Produktion besonderer Arbeitskräfte. Auseinandersetzungen um den häuslichen Dienst in Österreich (1880–1938)* (Berlin

the struggle for greater social recognition and better working conditions more difficult. Furthermore, in many cases little data on informal work was available, sometimes for political reasons. This making of ignorance meant that informal employment was usually not adequately captured in official surveys and statistics. This shortcoming also had a distinct gender bias. Informal work that had female connotations, or was mainly performed by women, was particularly affected by non-recognition, and, in turn, by non-recording and/or statistical misrepresentation.²⁷ This often went hand in hand with a fundamental contempt for women's informal work.

The contributions in our volume shed light on such connections in various key areas of informal work, including agricultural, home-based, service, domestic, and sex work, as well as casual, contract, and temporary work.²⁸ When these different areas and types of work are placed together in relation to formalized forms of (industrial) labor, common patterns and arguments become visible that a variety of actors and institutions referred to in order to distinguish informal from formal work activities and thus legitimize deviations from established or emerging labor and social security standards of formal labor. These differentiating features include, for example, changing locations or private rooms as places of work, overlapping different work tasks and professional activities, the intimate character of the work and the proximity to reproductive activities, or the perception of work as women's work. A focus on informal work thus de-centers the often tacitly assumed norm of organized, male-dominated, formal labor in the industrial sector to highlight the spread and diversity of non-formalized or feebly formalized work in Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁹

In scholarly as well as in public discourse, phenomena such as undeclared work, transactions without invoices, and other forms of hidden production are occasionally considered part of the informal economy. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, for example, debates on informal economic activities in

and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2024).

27 See Eloisa Betti's chapter in this volume.

28 For overviews on these areas of informal work, see Magaly Rodríguez García et al., eds., *Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution, 1600s–2000s* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); David van Arsdale, *The Poverty of Work: Selling Servant, Slave and Temporary Labor on the Free Market* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, eds., *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Leah F. Vosko, *Temporary Work: The Gendered Rise of a Precarious Employment Relationship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). On agricultural, home-based, and domestic work cf. footnote 11.

29 On the "productivist bias" in labor history, see Paolo Raspadori, "Becoming Workers? Strikes by Hotel and Restaurant Staff in Italy (1902–1923)," *International Review of Social History* 60, no. 3 (2015): 379–411.

many European and other (Western) industrialized countries were increasingly interwoven with discussions about the shadow economy.³⁰ Although criminal activities such as drug trafficking, corruption, or tax evasion are sometimes considered part of the shadow economy, the focus of interest concerning the shadow economy is usually on undeclared or unregistered, but in themselves legal, economic activities, on which no taxes and duties are paid and which, it is assumed, are not or not fully recorded in official statistics and national accounts.³¹

While there are overlaps, we believe it is useful to distinguish informal work from moonlighting and other activities in the shadow economy. What we refer to in this volume as informal work is not generally associated with the deliberate intention not to pay taxes and/or make social security contributions or knowingly to violate laws and administrative regulations. Of course, this does not mean that such motives cannot be at play. However, as the contributions to this volume show, the varieties of regulation that shaped and transformed informal work were not limited to issues of the illegality of the activities and actions of the various actors involved, nor did they necessarily address these topics. In fact, since (legal) non-regulation is not the same as illegality, in many cases carrying out informal work activities or being involved in such did not imply any illegal behavior.

Similarly, in the literature, what has been called the self-service economy is sometimes seen as part of the informal economy, and the work performed there is referred to as informal work. From such a perspective, activities such as do-it-yourself, neighborhood help, and other services that are usually provided free of charge as part of private self-organization, may be considered informal work.³² Subsistence work and reproductive work are occasionally also

30 Sibylle Marti, "Die 'Entdeckung' der Schattenwirtschaft: Informelle Arbeit und neoliberale Politik in den 1980er Jahren," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 48, no. 4 (2022): 551–83; Sibylle Marti, "The Shadow Economy and Ideas of Freedom: Debates and Policies on Informal Work in 1970s and 1980s West Germany and Beyond," *Moving the Social: Journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements* 69 (2023): 51–72.

31 See, e.g., Friedrich Schneider, ed., *Handbook on the Shadow Economy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011).

32 An early and influential concept of this kind was Jonathan Gershuny, *After Industrial Society? The Emerging Self-Service Economy* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Jonathan Gershuny, "The Informal Economy: Its Role in Post-Industrial Society," *Futures* 11, no. 1 (1979): 3–15. On do-it-yourself and voluntary work, see, e.g., Reinhild Kreis, *Selbermachen. Eine andere Geschichte des Konsumzeitalters* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2020); Jonathan Voges, "Selbst ist der Mann." *Do-it-yourself und Heimwerken in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2017); Matthew Hilton and James McKay, eds., *The Ages of Voluntarism: How We Got to the Big Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

counted as part of the informal economy.³³ As far as the unpaid subsistence and reproductive labor performed predominantly by women is concerned, it is well known that since the 1970s in particular there have been feminist criticisms of the systematic disregard of these forms of female labor for the maintenance of the economy and society and of the associated traditional gender-hierarchical division of labor. Such criticisms were expressed on the one hand in the “Wages for Housework” campaigns of the 1970s,³⁴ and on the other in the efforts of feminist economists to accurately record women’s economic activities and women’s unpaid labor in national accounts.³⁵

In contrast to some of the literature just mentioned, in this volume we do not include unpaid work activities (such as unpaid housework and care work) or activities undertaken for self-sufficiency and self-help (such as do-it-yourself, neighborhood help, volunteering, and community work) in what we consider to be informal work. We believe it more fruitful to understand informal work as a type of work that is (usually) remunerated monetarily, as such an approach allows us to analyze the links between informal work activities and different forms of unpaid work. In this way, we can shed light on important connections, such as the fact that unpaid reproductive duties are a crucial factor in women often only having access to less formalized and lower-paid jobs, or that in areas of work where informal employment is widespread, for example in agriculture or in home-based work, unpaid and paid labor are often intertwined.

Reconsidering Time and Space

In this volume, we argue that informal employment and informal occupations shaped labor relations in European countries throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, what we call informal work did not always have the same implications across Europe, nor did it necessarily refer to the same occupations. Not only did the degree of labor formalization vary between different countries but it also changed over time. As a consequence, the boundaries between formal and informal work

33 See, e.g., Birgit Pfau-Effinger et al., eds., *Formal and Informal Work: The Hidden Work Regime in Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

34 Emily Callaci, *Wages for Housework: The Story of a Movement, an Idea, a Promise* (London: Penguin, 2025); Louise Toupin, *Wages for Housework: A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972–77* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2018).

35 See, e.g., Lourdes Benería, “Accounting for Women’s Work: The Progress of Two Decades,” *World Development* 20, no. 1 (1992): 1547–60.

shifted continuously. For this reason, different work activities fall under these terms depending on time and space.

Informal work and informal production formed a constitutive part of European economies throughout the period between 1870 and 1970. They included informal occupations in crafts, trade, agriculture, and (domestic) service as well as various forms of home-based work, outsourcing, and temporary employment contracts in the industrial sector. These types of work have been crucial factors in the persistence and sometimes also growth of informal employment since the end of the nineteenth century. In large parts of Europe around 1950, with the exception of countries such as Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, and Bohemia, where the industrial sector dominated, work was still predominantly characterized by agriculture. By the early 1970s, the industrial sector had become the largest employment sector in Europe. The transition from industrial to service economies began in the 1970s, too.³⁶ It was accompanied by an increase in self-employment and less formalized employment relationships, thus accelerating the informalization of work. In many European countries, however, informal labor relations also spread during the post-war boom, for example industrial homework, sub-contracting, or temporary work.³⁷

These developments were not only characteristic of the capitalist economies of Western Europe: informal economic activities also played a significant role in socialist Eastern Europe during the Cold War. Their importance increased from the 1970s onwards. At this time, Eastern European countries were experiencing an economic crisis, not least caused by an increasing technological lag in comparison to Western industries, which resulted, among other things, in supply problems and rising prices.³⁸ At the same time, Eastern European economies saw an increase in informal work in the form of home production, small-scale private production, and private services. Yet there were considerable differences between different Eastern European countries in terms of how the authorities dealt with the informal economy. In some cases, this was combated, whereas in others it was tolerated and

36 On general trends of labor in post-war Europe, see Hartmut Kaelble, *Sozialgeschichte Europas. 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (München: C.H. Beck, 2007), 57–86.

37 See, e.g., Eloisa Betti, "Gender and Precarious Labor in a Historical Perspective: Italian Women and Precarious Work between Fordism and Post-Fordism," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 89 (2016): 64–83; Anna Elisabeth Keim, "Between 'Slave Labour' and 'More Freedom' in Working Life: Debating *Leiharbeit* in Germany from the Weimar Era to the End of the Boom," *Moving the Social: Journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements* 69 (2023): 33–49.

38 Hartmut Kaelble, *Kalter Krieg und Wohlfahrtsstaat. Europa 1945–1989* (München: C.H. Beck, 2011), 238–40.

sometimes even promoted by the state.³⁹ This resulted in the emergence of legalized informal businesses alongside socialist state economies.⁴⁰ It has to be emphasized, however, that informal occupations had existed in socialist countries already before the crisis of formalized labor. As in the rest of Europe, this concerned agricultural and domestic employment in particular. Factory work was similarly regulated in terms of labor law, but before the modernization of industrial production in the 1960s working conditions in Eastern European factory halls were often harsh, as they were in many other late industrializing countries, such as in Southern Europe.⁴¹

The focus on informal work allows for reconsidering the prevailing periodization of European labor history. For one thing, it puts the so-called *Trente Glorieuses*, the three decades from the end of World War Two until the economic crises of the mid-1970s, into perspective. The era of the post-war economic boom in Western Europe, sometimes also referred to as the “‘golden age’ of social democracy,”⁴² during which the formalization of (industrial) labor increased, is often tacitly taken as a benchmark for European labor relations as a whole. It is often forgotten that in Western European countries, too, various groups of workers, especially women and migrants, were not able to benefit to the same extent from this push towards formalization, which mainly affected the employment standards of male, skilled, non-migrant workers.⁴³ By contrast, a look at the history of non-formalized or weakly formalized forms of work shows how diverse and widespread such work activities were throughout Europe, including

39 Rainer Neef, “Zum Begriff und zu den sozialen Funktionen der Schattenwirtschaft in Osteuropa,” *Soziale Welt* 54, no. 3 (2003): 260–63.

40 Hungary’s promotion of the so-called second economy is a well-known example of this: Istvan R. Gábor, “The Second (Secondary) Economy: Earning Activity and Regrouping of Income Outside the Socially Organized Production and Distribution,” *Acta Oeconomica* 22, no. 3/4 (1979): 291–311. See also Eszter Bartha, *Alienating Labour: Workers on the Road from Socialism to Capitalism in East Germany and Hungary* (New York: Berghahn, 2013).

41 See Adrian Grama’s chapter in this volume; Eloisa Betti, *Precarious Workers: History of Debates, Political Mobilizations, and Labor Reforms in Italy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022).

42 For a critical reevaluation of the notion of a (social democratic) “golden age,” see Stefan Berger et al., eds., “Workers and the ‘Golden Age’ of Social Democracy?” Special Issue, *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History* 22, no. 1 (2025).

43 Eloisa Betti and Eileen Boris “Feminised Work after Fordism: The New Precarity,” in *The Routledge Handbook of the Gig Economy*, ed. Immanuel Ness (London: Routledge, 2022), 131–44; Betti, “Gender and Precarious Labor in a Historical Perspective,” 64–83; Nicole Mayer-Ahuja, “Prekär, informell – weiblich? Zur Bedeutung von ‘Gender’ für die Aushöhlung arbeitspolitischer Standards,” in *Arbeit in globaler Perspektive. Facetten informeller Beschäftigung*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Burchardt et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2013), 55–78.

Western Europe, both before and during the boom. From such a perspective, the neoliberal transformation of labor regimes since the 1970s can be considered to be less a “disruption” of the normalized case of formal labor than as part of a longer history of informality that was prevalent in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European economies.⁴⁴ Furthermore, an examination of the often contradictory and non-linear processes concerning the formalization and informalization of work, which the contributions to this volume bring to the fore, can shed new light on current phenomena such as bogus self-employment, zero-hour contracts, platform labor, and the gig economy, as well as on the increase in home office and remote work in the wake of the Corona pandemic.⁴⁵

The focus on informal work also allows attention to be paid to developments in regions and places that are often neglected when talking about European labor in general. It is no coincidence that several contributions to this volume refer to countries such as Greece, Portugal, Italy, and Spain, where industrialization and the related formalization of labor began later than in Western Europe and where formalized (industrial) work did not become the statistical norm to the same extent. Looking at informal work thus offers new opportunities to foreground places and regions that are often perceived to be at the margins of Europe and whose history is often also marginalized in European labor history.⁴⁶ Such a perspective makes it possible to explore similarities and differences between countries of what has been called the “semi-periphery” of Southern and Southeastern Europe and those often labeled the “core” of Western and Northern Europe on the one hand,⁴⁷ and between developments in socialist and capitalist Europe on the other.⁴⁸ Our volume thus shows the importance of a diverse geographical

44 Marti, “Precarious Work – Informal Work,” 401.

45 Colin Crouch, *Will the Gig Economy Prevail?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019); Andreas Eckert and Felicitas Hentschke, eds., *Corona and Work around the Globe* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021); Immanuel Ness, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of the Gig Economy* (London: Routledge, 2022); Immanuel Ness, ed., *Platform Labour and Global Logistics: A Research Companion* (London: Routledge, 2022).

46 See Christof Dejung and Martin Lengwiler, eds., *Ränder der Moderne. Neue Ansätze zur europäischen Geschichte (1800–1930)* (Köln: Böhlau, 2016) for an attempt to deliberately write European history from the margins of the European continent.

47 Leda Papastefanaki and Nikos Potamianos, “Labour History in the Semi-Periphery: Southern Europe, 19th–20th Centuries,” in *Labour History in the Semi-Periphery: Southern Europe, 19th–20th Centuries*, ed. Leda Papastefanaki and Nikos Potamianos (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021), 5–12.

48 Adrian Grama and Susan Zimmermann, “The Art of Link-Making in Global Labour History: Subaltern, Feminist and Eastern European Contributions,” *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 25, no. 1 (2018): 1–20.

scope in revealing both the diversity and persistence of informal work in Europe. Likewise, the history of the persistence and eventual re-emergence of informal work in Europe can provide inspiration for exploring similarities to non-formalized and unfree labor in the African, Asian, and Latin American economies, in particular the emergence and continued existence of the informal sector in countries of the Global South.⁴⁹ In this sense, our volume aims to stimulate further thinking about a de-provincialized global history of work.⁵⁰

Connections between Informal Work and Precarity, Gender, and Migration

In the perception of labor relations in the United States and (Western) Europe, there has been frequent talk of the spread of precarious work, especially in recent years. The term “precarious work” usually refers to the deterioration in working and living conditions that has in the last decades of the twentieth century produced a new group of workers, namely the precarious workers, sometimes even depicted as a new social class, “the precariat.”⁵¹ Hence, the notion of precarious work is often associated with the precarization of labor (i.e., the rights and benefits linked to labor) in (Western) European and other industrial countries in the post-1970 period.⁵² More recently, the term precarious work has also been applied to the period before 1970 and to regions outside of the Global North in order to show that precarious forms of work and working conditions were not exceptions in the (industrialized) economies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but quite common.⁵³

Research on precarious work sometimes refers to similar phenomena in the world of work as we aim to capture in this volume with the concept of informal work. However, although there are “formal similarities” between the two concepts of informal work and precarious work, as both are related

49 Cooper, “From Enslavement to Precarity?” 135–56.

50 See Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa* (London: Paradigm, 2012) for the epistemological implications of such a perspective.

51 Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

52 See, e.g., Robert Castel and Klaus Dörre, eds., *Prekarität, Abstieg, Ausgrenzung. Die soziale Frage am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2009). Cf. also footnote 3.

53 For an overview of research on precarious work cf. footnote 7.

to certain notions of standard or formal labor,⁵⁴ in our understanding they are not exactly the same. While precarious work has a more normative connotation and refers to harsh and insecure working and living conditions in a broader sense, the term informal work mainly refers to the varieties of (comparatively) less pronounced legal regulations and sociocultural rules and agreements that characterize informal occupations. Informality therefore does not automatically include precarity and precarity is not always a consequence of informality.

Against this background, the issue arises as to what extent informality and precarity influence each other. What is the cause, what is the consequence? Do people have to take on informal employment because they are in a precarious life situation, as may be the case for women who are under multiple burdens from reproductive and subsistence labor, for example, but also for migrant workers and members of a lower social class? To what extent do informal work arrangements lead workers into precarity, and which groups in society are particularly affected by this? When does precarity arise separately from informal employment and when is informal work no more precarious than certain forms of more formalized labor?

Raising such questions does not mean to deny that there are connections between informality on the one hand and precarity or insecurity on the other. In fact, many studies have pointed out that informal work was often less stable and less secure than formal labor. This was particularly the case in sectors in which informal work was widespread, as in the already mentioned areas of agricultural, home-based, and domestic work, as well as in various fields of barely regulated service work.⁵⁵ Other studies that have looked at practices of labor regulation, registration, and intermediation have argued that different categorizations, classifications, and semantics of work influenced access to specific rights and benefits, which in turn greatly affected social status.⁵⁶ Moreover, various categories and terms continued to exist that described and legally regulated activities by which

54 Mayer-Ahuja, "Die Globalität unsicherer Arbeit als konzeptionelle Provokation," 269.

55 Cf. footnotes 11 and 28.

56 Isabelle Berrebi-Hoffmann et al., eds., *Categories in Context: Gender and Work in France and Germany, 1900–Present* (New York: Berghahn, 2019); Jörn Leonhard and Willibald Steinmetz, eds., *Semantiken von Arbeit. Diachrone und vergleichende Perspektiven* (Köln: Böhlau, 2016); Sigrid Wadauer et al., eds., *The History of Labor Intermediation: Institutions and Finding Employment in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Berghahn, 2015); Sigrid Wadauer et al., "The Making of Public Labour Intermediation: Job Search, Job Placement, and the State in Europe, 1880–1940," *International Review of Social History* 57, no. S20 (2012): 161–89; Sigrid Wadauer, "Establishing Distinctions: Unemployment Versus Vagrancy in Austria from the Late Nineteenth Century to 1938," *International Review of Social History* 56, no. 1 (2011): 31–70.

people earned a living, but which were not subsumed under the notion of “work.” Accordingly, these occupations, such as casual work, itinerant trade, or peddling, were often governed by laws other than labor or social laws, for example by civil, commercial, and criminal laws, as well as laws on migration and freedom of movement.⁵⁷

The stability and security of work and labor relations therefore depended to a considerable degree on (constantly changing) formal definitions, but—as various chapters in this volume show—these definitions could be inaccurate or contradictory. The formalization of non-regulated or barely regulated work activities could therefore bring more security—in terms of more stable employment, access to labor or other rights, better social protection, and higher social status—but this was not always the case. Indeed, several contributions point out that formalization did not necessarily reduce insecurity. This could be the case when regulations did not take into account the social realities of informal workers, or when regulations existed but were not enforced. As the law is about boundary-making, formalization processes also created new dividing lines between workers, thus constantly producing insiders and outsiders in regard to legal regulation and the rights that came with them. Formalization could also be associated with more repression if it limited the flexibility of informal occupations and/or the autonomy of workers. Furthermore, formalization could imply sanctions that were not meant to improve the situation of workers but instead promote political goals such as public safety or public health. Likewise, even though informal work often went hand in hand with economic precarity, the insecurity perceived by informal workers was not always exclusively related to material insecurity. It could also relate to other things, such as the quality of the food they received as part of their compensation or their feelings towards customers.⁵⁸ The relationship between informality and insecurity was therefore complex and ambiguous. Taking this finding seriously requires analyzing the connections between informality and precarity empirically and in their specific historical contexts.

Certain social factors increase the likelihood of ending up in and having to accept informal work with rather precarious working conditions in order to earn a living. These include, in particular, gender and migration, which

57 See Sigrid Wadauer's chapter in this volume; Sigrid Wadauer, *Der Arbeit nachgehen? Auseinandersetzungen um Lebensunterhalt und Mobilität (Österreich 1880–1938)* (Köln: Böhlau, 2021); Beate Althammer, ed., *Citizenship, Migration and Social Rights: Historical Experiences from the 1870s to the 1970s* (London: Routledge, 2023).

58 See David Cowan's chapter in this volume.

also often overlap and intersect. When women were informally employed, their working conditions were often worse than those of men. In this context, the relationship between paid and unpaid work was essential, as female informal employment was often closely linked to female reproductive or subsistence work. Women often had to take on informal employment because they also had to bear the burden of (unpaid) housework and care work and were thus limited in their employment opportunities. In order to be able to pursue informal (paid) employment, women were also often forced to redistribute reproductive work among other female family members, such as, for example, grandmothers.⁵⁹ Moreover, the agency of women employed as informal workers was also gendered because women's freedom and scope for action were often not equal to those of men, due to legal as well as social and cultural regulation. For a long time, for example, women were not allowed to work at night.⁶⁰ Not only gendered conceptions of labor, but also other social categories of difference such as race, ethnicity, class, or nationality, had an impact on processes of non-/formalization of work. Intersectional dimensions of informal work are particularly evident in contributions to this volume, which discuss where women's work coincides with racialized forms of work, or those that deal with female workers with migration experience. The latter includes, for example, young women who migrated within their country from rural areas to urban, industrialized regions, but also women who had to flee their country and only found informal work in their new place of residence where there was a surplus of labor due to refugee migration.

As is well known, in addition to labor migration caused by refugee or internal migration, so-called guest work has played a significant role in European labor history since the end of the nineteenth century. This type of labor migration is not the focus of this volume. Nevertheless, it often led to people having to work in the context of informal labor relations. In numerous (Western) European industrialized countries, for example in Switzerland, the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, France, the Benelux countries, and Sweden, guest workers formed an indispensable labor pool: especially during the post-war boom, but in some cases as early as the end

59 Kateryna Burkush, "Informality and Seasonal Work in Narrated Biographies of Women from Soviet Transcarpathia (1950s–1980s)" (unpublished conference paper, presented at the conference "Insecurity in the Age of Labour Formalisation: Informal Work in Europe, ca. 1870–1970," University of Bern, 2023).

60 Boris, *Making the Woman Worker*, chapters 1 and 2. On night work, see also Ger Duijzings and Lucie Dušková, eds., *Working at Night: The Temporal Organisation of Labour Across Political and Economic Regimes* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022).

of the nineteenth century. These migrant workers came, among others, from Southern European and Mediterranean countries or—in the case of former colonial states such as France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Belgium—from former colonies.⁶¹ Compared to standard employment in industry at the time, their working conditions were less formalized and less protected than those of the local (male) population, and their working conditions were often worse as a result. Immigrant workers in the Eastern European socialist countries after 1945—a phenomenon on a much lower scale as compared to the former countries—who came from countries such as Cuba, Vietnam, or neighboring socialist countries, repeatedly also experienced distinction and discrimination in terms of their labor rights and relations.⁶² As a rule, the informality of migrant work was politically intentional. The migrant workers served as a flexible labor force reservoir and—according to the destination countries—were supposed to work only for a limited period and then return to their country of origin.

Against the background of the prevalence of informal work, which was particularly widespread among migrant and women workers, the question arises as to how informal labor relations affected formalized employment relationships and vice versa. With its focus on informal work, our volume aims to encourage placing greater emphasis on such issues in European labor history in the future. A better understanding of the interactions and interdependencies between formal and informal forms of work might be of particular importance in view of the increasing informalization of work in recent decades.

Key Actors in the In-/Formalization of Work

If one intends to examine the history of informal work in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, the basic question arises as to which factors have

61 See, e.g., Jochen Oltmer et al., eds., *Das "Gastarbeiter"-System. Arbeitsmigration und ihre Folgen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Westeuropa* (Berlin: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2012); Heike Knortz, *Gastarbeiter für Europa. Die Wirtschaftsgeschichte der frühen europäischen Migration und Integration* (Köln: Böhlau, 2015); Peter Gatrell, *The Unsettling of Europe: The Great Migration, 1945 to the Present* (London: Penguin, 2019); Jakob Schönhagen and Ulrich Herbert, eds., *Migration und Migrationspolitik in Europa 1945–2020* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2023).

62 See, e.g., Alena K. Alamgir, "Recalcitrant Women: Internationalism and the Redefinition of Welfare Limits in the Czechoslovak-Vietnamese Labor Exchange Program," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 1 (2014): 133–55; Rory Archer, "Albanian Labor Migration, the Yugoslav Private Sector and its Cold War Context," *Labor History* 64, no. 4 (2023): 425–42.

driven the respective processes of the formalization and informalization of work. The chapters in this volume identify four (collective) actors that have played key roles in this development, and they point out that neither formalization nor informalization were hidden-hand processes but that both informality and formality were actively co-produced by various actors and interests.

First, this concerns the formative role of the *state and its institutions*. Sebastian Conrad, Elisio Macamo, and Bénédicte Zimmermann have argued that the formalization of labor after the late nineteenth century and the concomitant association of workers with the nation state marked “a profound break” with ideas of work in pre-modern societies.⁶³ Statistical, sociological, legal, and economic discourses brought new knowledge to the fore and defined which activities would henceforth be recognized as “work” and thus be protected by labor and social law.⁶⁴ At the same time, this boundary-making created controversies from the outset and was the subject of constant political debate. Sometimes states wanted to conceal certain phenomena in the world of work, such as the extent of unemployment or underemployment, and therefore deliberately produced ignorance. This was done, for example, by using definitions and categories in labor statistics that did not adequately represent social reality, or by not counting certain forms of labor. Informal work activities such as casual, seasonal, or home-based work were often inadequately recorded or not recorded at all.⁶⁵

Various chapters point out that states should not be perceived as homogenous entities. Rather, governmental and administrative bodies often acted independently, functioned according to their own logic, and frequently pursued different political goals. Particularly in federalist states, in which local, regional, and national authorities had organizational competences, this could result in the diverse bodies having unclear responsibilities leading to different interpretations of the law. Yet the law was also applied and further developed according to jurisdiction. Several contributions show that courts were crucial actors that could consolidate or neglect the regulation of certain labor practices.

During the twentieth century, the role of the state was constantly challenged by international organizations. Established in 1919, the ILO played a

63 Sebastian Conrad et al., “Die Kodifizierung der Arbeit: Individuum, Gesellschaft, Nation,” in *Geschichte und Zukunft der Arbeit*, ed. Jürgen Kocka and Claus Offe (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2000), 450.

64 Buchner and Hoffmann-Rehnitz, “Nicht-Reguläre Erwerbsarbeit,” 339; Conrad et al., “Die Kodifizierung der Arbeit,” 469–73.

65 See, e.g., Elisa Lopes da Silva’s chapter in this volume.

central role in the internationalization of labor rights and labor standards.⁶⁶ After World War Two, the European Economic Community, founded in 1957, was an important alliance of Western European countries formed with the aim of creating a common market and harmonizing economic policies. In Western Europe, the OECD, which increasingly pushed for coherent economic and labor policies within its member countries, played a crucial role as well.⁶⁷ But the actual design of labor and social laws remained strongly national in character throughout the twentieth century. This is one of the reasons why the contributions in our volume are mostly national in scope, although comparative and transnational perspectives are included.

Second, processes of formalization and informalization were shaped by capitalist actors, i.e., *private companies or employers* who employed informal workers, commissioned products or services from them, or resold their products and services. It is important to highlight that it would be misleading to separate informal work activities from the formal economy or to assume that these were two distinct spheres of production. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe (as elsewhere), informal work and workers were always linked to the formal economy and existed within and not outside of it.⁶⁸ A significant proportion of the informal labor force, especially in small trade, craft, or home-based work, which regularly served as additional employment to complement agricultural, subsistence, or reproductive work, was not made up of employees but what we nowadays call the self-employed. Numerous informal workers worked for formally registered employers and businesses, often alongside formal employees; informal workers produced goods and services that were used or resold by formally recognized companies or middlemen; and informal workers

66 Boris, *Making the Woman Worker*; Maul, *The International Labour Organization*; Eileen Boris et al., eds., *Women's ILO: Transnational Networks, Global Labour Standards and Gender Equity, 1919 to Present* (Geneva: ILO; Leiden: Brill, 2018); Jasmien Van Daele et al., eds., *ILO Histories: Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World During the Twentieth Century* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

67 Matthias Schmelzer, *The Hegemony of Growth: The OECD and the Making of the Economic Growth Paradigm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Matthieu Leimgruber and Matthias Schmelzer, eds., *The OECD and the International Political Economy Since 1948* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Fabrizio De Francesco and Claudio M. Radaelli, eds., *The Elgar Companion to the OECD* (Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023).

68 A widely noted critique of a dualist framework that distinguishes between a formal and an informal economy is Alejandro Portes et al., eds., *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). See also Pfau-Effinger et al., *Formal and Informal Work*; Enrico Marcelli et al., eds., *Informal Work in Developed Nations* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2010).

sometimes also worked as formal workers or switched between informal and formal occupations. That is why Nicole Mayer-Ahuja has emphasized that “[i]nformality and employment do not preclude each other.”⁶⁹ Various chapters show that companies and employers occasionally used the informal status of informal workers to circumvent the responsibilities which their role as employers should have entailed. This was the case, for example, when they were obliged to pay insurance contributions or other levies but did not fulfil these obligations, or when they refused to fill in labor documents and certificates. Sometimes, informal status also opened up opportunities for informal workers to keep nasty employers or customers at bay.

A third factor that shaped labor relations was, of course, the *informal workers* themselves. Many chapters in this volume stress the importance of considering the agency of workers. Sometimes workers chose to perform informal work activities because these activities better fit their personal circumstances.⁷⁰ Work on demand, temporary work, and contract work could, for instance, allow them more flexibility to pursue leisure activities, or combine paid work with other tasks, especially unpaid housework and family work. Material benefits such as higher net wages could also be an incentive to work informally. This was so even if such a choice, often made against the background of immediate financial need, undermined the long-term interests of the workers. The same was true for activities that were not formalized and socially protected but for which no taxes had to be paid. In some cases, workers voluntarily switched between formal and informal employment. However, it is clear from the contributions that we should not overestimate the freedom of choice of informal workers, as the “choice” to take on informal employment was often the result of their limited opportunities to find formal employment with a decent salary. Their opportunities to exit informal work were likewise limited in many cases; and, for women in particular, marriage was frequently the only way out, if an exit was available at all. The interest, or lack of interest, that informal workers took in formalizing their labor relations was essentially a consequence of how they assessed their individual situation.

The fourth group of actors comprised *trade unions and civil society organizations*. The question of informal workers’ scope for action is linked to whether and under what circumstances they were organized well enough to achieve better working conditions. In this context, the supporting role of

69 Mayer-Ahuja, “Labor, Insecurity, Informality,” 258.

70 On the relationship between work and life course, see Josef Ehmer and Carola Lentz, *Life Course, Work, and Labour in Global History* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023).

trade unions and political parties, but also of other civil society organizations, was crucial. Several chapters shed light on trade unions' relations to informal workers. One problem in organizing informal workers was that formally employed workers perceived them as competitors and wage depressors.⁷¹ Nevertheless, various trade unions, workers' associations, and women's groups tried to improve working conditions for informal workers and to integrate them into trade unions and cooperative structures. The interest of trade unions and other groups in organizing informal workers was particularly strong when this fell in line with their own overriding interests. However, some groups also failed to meet the needs of informal workers, resulting in a low level of organization. In addition, there were also ambivalent supporters, such as charitable foundations, which offered help—for example in finding work—but were not necessarily interested in effecting long-term change for informal workers.⁷² As various contributions point out, effective infrastructure for supporting and empowering informal workers was particularly difficult to establish in employment relationships that took place in social spaces where legal norms were weak and where working conditions prevailed that were far from public attention. Yet when effective institutions existed that supported labor struggles by or in support of informal workers, improvements in their working and living conditions became possible.

Looking at the actions of the key actors involved in the processes of formalization and informalization of work, it becomes clear that the emergence and expansion of formal work, embedded in labor law and social policy, itself gave rise to new and changing forms of informality, often triggered by corresponding strategies of these actors. As several chapters show, the formalization of labor did not only include some and exclude others, but rather generated diverse reactions and circumvention strategies. When work became more regulated, some actors tried to circumvent these regulations by switching to (still) existing forms of informality or inventing new variants of it. Although such strategies could violate the law, many of them operated within the legal framework.

The interactions between the various actors involved and their different interests co-produced the varieties of regulation that make up informal

71 On the influence of such perceptions on the attitude of trade unions towards (informalized) migrant workers, see, e.g., Oliver Trede, *Zwischen Misstrauen, Regulation und Integration. Gewerkschaften und Arbeitsmigration in der Bundesrepublik und in Großbritannien in den 1960er und 70er Jahren* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015).

72 See Leena Enbom's chapter in this volume.

work. These varieties of regulation in turn shaped the forms of resistance and political activism linked to informal work, as they set the framework of what action was considered useful, meaningful, and possible in different contexts. As the contributions in this volume show, the resulting controversies and disputes as well as their effects and repercussions on the legal and the sociocultural regulations of informal work can be used productively to examine processes and strategies of the in-/formalization of work historically.

The Structure of this Volume

This volume is organized into three sections. The chapters in the first section cover the period from the end of the nineteenth century to the First World War. In Western and Northern European industrialized countries, the formalization of employment relations began at the end of the nineteenth century. From 1880 onwards, several European countries, most notably the German Reich and Austria, developed social insurance and wage taxation systems, accompanied by the introduction of both statistical recording and the legal regulation of the labor market.⁷³ This “invention” of the modern understanding of work was closely linked to the spread of formal industrial labor, which eventually became the (desired) norm for labor relations. What is more, this resulted in social security becoming intrinsically linked to such formalized types of work. However, this increasing labor formalization went hand in hand with the (legal) non-regulation of other work activities; sometimes this non-regulation was intentional, but at others it was also the result of administrative difficulties in enforcing regulations, such as, for example, when the actors and institutions involved pursued different interests. Furthermore, well into the twentieth century many European countries and regions were not industrialized and people thus largely worked outside of formal employment relationships.

For a long time in rural regions across Europe, handicrafts complemented agriculture and animal husbandry. Many people were engaged in small-scale manufacture and produced goods such as textiles, baskets, ceramics, and

73 Sandrine Kott, *Sozialstaat und Gesellschaft. Das deutsche Kaiserreich in Europa* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014); Peter Wagner et al., eds., *Arbeit und Nationalstaat. Frankreich und Deutschland in europäischer Perspektive* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2000); Emmerich Tálos and Karl Wörster, *Soziale Sicherung im Sozialstaat Österreich. Entwicklungen – Herausforderungen – Strukturen* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1994).

wooden toys in their homes; they did so for their own use or for sale at local markets. In the Austrian Empire, the Trade Regulation Act of 1859 led to a liberalization of the labor market. *Corinne Geering* shows that this prompted the state to enact new regulations for work and training in crafts. However, the Austrian authorities encountered difficulties in formalizing work performed in the rural home. The planned regulations collided with the ways people had traditionally organized work in rural communities. Moreover, local communities found new ways of maintaining informal labor regimes by evading state regulations, in particular through tax avoidance. Therefore, a long debate ensued over how to formalize work in the rural home. Geering discusses the challenges the Austrian authorities faced in their attempts to apply state regulations to rural communities in the period between 1859 and 1914 and enquires into the conflicting interests that rendered the formalization of work performed in the rural home difficult.

In her contribution, *Sigrid Wadauer* uses examples from Austria to show that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, developments in labor formalization, such as the introduction of work contracts, trade regulations, or registration obligations, were not uncontested. While formalization could lead to social protection, it also included opportunities for disciplining workers. Even social insurance was initially criticized as undemocratic, worthless, or costly and was not always welcome, even by the workers themselves, who feared that public insurance would weaken their political power. Self-employment could be regulated in several ways. While it was easy to obtain a license for various trades, some of the more precarious trades often required complex administrative procedures. Hence, formalization did not necessarily imply social security, and informal work was not the last option per se, as it could offer better income, freedom, and prospects. To understand such preferences, the specific context and the opportunities, ambitions, and expectations of the respective actors must be considered. Wadauer therefore argues for examining the records of people's employment histories, which can be used to observe how people often combined a variety of livelihoods and incomes over the course of their lives.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Helsinki emerged as a rapidly expanding capital in Northern Europe. At that time, Finland was a nation still grappling with relative poverty and limited urbanization. A significant segment of its burgeoning population found themselves at the fringes of the formal labor market. They began engaging in various forms of home-based work such as producing clothing, linen, accessories, and utility items. *Leena Enbom* points out that these activities largely operated outside the realm of official employment, with participants lacking recognized occupational

titles while their economic contributions remained undocumented in tax records and population statistics. Her chapter delves into the intricacies of the informal labor market associated with home-based handicrafts and needlework during the early twentieth century, particularly common among the urban poor. She explores who participated in this labor market and investigates the prevalent employment arrangements for handicraft workers. What is more, she analyzes which institutional factors facilitated the persistence of the informal labor market in handicrafts. In doing so, Enbom contextualizes early twentieth-century handicraft activity within the broader framework of marginalized wage labor, which is characteristic of less industrialized societies.

The volume's second section deals with the period between the World Wars. The time following the end of the First World War and other regional wars, such as the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922), was characterized by various economic and political crises, which also affected the world of work.⁷⁴ Migrants and refugees often found employment in informal and insecure settings only. After the crash of 1929, the global economic crisis plunged numerous European economies into recession and caused a rapid rise of unemployment in the 1930s. At the same time, fascist and military dictatorial regimes came to power in various European countries. In National Socialist Germany, labor became inextricably linked to the idea of a national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and was strongly charged with anti-Semitism.⁷⁵ Not only under National Socialism and Austrofascism but also in other (still democratic) European countries, the upheavals of the global economic crisis led to a distinct worsening of women's work situation. Women were increasingly pushed out of the formal labor market for economic and ideological reasons. As a result, intended or unintended by those who promoted these policies, women were forced into informal employment alongside their traditional roles as housewives and mothers. However, male employees in industry and the service sector were also ever more confronted with the informalization of work, for example due to the increase of temporary work.

From the end of the nineteenth century to the Second World War, small-scale garment, lace, and embroidery manufacturing developed in Greece. This was the case both in urban centers and the countryside, due to cheap

74 See, e.g., Adam J. Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916–1931* (London: Allen Lane, 2014); Boris Barth, *Europa nach dem Großen Krieg. Die Krise der Demokratie in der Zwischenkriegszeit 1918–1938* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2016).

75 Marc Buggeln and Michael Wildt, *Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014). See also Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisierung und Nation im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006), chapter 6.

female home-based work. *Leda Papastefanaki*'s chapter sheds light on the women who often worked at home under unstable and insecure conditions and who combined unpaid reproductive and subsistence labor with wage work. As a consequence of the Greco–Turkish War, a large number of refugees from Asia Minor, mainly women and children, came to Greece. Women and children refugees often worked in informal conditions in domestic service and in the textile, tapestry, and garment industries, either in small workshops or at home. Papastefanaki explores the variations of informal labor in Athens, Piraeus, and other Greek cities and highlights the interactions between informal and formal work. In doing so, she also examines the conflicts over informal home-based work and child labor, and the efforts, carried out by trade unions, bourgeois reformers, and labor inspectors, to introduce labor regulation in the interwar period.

When British restaurants in the 1920s and 1930s required an extra pair of hands, they would often call on a temporary “extra waiter” to serve food. The visibility of the extra waiter, a relatively well-known cultural figure, prompted concerns about inadequate remuneration and overly strenuous working conditions in Britain's service industry at a time of mass unemployment. *David Cowan*'s chapter offers insights into the experiences of this little-studied sector of informal work in early twentieth-century Britain and discusses whether representations of these workers' lives centered solely on their insecurity. By focusing on restaurant work, Cowan seeks to broaden our definitions of “insecurity” in modern labor beyond the concerns about wages. He explores the tactics employed by extra waiters to get by in challenging economic circumstances. And, by focusing on one well-documented extra waiter—the author of an autobiography published in the late 1930s—he also raises the question of the usefulness of a biographical approach to exploring informal work.

Industrial homework was a relevant sector of wage labor in interwar Austria, mostly for urban working-class women in clothes and textile production. *Elisabeth Luiß*'s chapter outlines the extent and conditions of home-based work between 1918 and 1938 in the context of struggles over the legal regulation of this type of work. From 1918 to 1922, protective provisions, a mechanism to set minimum wages, health, and unemployment insurance, were introduced. During the 1920s, home-based work increased as a consequence of the economic crisis. With a power shift towards conservative forces, the implementation of regulations for home-based work largely failed. Luiß provides a study of an early European case of the informalization of a—at the time—newly regulated sector of wage work. She shows how employer organizations and state actors embedded

their economic interests—to lower production costs and decrease state expenditure—within a dominant political discourse that confined women's role to unpaid reproductive work at home. Despite the crucial economic contribution of female home-based work to the livelihood of whole families, the character of home-based work as “real” work remained contested. This helped to justify women's exclusion from protective legislation and social benefits.

All over Europe, social insurance schemes were exclusive from the start, targeting a minority of the workforce only. *Jessica Richter* argues that for the emerging Austrian welfare state during the First Republic, founded in 1918, such modes of exclusion were constitutive. While agricultural workers gained access to health insurance in 1921, although this remained contested, they were excluded from unemployment insurance. Administrative authorities, farmers, and their political representatives pointed to the persistent labor shortage and the special characteristics of the farming community to argue that social insurance imposed an unnecessary cost factor on family and non-family workers. Moreover, work arrangements on farms did not easily fall into the categories established for commercial, agricultural, or domestic labor, or for distinguishing family from non-family work. As a result, social insurance claims were often unclear, sometimes leading to lengthy investigations to clarify workers' rights. Against this backdrop, administrative authorities sharpened the criteria to distinguish agricultural, commercial, or domestic workers from each other. In her chapter, Richter examines how these authorities drew a line between farm and commercial labor and thereby granted or denied workers' social benefits and entitlements.

The chapters in the third section of the volume deal with an era that is often referred to as the *Trente Glorieuses* or the *Golden Age*. In response to the global economic crisis of the 1930s, the formalization of labor intensified after the Second World War. In the industrialized Western and Northern European countries, the so-called standard employment relationship became established. It was mostly geared towards native male skilled workers and entailed full employment, permanent employment contracts, and improved social security benefits.⁷⁶ A similar development took place, albeit with some delay and to a smaller degree, in the less industrialized, semi-peripheral Southern European countries, where a large proportion of the workforce

76 Toni Pierenkemper, “Der Auf- und Ausbau eines ‘Normalarbeitsverhältnisses’ in Deutschland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Geschichte der Arbeitsmärkte*, ed. Rolf Walter (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2009), 77–112.

was still employed in agriculture.⁷⁷ Despite different economic systems and ideologies, formalized labor relations also became the standard in the socialist states of Eastern Europe.⁷⁸ However, certain forms of work were excluded from this surge in formalization, which took place in different ways throughout Europe in the economic post-war boom. Especially women, who were needed as an additional workforce due to the boom and/or male-dominated labor migration, often found themselves in informal occupations. The desired norm of formalized wage labor was therefore not “the linear and inevitable result of a centuries-long revaluation of labor,” which faced a crisis around 1970.⁷⁹ Rather, (legally) unregulated or barely regulated work remained an integral part of the industrialized economies in post-war Europe.

Elisa Lopes da Silva’s chapter analyzes “unemployment” by discussing lived experiences, statistical representations, and state policies of worklessness in Portugal’s Estado Novo dictatorship lasting from 1933 to 1974. She argues that Portugal’s low unemployment rates under the dictatorship, accepted by economic and social historiography, hide the magnitude of underemployment and other forms of work insecurity. Unregulated or feeble work relations were prevalent in a country where most of the population worked in agriculture until the 1950s. From the beginning of the twentieth century to the end of Portugal’s authoritarian rule, out-of-work experiences were mainly encompassed by the conceptual framework of “unemployment.” The category of unemployment standardized work trajectories outside of formalized wage labor. Lopes da Silva argues that unemployment functioned more as a mediating category used by the state to manage a set of precarious working and living situations than as a reliable representation of the Portuguese world of work. Through the study of individual experiences, collective actions, state categorizations and institutions in the context of Estado Novo’s repressive policies, she questions the narrative of the hegemonic rise of formalized wage labor in twentieth-century Europe.

Adrian Grama’s chapter explores how the state socialist regime of postwar Romania dealt with precarious work. This was an issue at once to be tackled

77 Leda Papastefanaki and Nikos Potamianos, eds., *Labour History in the Semi-Periphery: Southern Europe, 19th–20th Centuries* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021); Leda Papastefanaki and M. Erdem Kabadayı, eds., *Working in Greece and Turkey: A Comparative Labour History from Empires to Nation-States, 1840–1940* (New York: Berghahn, 2020).

78 See, e.g., Adrian Grama, *Laboring Along: Industrial Workers and the Making of Postwar Romania* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019); Siefert, *Labor in State-Socialist Europe, 1945–1989*.

79 Conrad et al., “Die Kodifizierung der Arbeit,” 474.

in labor law and cemented by jurisprudence, and also a feature of a shattered and traditionally backward economy confronted with the requirements of industrial development. He argues that precarious work under state socialism, to the extent that it was acknowledged as such, was part of a history of the formalization of employment relationships during which a multitude of types of work were subsumed under a standard employment contract. Yet it was also a type of work shaped by a general modernizing push which lay beyond legal categories and their enforcement by public power. Empirically, the chapter compares the trajectory of labor law under state socialist Romania to that of other late industrializing countries, such as Portugal under the *Estado Novo*. Grama argues that it is due to the unavoidable contradiction between the restrictive scope of labor law and the stratified employment regimes any economy generates—be it socialist or capitalist—that precarious labor emerges as an object of public policy, trade-union militancy, or, as suggested in his chapter, the literary imagination.

In German historiography, contract work was for a long time associated mainly with the labor market policies after the mid-1980s and the moonlighting of labor migrants. *Anna Elisabeth Keim* examines such work forms in West Germany in the mid-twentieth century, a period in which contract work and temporary employment were not yet formalized but practiced informally in both the industrial and the service sectors. The chapter demonstrates that there were debates about industrial contract workers among German labor lawyers from the late 1920s onwards. Furthermore, it illustrates the informal system of subcontracting between smaller construction firms and larger plants of the West German coal, steel, and chemical industries and questions contract workers' changing motivations in taking up this line of informal work. Keim also draws attention to the appearance of temporary employment companies on the West German labor market during the 1960s, which at first were mainly engaged in the placement of female office employees. For both groups, Keim emphasizes the agency of the temporary workers who began to choose informality more and more frequently during the "long" 1960s.

In Southern Europe, the so-called Fordist Era was not only a phase of industrial and economic growth but also an ambivalent period as far as working conditions were concerned. The persistence of a high level of both informality and precarity has been proved in the case of Italy by recent research on the industrial sector. The gender lens has helped in showing the variety of forms of work performed by women beyond the formal economy, both in the industrial and agricultural sectors. *Eloisa*

Betti's chapter unveils the persistence of informal work in the post-war period, by analyzing the labor conditions of women from rural Italy in the 1950s and 1960s. In those years, women struggled to be recognized as “real” workers in agriculture, campaigning to obtain the status of wage workers and so become entitled to run farms on their own. Informal labor arrangements and patriarchal regulations which remained in place in the agricultural sector were exposed by women's associations and trade unions, as female workers became the majority of the rural workforce after the 1950s. On the one hand, the modernization of agriculture created new opportunities for women, who were often portrayed as iconic tractor drivers. On the other hand, women were often left marginalized and excluded from the modernization process. When they experienced unemployment and underemployment, rural women often had to combine different jobs to support their family and were exploited in the informal economy as industrial home-based workers while they still lived and worked part-time in rural areas.

The 1960s and 1970s in Spain were years of the effective mobilization of workers for better living conditions and against Franco's dictatorship. Because of that, Spanish labor history has mainly focused on the labor movement's role as agent for democratization during the last years of Franco's regime and the Spanish Transition. But those labor sectors that did not play a political role have been largely neglected. This concerns not least informal and precarious jobs, where workers' mobilizations or collective political and social protest were not succeeding. *Diego Latorre Manglano* argues that, even so, a conception of conflict as a facet of everyday life allows us to highlight power relations in informal labor conditions. His chapter studies Spanish domestic service, which, according to the data used, was the main work area for women during the 1960 and 1970s. This area was clearly marked by strong features of precariousness, feminization, and informality. He analyses both the daily resistance of domestic workers and the conflicts this generated, as well as the attempts to mobilize workers collectively. By doing so, Latorre Manglano furthers our understanding about the agency of workers engaged in feminized, informal, and precarious jobs and the labor conflicts that resulted from these working conditions.

The last contribution to this volume provides a counterpoint to the previous ones. While all other chapters are focused primarily on the nation-state level in specific periods, *Eileen Boris* uses the example of intimate labor to shed light on transnational dimensions of informal work over the entire period under investigation in our volume, i.e., from the

end of the nineteenth to the end of the twentieth century. During this period, intimate labor was often not recognized as work or stood outside of formalization, as it was affected neither by union organizing nor by the legal codification of the employer-employee relationship. Boris suggests that intimate labor belongs to a transnational story as it was shaped by both labor migration and the circulation of ideas. She charts discourses about domestic, care, and sex work through international agreements, institutional networks, and national responses that led to exclusion from labor standards. Care work to a considerable degree remained informal, often as part of the voluntary sector, which, prior to being incorporated into the post-Second World War welfare state, was often denominational or remained a part of the shadow economy. Domestic work retained its servile attributes due to the fact that it was considered an integral part of private relationships. Sex work at times was regulated for the benefit of customers while at other times it was criminalized; generally, it was subject to bourgeois cultures of protection as a moral or public health question. In sum, Boris argues that this transnational story of intimate labor is neither one of progress nor of loss: rather, there was increasing inclusion of these types of work into what were considered standard social and economic relations, albeit at different places at different times, though this inclusion has never been stable.

Overall, the contributions of this volume give strong evidence that informal work was prevalent in European economies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not only in rural areas in the Southern or South-Eastern peripheries of the continent but also in their industrial cores. This challenges both presumptions of current labor history about the predominance of formalized types of work in modern economies and notions about distinct paths of development that clearly distinguished the industrialized societies of the Global North from the rest of the world. Rather, the fact that informal work was omnipresent in European countries between the 1870s and the 1970s, despite the obvious differences between their diverse economies, may prompt us to reconsider the social embeddedness of economic life in modern societies—not least in regards to gender relations and the role of migratory labor—and to explore comparative approaches to how this type of work related to formal labor and how authorities and other actors in the world of work aimed to regulate it by various provisions. This might not only offer a fresh perspective on the European past and shed light on the path dependencies of current developments but also illuminate present debates about the future of work.

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Nineteenth Century to the First World War

Informal Work at the Beginning of
Labor Formalization

2. When the State Arrived in the Rural Workshop: Laws and Taxes for Home Industries in Austrian Galicia, 1859–1914

Corinne Geering

Abstract: During labor market liberalization, work in the countryside often evaded formal classification in law and taxation. Here, the dominant focus on agricultural production obscured other forms of industrial labor performed in the rural home. This chapter examines efforts to formalize home industries in the Austro-Hungarian Empire by zooming in on the crownland of Galicia. Drawing on industrial reforms, surveys, and legal disputes, it traces conflicts between urban center and rural periphery as well as among state authorities, which ultimately relegated rural workshops to the informal economy facing legal insecurity. This process involved not only intense competition among low-income workers but also resistance to labor formalization by rural workshops seeking to evade the new laws, especially through tax avoidance.

Keywords: informal economy, taxation, labor and trade law, crafts, Austro-Hungarian Empire

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, the social distancing measures pushed millions of people to work in their own homes. Advantages for both employers and employees became apparent early on: there was no need for commuting, companies could save costs in rent and energy bills, and working at home was perceived as more compatible with care work.

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Economists and social scientists were quick to propose that the pandemic would fundamentally change the world of work.¹ At the same time, however, working at home raised a multitude of legal questions concerning liabilities, insurance, and taxation. While these questions were framed as unprecedented challenges to the traditional structures of the labor market, in fact they exposed unresolved issues that had emerged already at the very onset of labor formalization. Given the sudden spread of work in the home, the recent pandemic merely made visible the legal uncertainty that many people, oftentimes in precarious work environments, had struggled with for more than 150 years. If one focuses, in the history of labor formalization, on work in the home instead of the factory, it becomes clear that this uncertainty was not the result of mere oversight or indifference by state authorities. Rather, the new laws and regimes of taxation contributed to establishing the informal economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Historians of capitalism have highlighted the central role that work performed in the home has played in the development of industrialization in Europe since early modern times. Self-employment, small trade, and crafts were not replaced by industrial production in factories but were integrated into the capitalist commodity chain.² The early modern formation of industrial capitalism has been traced back to the production of commodities in the home for transregional markets, a process referred to as proto-industrialization. Although economists and economic historians have tended to focus on industrial production in factories, the research on proto-industrialization shows that decentralized and non-mechanical modes of production in small establishments by far outweighed factory production even for the most part of the nineteenth century.³ Especially in rural regions, companies and traders subcontracted work to residents who completed the tasks in their own home. This putting-out system relied

1 Several major newspapers published articles with this claim: "Work Will Never Be the Same," *New York Times Magazine*, February 21, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/02/17/magazine/remote-work-return-to-office.html>; Joanna Partridge, "COVID-19 has Changed Working Patterns for Good, UK Survey Finds," *The Guardian*, October 5, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/05/covid-19-has-changed-working-patterns-for-good-uk-survey-finds>; Jessica Wegener, "Wie die Corona-Krise unsere Art zu arbeiten nachhaltig verändern wird," *Die Zeit*, March 24, 2020, <https://www.zeit.de/zett/2020-03/homeoffice-es-geht-nicht-wieder-zurueck-ins-buero-coronakrise-buero>.

2 Andrea Komlosy, "Work and Labor Relations," in *Capitalism: The Reemergence of a Historical Concept*, ed. Jürgen Kocka and Marcel van der Linden (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 57.

3 Peter Kriedte et al., eds., *Industrialisierung vor der Industrialisierung. Gewerbliche Warenproduktion auf dem Land in der Formationsperiode des Kapitalismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 14.

on the rural subsistence economy handed down over generations: rural residents would manufacture and trade goods such as tools, clothing, or dishes, alongside working in agriculture, horticulture, and husbandry. Facing increasing economic pressure in making the transition from a countertrade to a monetary economy, the peasant-workers continued to perform these trades not for their families and vicinities but as cheap labor for the globalizing market. The early capitalist work relations rendered them both as objects of exploitation and as agents fostering economic growth—though for the benefit of subcontractors.⁴ Working in one's home became synonymous with hardship and misery, and social reformers sought to counter the expansion of sweatshops by introducing legislation governing such labor.

This chapter discusses the efforts to formalize home industries in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, zooming in on the crownland of Galicia, one of the most agricultural regions of the empire. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, social insurance laws for factory workers were enacted in both the Austrian and Hungarian territories of the Dual Monarchy.⁵ These efforts were part of a “global social insurance movement” seeking to provide insurance in case of health issues and work accidents.⁶ Beginning in the early nineteenth century, reformers had sought to improve working conditions in factories, and, in particular, to eliminate child labor.⁷ However, this focus on the workplace of the factory pushed other types of work than legally regulated wage labor to the background of historical debates on social reforms, labor, and trade law. Day laborers, servants, and small traders who performed their work outside the factory generally remained excluded, and thus often did not benefit from the provisions of the new laws.⁸ Against this backdrop, reformers across Europe called for

4 Kriedte et al., *Industrialisierung vor der Industrialisierung*, 116.

5 An overview on the reforms in Cisleithania is provided in Kurt Ebert, *Die Anfänge der modernen Sozialpolitik in Österreich. Die Taaffesche Sozialgesetzgebung für die Arbeiter im Rahmen der Gewerbeordnungsreform (1879–1885)* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1975); Margarete Grandner, “Conservative Social Politics in Austria, 1880–1890,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 27 (1996): 77–107; for the reforms in Transleithania, see Susan Zimmermann, *Divide, Provide, and Rule: An Integrative History of Poverty Policy, Social Policy, and Social Reform in Hungary under the Habsburg Monarchy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011).

6 Aiqun Hu and Patrick Manning, “The Global Social Insurance Movement since the 1880s,” *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 1 (2010): 125–48.

7 For an overview of legislation concerning health and safety at work in nineteenth-century Europe, see Ebert, *Die Anfänge der modernen Sozialpolitik*, 33–47.

8 Labor law in Austria and Hungary with a focus on marginalized groups is discussed by Susan Zimmermann, “Geschützte und ungeschützte Arbeitsverhältnisse von der Hochindustrialisierung bis zur Weltwirtschaftskrise. Österreich und Ungarn im Vergleich,” in *Uneregelt und unterbezahlt:*

extending the factory-based regulations to the home, where working hours were long and arduous and the overall conditions miserable.⁹ However, it was difficult to integrate rural workshops into laws regulating the production, handling, processing, or packaging of goods in one's own home and thus continuing the tradition of earlier factory acts. These laws conceived home industries as an extension of the factory, rather than as self-employment or small trade businesses.

The countryside, still home to most of the population across Europe, was faced with legal insecurity resulting from the process of labor formalization. The strong—one could even say exclusive—association of the countryside with agricultural production contributed to obscuring other types of labor performed in the rural home. For instance, rural home industries did not fall under Austrian trade law, due to the assumption that they were subsidiary to agriculture. Moreover, the primary economic sector, including agriculture and forestry, was generally not subject to labor and trade laws but governed by its own legislation. The actual work performed in the countryside often did not fall within the clear categorization defined by law, but rural home industries could still be subjected to trade law and related regulations, usually to their disadvantage. This was especially apparent in the case of profit and income taxes that were the most tangible results of labor formalization for many rural residents. Therefore, rural communities actively sought to avoid and resist the state officials who arrived in their workshops. In many ways, the countryside proved difficult to control for the Austrian government, and competition between different authorities at local, regional, and imperial levels ensued over the interpretation of the new laws.

This chapter highlights the conflicting interests between urban center and rural periphery. It combines debates among the imperial authorities and urban elites with the perspectives of rural craftspeople on the ground and reveals how the process of labor formalization created new insecurities, possibly unintentionally, around precarious work. The analysis relies on published and archival source materials such as laws and reforms, surveys, economic journals, and reports that outline the efforts of formalizing work performed in the rural home. The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the role of home industries in the state reforms that aimed to

Der informelle Sektor in der Weltwirtschaft, ed. Andrea Komlosy et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 1997), 87–115.

9 See the postulation by reformer Lujo Brentano at the 1872 founding meeting of the *Verein für Socialpolitik* (Association for Social Policy) in Eisenach, German Empire, cited in Ebert, *Die Anfänge der modernen Sozialpolitik*, 61.

formalize labor in the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy, starting with the Trade Ordinance of 1859. The second part focuses on the countryside in Galicia and provides insights into the experiences of craftspeople working in their rural homes. This discussion also sheds light on their ways of resisting the process of labor formalization by looking into schemes of tax avoidance. And finally, by focusing on the initiatives behind introducing special laws for home-based work after 1900, the third section highlights the economic competition between low-income workers as an underlying issue guiding the deliberate non-regulation of work in the countryside, thus solidifying the legal insecurity of home industries. Overall, the sources in this chapter make evident that home industries emerged as a legal and economic grey area in the late empire, whether imposed from above or as a deliberate choice for lack of a better alternative. This chapter thus seeks to shed light on how different agents took advantage of, opposed, and played on the informal status of rural craftspeople.

Exemptions in Austrian Trade Law

In rural regions across Europe, handicrafts have for a long time complemented the economic and social histories of agriculture and animal husbandry. Much of the populace has engaged in small-scale manufacturing and produced goods such as textiles, baskets, ceramics, and wooden toys in their homes. Peasants would organize the raw materials and manufacture the products on their own account. These goods would then either be used in their households, for the transporting of agricultural produce to local markets, or sold to other villagers.¹⁰ Conducted largely as private counter-trade, this type of work was of no immediate concern to the state economy and thus remained outside early efforts at formalization in labor and trade law. This chapter subsumes this type of production under the term “home industries,” whose specific content has been subject to a long-lasting debate between economists, social reformers, and politicians on *Hausindustrie* (in German), *przemysł domowy* (in Polish), and other notions in the multilingual Austro-Hungarian Empire. In legislation, work performed in the rural home was not considered work in its own right. Reflecting the rural-urban divide, home industries were instead treated as a by-product of agriculture or the factory system. Generally, three different types of production in the

10 Richard Kahle, “Über Hausindustrie und Heimarbeit in Deutschland und Österreich” (PhD diss., Friedrich-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1903), 27–28.

home figured in the debate. The first was composed of private production in the family for their own household. The second type referred to the production of goods for sale in small quantities as a second occupation alongside agriculture. And finally, the third type entailed the production of goods per order from subcontractors and middlemen affiliated with large industries.¹¹ This last type was also named *Verlagswesen* (putting-out system) or *Heimarbeit* (home-based work) in urban environments that demarcated it from the other two types of production found primarily in the countryside.

For a long time, small trade business was a matter of the city. Membership in an urban guild was mandatory until the principle of economic freedom was introduced in the decades following the French Revolution. Across Europe, states issued reforms abolishing the hitherto existing guild restrictions. The Austrian state enacted the Trade Ordinance (*Gewerbeordnung*) in 1859 that aimed to establish uniform regulations for industrial and commercial activity across the entire empire.¹² It promoted the liberalization of the labor market and provided the basis for designing a new system of taxation. From then on, no affiliation with an association was needed to take up a trade, which allowed extending a small trade business into the countryside. Moreover, mobility restrictions were relaxed: Austrian citizens were now allowed to establish businesses across the empire and commission work in other crownlands. This applied to both men and women, as well as to Jewish people, whose earlier trade restrictions were lifted.¹³ The only stipulation of the Trade Ordinance was that all commercial activity had to be registered with the trade authorities by submitting the trader's name, age, place of residence, and citizenship, as well as the type and place of activity.¹⁴ So-called free trade, which encompassed most crafts, required a trade license (*Gewerbeschein*), which to traders was a double-edged sword. It enabled them to conduct their own business and access social benefits, but it also served

11 These three types were outlined in the definition of *Hausindustrie* by the International Statistical Congress in 1876. Commission permanente du Congrès international de statistique, ed. *Compte-rendu de la neuvième session à Budapest. Deuxième partie. Travaux du congrès* (Budapest: Imprimerie de l'Athenaeum, 1878), 689–90; see also Corinne Geering, "The Hinterland on Display: Establishing a Market for Rural Handicraft in Austria-Hungary," *Rural History Yearbook / Jahrbuch für Geschichte des ländlichen Raumes* 17 (2020): 74–75.

12 The Trade Ordinance of 1859 did not apply to Venetia and the Military Frontier. After the Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867, the Hungarian government adopted its own Trade Act in 1872, thus enacting separate regulations.

13 *Die Gewerbeordnung vom 20. December 1859* (Vienna: Manz'sche Buchhandlung, 1875), § 1, § 4, and § 9.

14 *Die Gewerbeordnung vom 20. December 1859*, § 14, and § 44.

as grounds for state authorities to claim income and profit taxes. Against this background, in order to avoid taxation some small traders sought to bypass the trade license application. The Trade Ordinance classified this as a criminal offense and, if caught, delinquent traders had to pay a fine.¹⁵

The Trade Ordinance operated according to a narrow definition of *Gewerbe* that continued guild traditions, meaning that there were several occupations to which it explicitly did not apply. Mining, publishing, law, engineering, doctors and midwives, teachers, prisons, railways and steamships, banks, insurance, and entertainment, were subject to separate provisions specific to the standards of their respective fields. Furthermore, all trades predominantly found in rural communities were exempt from the Trade Ordinance. The regulations neither applied to agriculture, forestry, and the related processing of produce, nor to the “domestic second occupations” that were performed by “ordinary members of one’s own household.”¹⁶ Consequently, industrial production in the domains of *Hausindustrie* did not fall under this new law.¹⁷ However, in contrast with the other aforementioned professional fields, there were no separate regulations adopted by the Austrian state, which means that home industries remained outside the labor formalization process. This essentially relegated a large proportion of commercial activity in the countryside to the informal economy. The trades performed in the rural home were legal but unregulated. And the lack of official registration resulted in distorted commercial statistics that did not record these activities.

The process of market liberalization also entailed exemptions for the sale of goods produced at home. The Trade Ordinance granted everyone the freedom to sell their goods in the marketplace.¹⁸ While traders from different places gathered at major markets held at fairs and health resorts, weekly markets restricted trade to people residing in the localities where they were held. They also limited the wares traders could sell to agricultural produce, articles of daily use such as milk, butter, fruit, vegetables, flowers, or wood, and goods produced in “customary second occupations by countryside people from the environs.”¹⁹ These initially were the object of rural countertrade and

15 *Die Gewerbeordnung vom 20. December 1859*, § 132.

16 “die in die Kategorie der häuslichen Nebenbeschäftigungen fallenden und durch die gewöhnlichen Mitglieder des eigenen Hausstandes betriebenen Erwerbszweige.” “Kundmachungspatent,” in *Die Gewerbeordnung vom 20. December 1859*, 2. This and all following translations by the author.

17 “Alphabetisches Register,” in *Die Gewerbeordnung vom 20. December 1859*, 92.

18 *Die Gewerbeordnung vom 20. December 1859*, § 62 and § 70.

19 “landesüblichen Nebenbeschäftigungen der Landleute der Umgegend.” *Die Gewerbeordnung vom 20. December 1859*, § 66 and § 52.

thus remained exempt from profit taxation,²⁰ but selling them for money at markets did not appear attractive. For example, when a peasant was asked why he refrained from selling milk and butter from his farm, he responded that there were simply no consumers to be found in the village, since all of them had their own cows.²¹ The same held true for handmade textiles, shoes, and tableware. Craftspeople in the countryside generally did repair items alongside producing new goods, and still engaged in countertrade.²² Furthermore, at local markets they competed with cheaper factory-made clothing from junk dealers. Gradually, however, many rural residents stopped wearing the local attire—popularized as folk costumes by contemporary ethnographic writing—that they deemed too impractical and expensive. Therefore, though formulated expressly for rural home industries, the exemptions provided by the new regulations were hardly of use to those working in their homes, as they refrained from attending markets.

Enacting regulations for the rural home involved a great degree of complexity due to the conflicting interpretation of regulations by different state authorities. The exemption of home industries from the Trade Ordinance led to considerable confusion during implementation. The formal recognition of work was connected to the legal obligation to pay taxes and get health and accident insurance and the entitlement to receive letters of reference and certificates. Due to the ambiguous classification in the Trade Ordinance of work performed in the home, a range of institutions, including the chambers of trade and commerce, the industrial inspectors, the district administration, and the Administrative High Court, were now forced to settle numerous disputes. For instance, a bricklayer who produced wooden shoes as a second occupation in his home was taxed on them even though this type of work had already been defined by the government as remaining outside the domain of the Trade Ordinance.²³ This was due to a lack of coordination in the administrative process: while the provincial government recognized some trades as *Hausindustrie*, and thus outside

20 "Vollzugsvorschrift zum Gesetze vom 25. October 1896, R. G. Bl. Nr. 220, betreffend die directen Personalsteuern," in *Reichsgesetzblatt für die im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreiche und Länder, Jahrgang 1897, n. Stück* (Vienna: kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1897), 140.

21 Eugen Schwiedland, "Die Entstehung der Hausindustrie mit Rücksicht auf Österreich," *Zeitschrift für Volkswirtschaft, Socialpolitik und Verwaltung* 1 (1892): 154.

22 Arnulf Nawratil, "Die Heimarbeit der Schuhmacher in Galizien," in *Bericht der k. k. Gewerbe-Inspectoren über die Heimarbeit in Österreich*, vol. 2, ed. k. k. Handels-Ministerium (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1901), 326.

23 "Sitzung der oberösterr. Handels- und Gewerbekammer in Linz am 13. März 1890," *Linzer Volksblatt*, March 15, 1890, 2.

formalized labor, the financial authorities still initiated taxation. What becomes apparent in these cases is that the process of labor formalization produced more insecurity for those engaged in home industries, who remained in legally uncertain conditions. Tax exemption made it attractive to declare any small business and any practice of subcontracting by big industrialists and factory owners as *Hausindustrie*, which raised general suspicion towards those working in the home. These tensions reveal the divergent interests, the opportunism, as well as the resistance underlying the process of formalizing work in the countryside.

Contested Taxation of Home Industries in Galicia

In rural regions, handicrafts performed in the home constituted a large part of industrial and commercial work, ranging from production of goods for local customers to precarious work for subcontractors. However, the state authorities knew very little about these trades, given that official documentation was sparse and information difficult to access. Statistics relied on data provided by factory owners and chambers of commerce and thus exhibited gaps for regions where the number of large industries was low. This oversight started to shift once the methods of documentation changed and after the Austrian Ministry of Trade introduced industrial inspectors in 1884 to examine all commercial activity across the crownlands' districts. In the crownland of Galicia, which can be considered a resource periphery of the empire,²⁴ a whopping two thirds of businesses visited by the industrial inspectors fell into the category of small trade. Second occupations played an important role for agricultural producers who manufactured goods in their homes during the cold months when farming was at rest. They worked alone, helped only by family members, and sold low-turnover goods at local markets in rural areas. The reports compiled by industrial inspectors reveal that the working conditions in home industries regularly failed to meet the requirements stipulated by the new laws. They worked more than eight hours daily, their homes were poorly equipped, and the laboring children of the family slept on straw-filled grain bags lying on the floor or on benches.²⁵ A

24 See Klemens Kaps, *Ungleiche Entwicklung in Zentraleuropa: Galizien zwischen überregionaler Verflechtung und imperialer Politik (1882–1914)* (Vienna/Cologne/Weimar: Böhlau, 2015).

25 Arnulf Nawratil, "Bericht des k.k. Gewerbeinspectors über den XV. Aufsichtsbezirk" [(1892)], in *Bericht der Gewerbe-Inspectoren über ihre Amtsthätigkeit im Jahre 1892* (Vienna: Verlag der kaiserlich-königlichen Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1893), 418.

large number of rural residents in Galicia opted for emigration, both within Europe and across the Atlantic, to escape rampant poverty.²⁶

Among those trades performed in the home, shoemaking was the most widespread and employed the largest number of people in Galicia. In some municipalities, a quarter of residents or more were engaged in shoemaking, and many individuals combined it with farming small plots of land and working in the booming industry of oil production.²⁷ Yet the profession of shoemaking was in continuous decline, especially since many peasants had taken up this trade as a second occupation in the villages, working for knock-down prices.²⁸ The working conditions were extremely precarious and the shoemakers repeatedly appealed to the Galician Diet to improve their situation, which is why the provincial and Austrian authorities produced a relatively large amount of documentation on this trade.²⁹ They continuously observed a number of legal infringements on the working conditions of shoemakers in Galicia that made it impossible for them to maintain a profitable business. Most shoemakers worked on their own account and, as home industry businesses, they considered themselves exempt from the obligations defined by trade law. For this reason, less than 10% had formally registered a trade license.³⁰ Yet, the district commissions still officially recognized many of them as traders following the stipulations of the Trade Ordinance and required them to fulfil the consequent legal obligation to pay taxes on income and profits. Consequently, instead of being considered exempt, they were taxed as enterprises without capital whose income depended on their own labor.³¹

26 See Annemarie Steidl et al., *From a Multiethnic Empire to a Nation of Nations. Austro-Hungarian Migrants in the US, 1870–1940* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2017), 115–16.

27 *Stenographisches Protokoll der im k. k. Arbeitsstatistischen Amte durchgeführten Vernehmung von Auskunftspersonen über die Verhältnisse im Schuhmachergewerbe* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1904), 1063.

28 *Stenographisches Protokoll der im k. k. Arbeitsstatistischen Amte durchgeführten Vernehmung von Auskunftspersonen über die Verhältnisse im Schuhmachergewerbe*, 862.

29 Nawratil, “Die Heimarbeit der Schuhmacher,” 333.

30 Arnulf Nawratil, “Bericht des k.k. Gewerbeinspectors über den XV. Aufsichtsbezirk” [(1889)], in *Bericht der Gewerbe-Inspectoren über ihre Amtsthätigkeit im Jahre 1889* (Vienna: Verlag der kaiserlich-königlichen Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1890), 368.

31 “Erlaß des Finanzministeriums vom 18. April 1850, über die Einbringung und Behandlung der Bekenntnisse zur Bemessung der Einkommenssteuer,” in *Allgemeines Reichs-Gesetz- und Regierungsblatt für das Kaiserthum Oesterreich. Jahrgang 1850, Zweiter Theil, 56. Stück* (Vienna: Kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1850), 798. The template continued to be used in Galicia after the introduction of the Trade Ordinance, see “Kundmachung der k. k. Finanz-Landes-Direction vom 8. Jänner 1868 Zahl 1249, betreffend die Vermessung und Einhebung der Einkommenssteuer für das Jahr 1868,” in *Landes-Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt für das*

The industrial inspector for Galicia recorded and disapproved of several instances of malpractice committed by local authorities in his reports. In addition to being taxed, shoemakers were denied access to markets, charged fees for engaging their children as alleged helpers and apprentices, or coerced into joining a local cooperative, which subjected them to the related financial obligations.³² In reaction to this evidence, the provincial government of Galicia ordered legal clarification of the status of several hundred small shoemaking businesses.³³ In order to identify irregularities in administration, the Galician Diet further mandated that any illegitimate taxation of *przemysł domowy* was to be reported to the financial directorate of the crownland.³⁴

Moreover, the Austrian Ministry of Trade organized multiple surveys with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the home industries across the empire. The industrial inspectors were tasked with compiling their observations and, in 1898, the Ministry established the Department for Labor Statistics, which produced two extensive surveys, one on clothing manufacture and another on shoemaking.³⁵ The results of the surveys were published around 1900: by drawing on the expertise of the workers themselves, they now provided valuable insights into the perspectives and life trajectories of those engaged in home industries. Among them was Vincenz Bergel, a shoemaker from Dobczyce/Schlossberg, located around thirty kilometers south of Kraków. He had been handed over to a shoemaking relative at the age of nine after both his parents died. At first, he was deployed to herd cattle for several years before entering the workshop as an apprentice. Then he served in the military, after which he returned to Galicia, got married, and established an unlicensed workshop in his own home. At the time of the interview, he was selling boots to middlemen frequenting local markets and to subcontractors allotting production for the

Königreich Galizien und Lodomerien sammt dem Großherzogthume Krakau (L'viv: k. k. galizische Aerial-Staatsdruckerei, 1868), 5–6.

32 Nawratil, "Bericht des k.k. Gewerbeinspectors" (1889), 371.

33 "Stichproben aus einem interessanten Blaubuche," *Das Vaterland*, July 9, 1892, 3.

34 Sejm Krajowy Królestwa Galicyi i Lodomeryi wraz z Wielkiem Księstwem Krakowskiem, *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne rozpraw galicyjskiego Sejmu krajowego. 25. posiedzenie 4. Sesi, VI. peryodu Sejmu galicyjskiego z dnia 20. Maja 1893* (L'viv: n.p., 1893), 965.

35 *Stenographisches Protokoll der im k. k. arbeitsstatistischen Amte durchgeführten Vernehmung von Auskunftspersonen über die Verhältnisse in der Kleider- und Wäscheconfection* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1899); *Stenographisches Protokoll der im k. k. Arbeitsstatistischen Amte durchgeführten Vernehmung von Auskunftspersonen über die Verhältnisse im Schuhmachergewerbe*; k. k. Handels-Ministerium, *Bericht der k. k. Gewerbe-Inspectoren über die Heimarbeit in Österreich* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1900).

Austrian army, a major buyer of new footwear.³⁶ His interview, as well as several others with respondents from Galicia, confirmed the irregularities noted above in how the state implemented trade regulations. In particular, many shoemakers paid taxes without having obtained a trade license.³⁷

The system of taxation reflected the social inequalities inherent in the “relations of extraction” that defined the disproportionate levels of financial contribution demanded by the state from different groups.³⁸ Historians have shown how taxation levied alongside the extraction of resources helped increase economic inequalities between the imperial metropole and its peripheries, since the poor were generally taxed more than the rich.³⁹ In fact, the peasantry in Galicia contributed the largest proportion to the overall taxes of the crownland and financed more than 80% of the costs of public infrastructure projects, like roads.⁴⁰ How was this possible? Profit and income taxation was the responsibility of local government; therefore, the application of tax law varied to a large extent across the empire.⁴¹ The tax exemption offered to home industries and second occupations alongside the agricultural work performed by small landholders presented a problem for rural regions. In more than a hundred municipalities in Galicia, expenditure regularly exceeded tax revenue. Decrees issued by the emperor show that a supplement was needed of up to 90% in annual income derived from direct taxes.⁴² The increased expenditure put the state authorities under

36 *Stenographisches Protokoll der im k. k. Arbeitsstatistischen Amte durchgeführten Vernehmung von Auskunftspersonen über die Verhältnisse im Schuhmachergewerbe*, 873–76.

37 k. k. Arbeitsstatistisches Amt im Handelsministerium, *Die Verhältnisse im Schuhmachergewerbe. Auf Grund der durchgeführten Vernehmung von Auskunftspersonen* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1905), 6.

38 See Martin Daunt, “How to Pay for the War: State, Society and Taxation in Britain, 1917–1924,” *English Historical Review* 111, no. 443 (1996): 882–919.

39 Gurinder K. Bhambra and Julia McClure, eds., *Imperial Inequalities: The Politics of Economic Governance across European Empires* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).

40 “Pierwsze czytanie wniosku p. Antoniewicza o uchylenie zakazu moczenia lnu i konopi i o wolność podatkową dla przemysłu domowego,” in Sejm Krajowy Królestwa Galicyi i Lodomerji wraz z Wielkiem Księstwem Krakowskiem, *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z rozpraw galicyjskiego Sejmu krajowego. 14 posiedzenie 4 sesyi, VI. peryodu Sejmu galicyjskiego z dnia 6. Maja 1893* (Lviv: n.p., 1893), 529.

41 “Erlaß des Finanzministeriums vom 25. März 1851,” in *Allgemeines Reichs-Gesetz und Regierungsblatt für das Kaiserthum Oesterreich. Jahrgang 1851* (Vienna: kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1851), 243–44.

42 See the decrees on collecting additional taxes in the municipalities of Galicia in “Gesetz, giltig für das Königreich Galizien und Lodomerien sammt dem Großherzogthume Krakau, mit welchem 105 Gemeinden zur Bestreitung der Gemeindeauslagen die Erhebung von Zuschlägen zu den direkten Steuern bewilligt wird,” in *Landes-Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt für das Königreich*

considerable pressure to glean potential additional sources of tax income. In every district of Galicia, the governor installed a tax commission comprising a financial officer and two “well-known men of confidence,” usually priests and teachers in the municipalities who were familiar with the local conditions.⁴³ They were chosen because they were deemed more trustworthy than government representatives, who were eyed with suspicion by the local population.⁴⁴ Tax collectors were notorious among rural craftspeople for lying in ambush to catch peasants and housewives red-handed trading the goods they had produced in their own homes. The act of selling then provided the basis for demanding taxes, and craftspeople in rural regions sought to actively avert this problem.

Against this background, those engaged in home industries showed interest in keeping its informal status and using legal uncertainty to vanish into the grey economy. They were wary of tax collectors and hid their identity, thus obscuring the name of the person who had produced the commodities for sale.⁴⁵ This made it difficult for authorities to compile reliable information for official reports and statistics. As a consequence of their legal insecurity, craftspeople in rural regions were hesitant to attend markets, which either pushed them further into the exploitative putting-out system or made it necessary for them to cease production altogether.⁴⁶ The trade license, though intended to liberalize industrial and commercial activity, instead became an instrument of gatekeeping by serving as an expensive ticket to access local markets. One of the respondents explained this mode of operation blatantly in the state survey on shoemaking: “I do not bring my shoes to the market myself, therefore I do not need a trade license.”⁴⁷ This situation made him and other

Galizien und Lodomerien sammt dem Großherzogthume Krakau, Jahrgang 1874, 16. Stück (Lviv: n.p., 1874), 77–84.

43 “Erlaß des Finanzministers vom 11. Jänner 1850, womit die Vollzugs-Vorschrift zu dem allerhöchsten Patente vom 29. October 1849, über die Einführung der Einkommenssteuer bekannt gemacht, und vom Tage der Kundmachung angefangen, in Wirksamkeit gesetzt wird,” in *Allgemeines Reichs-Gesetz- und Regierungsblatt für das Kaiserthum Oesterreich, Jahrgang 1850, Ersther Theil, 7. Stück* (Vienna: kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1850), 124.

44 See the statement by Josef Siemiradzki in *Protokoll der im k. k. Handelsministerium durchgeführten Vernehmung von Auskunftspersonen über die Auswanderung aus Österreich* (Vienna: k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1912), 139.

45 Włodzimierz Dzieduszycki, “Galizien,” in *Die Hausindustrie Oesterreichs. Ein Commentar zur Hausindustriellen Abtheilung auf der Allgemeinen Land- und Fortstwirthschaftl. Ausstellung*, ed. Wilhelm Exner (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1890), 153–54.

46 Schwiedland, “Die Entstehung der Hausindustrie,” 153.

47 “ich bringe meine Schuhe nicht selbst zum Markt, brauche daher auch keinen Gewerbeschein.” *Stenographisches Protokoll der im k. k. Arbeitsstatistischen Amte durchgeführten Vernehmung*

shoemakers dependent on subcontractors and middlemen for income, thus sustaining the precarious nature of their work. In view of these circumstances, representatives from different political camps expressed the conviction that a solution was needed for the poverty-stricken home industries. As these debates show, the formalization of home industries was hardly the preferred option either of workers or the legislative and tax-collecting state officials.

Competition of Workers Affected by Poverty

Work in the home had expanded quickly towards the end of the nineteenth century. Production in factories had increased in cost, amongst other things due to social reforms that included the shorter workday and financial obligations for securing health and accident insurance. These cost increases relegated more precarious work to people working outside the factory and thereby outside labor protection. This affected some groups more than others, especially women, children, people with disabilities, and, in general, unskilled workers and those lacking alternative work opportunities, for example in rural regions. For one, home industries were often the only option for people with disabilities and those experiencing health issues who could not find employment in large industries.⁴⁸ Women, on the other hand, were denied access to vocational schooling and proof of qualification, which largely restricted their professional options to unskilled work in the home.⁴⁹ Here they also combined childcare with manual labor or took part in workshops involving all members of the household. In particular, the rural home was most notable for the widespread occupation of children, as documented by the survey on child labor compiled by the Department for Labor Statistics.⁵⁰ Given the overall rise of precarious work in the home, self-employed artisans with small licensed workshops lost more and more customers not only to large-scale industrial production but also to peasants seeking new sources of income following the transition to a

von Auskunftspersonen über die Verhältnisse im Schuhmachergewerbe, 874.

48 Else Cronbach, "Die neuere Gesetzgebung über die Heimarbeit unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des österreichischen Regierungsentwurfes," *Zeitschrift für Volkswirtschaft, Sozialpolitik und Verwaltung* 21 (1912), 158.

49 O. v. G., "Die gesetzliche Stellung der Frau und die neue Gewerbeordnung," *Wiener Hausfrauen-Zeitung*, September 2, 1883, 301.

50 k. k. Arbeitsstatistisches Amt im Handelsministerium, *Erhebung über die Kinderarbeit in Österreich im Jahre 1908. II. Teil. Textliche Darstellung* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1911).

monetary economy in the countryside. Consequently, they were faced with the option of either accepting a job in a factory or working for an industrial subcontractor themselves. In view of this economic pressure, the subcontracting of home industries emerged as the dreaded bogeyman representing the threat of the social decline of small trade.

The liberalization of the labor market through the Trade Ordinance of 1859 intensified the competition between craftspeople. After the mandatory guild-based apprenticeships in towns had been abolished, the Austrian state was prompted to enact further regulations to ensure quality of work and to provide training facilitating free trade. In particular, it was deemed necessary for craftspeople to acquire new skills in order to match the tastes of consumers in a transregional market. In the early 1870s, the Ministry of Trade established around forty vocational schools across the crown-lands for training in specific industrial sectors ranging from woodworking, ironware, and wickerwork to pottery. Overseen by a joint commission with the Ministry of Education, these schools were expected to foster the growth of local industries by raising the quality of handicraft production.⁵¹ These schools also specifically catered to training the rural population, which was experiencing increased economic pressure and was forced to find new sources of income. Having obtained the school certificate, rural craftspeople competed with artisans in urban environments who still trained mainly as apprentices in workshops and were thus displeased with the new vocational schools. For instance, the shoemaker Vincenz Bergel was in favor of “tearing them down.” He explained that upon completion of their studies, the children from peasant families returned to their villages where they worked at home producing goods for considerably lower prices than their urban competitors.⁵² This contributed to the perception that home industries had an unfair advantage, which was further fueled by their exemption from tax.⁵³

Against this background, as early as the 1860s urban small traders started lobbying for new laws restricting the growing competition from home industries. The Trade Ordinance was criticized as a “work of bureaucracy” ruled by

51 Geering, “The Hinterland on Display,” 78.

52 *Stenographisches Protokoll der im k. k. Arbeitsstatistischen Amte durchgeführten Vernehmung von Auskunftspersonen über die Verhältnisse im Schuhmachergewerbe*, 876–77.

53 See, e.g., the debate on the tax reform in the Austrian parliament in 1887: “Stenographisches Protokoll. Haus der Abgeordneten. X. Session. 137. Sitzung, am 29. April 1887,” in *Stenographisches Protokoll über die Sitzungen des Hauses der Abgeordneten des österreichischen Reichsrathes in den Jahren 1886 und 1887. X. Session. IV. Band* (Vienna: kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1887), 4988.

large industries at the expense of small trade.⁵⁴ In 1883, the Ministry of Trade adopted a comprehensive revision of the Trade Ordinance that responded to the growing concern expressed by urban artisans. This reform introduced a third category of trade in addition to the hitherto existing free and concessionary trades. The new category of artisanal trade (*handwerksmäßiges Gewerbe*) denoted skills that were acquired through training and prolonged application and required “proof of qualification.” This proof could be an apprenticeship report, an employer’s reference, or a diploma from one of the new vocational schools.⁵⁵ Alongside the amendment, the Ministry of Trade and the Ministry of the Interior published a list of recognized artisanal trades and educational facilities that they updated at regular intervals. These were all trades performed by men, and only in 1907 was a list of four “women’s trades” added, all in the textile industry, granting women the opportunity to obtain a proof of qualification as well.⁵⁶ In addition to the major reform of 1883, in the following years the Ministry issued three further amendments with the aim of formalizing crafts. They introduced new regulations on the employment of unskilled laborers (1885), the training of apprentices (1897), and the organization of orders through business owners and salesmen (1902).

What remained constant throughout all reforms, however, was the informal status of home industries. In the amended Trade Ordinance, the domain of *Hausindustrie* was still explicitly excluded from the overall definition of trade—including the new category of artisanal trade—and thus remained outside the application of trade and labor law.⁵⁷ This informal status had been framed by parliament and Diet representatives across the political spectrum as a necessary condition serving the interests of those affected by poverty. Since their income was very low, they claimed, the taxation resulting from labor formalization was deemed to place an unbearable economic burden on home industries. However, while the situation of home industries in Galicia discussed above confirms that rural workers did seek informality, the legal ramifications solidifying this status were hardly to

54 Alois Liechtenstein, *Die sociale Frage. Rede, gehalten von Alois Prinz Liechtenstein am 3. Mai 1877 in der Schlußversammlung des Allg. österr. Katholikentages für die Gesamt-Monarchie* (Vienna: Verlag von Mayer & Comp., 1877), 14.

55 “Gesetz vom 15. März 1883, betreffend die Abänderung und Ergänzung der Gewerbeordnung,” in *Reichsgesetzblatt für die im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreiche und Länder, Jahrgang 1883, 12. Stück* (Vienna: kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1883), 116.

56 “Verordnung des Handelsministers im Einvernehmen mit dem Minister des Innern von 2. August 1907, betreffend die Bezeichnung der gemeiniglich von Frauen betriebenen handwerksmäßigen Gewerbe,” in *Reichsgesetzblatt für die im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreiche und Länder, Jahrgang 1907, 86. Stück* (Vienna: kais. kön. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1907), 746–47.

57 “Gesetz vom 15. März 1883,” 114.

their advantage. In 1883, alongside the revised Trade Ordinance, the Ministry of Trade issued a decree providing much-needed definitions of *Gewerbe*, the main subject of the document, and of the *Hausindustrie* excluded from it. The latter was defined as commercial production following local customs and performed in one's own home, either as a main or second occupation, but without any helpers apart from household members.⁵⁸ In practice, the legal exemption of this type of work also served the interests of subcontractors in maximizing profit, and of the landed gentry in upholding pre-industrial power relations between them and the peasants living and working on their vast estates. "Let them work how they worked for centuries," a noble member of the Galician Diet proclaimed, demanding the explicit exclusion of rural home industries from the process of labor formalization.⁵⁹ For subcontractors, on the other hand, the legal exemption of home industries offered attractive opportunities for cost reduction. For example, the 1888 law on workers' health insurance only granted the possibility of providing insurance to those home industries working for subcontractors who were willing to register them.⁶⁰ This was hardly ever the case, since many traders only used this passage to evade payment of contributions by classifying their workers as home industries.⁶¹

Austrian law was by no means exceptional for having a gap in its legislation when it came to formalizing home industries. It was only in the 1890s that the first laws on home industries were adopted by other states targeting the extremely low wages common for manual labor performed in the home. Emerging from initiatives on worker protection, these laws created boards guaranteeing minimum wages in trades affected by the sweating system.⁶² The situation in Austria, however, was different in that interest in legislation did not emerge from the misery observed in home industries and did not aim to expand factory-related worker protection. Instead, the low prices of

58 Ministerialerlaß vom 16. September 1883, cited in Ludwig Gumplowicz, *Das Österreichische Staatsrecht (Verfassungs- und Verwaltungsrecht). Ein Lehr- und Handbuch* (Vienna: Manz'sche k. u. k. Hof-Verlags- und Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1907), 485–86.

59 See Ludwik Zygmunt Dębicki, "Włodzimierz hr. Dzieduszycki," in *Portrety i sylwetki z dziewiętnastego stulecia. Serya II* (Kraków: Spółka Wydawnicza Polska, 1906), 264.

60 "Gesetz vom 30. März 1888, betreffend die Krankenversicherung der Arbeiter," in *Reichsgesetzblatt für die im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreiche und Länder, Jahrgang 1888, 9. Stück* (Vienna: kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1888), 57.

61 See Zimmermann, "Geschützte und ungeschützte Arbeitsverhältnisse," 102.

62 The Australian state of Victoria created wages boards in 1896, and similar boards were introduced in the United Kingdom in 1909 through the Trade Boards Act. See Andrew Seltzer and Jeff Borland, "The Impact of the 1896 Factory and Shops Act on the Labour Market of Victoria, Australia," *The Journal of Economic History* 78, no. 3 (2018): 785–821.

work performed in the home were perceived as unfair competition; thus, by formalizing home industries, measures were introduced in order to protect small trade artisans against their even poorer counterparts. This objective behind the labor formalization of home industries was pinpointed at the meeting of Austrian national economists in 1896 with the question: “Is it possible to eradicate home industries or at least to render it innocuous for small trade?”⁶³ However, this target fought a symptom rather than the underlying condition of precarious work.

Around 1900, the results of the surveys by the industrial inspectors and the Department for Labor Statistics had made public the calamitous conditions of home industries. The surveys provided the basis for finally drafting legislation on *Heimarbeit* (home-based work.) In line with the objective of protecting small trade workshops, the purpose of the new law was to impede production in the home. The minimum age was to be set at 18 for male and 16 for female workers. In addition, it prohibited the engagement of helpers and apprentices, including family members; and direct sales were off-limits. The new law focused on urban environments, and thus it again made an exemption for *Hausindustrie* performed in rural communities. In the countryside, the lack of work and training opportunities outside the rural home made it impossible to extend the regulations to village workshops. Here, prohibiting child labor in the home and banning the sale of products at weekly markets, as envisaged by the legislative authorities, could hardly be implemented.⁶⁴ The law on *Heimarbeit* was adopted, together with the law on child labor, only in 1918 by the Provisional National Assembly for Deutschösterreich, by which time the Austro-Hungarian Empire had ceased to exist. The regulations applied to those workers remaining outside the Trade Ordinance who received orders from subcontractors and who completed them with no helpers from outside their own families in their own homes.⁶⁵ Therefore, the implementation of the law fully relied on the subcontractors and middlemen who were obliged to register the labor

63 “Ist es möglich, die Heimarbeit zu vertilgen oder sie wenigstens für das Kleingewerbe unschädlich zu machen?” “Verhandlungen der Gesellschaft österreichischer Volkswirte. LXVIII. Plenarversammlung vom 3. November 1896,” *Zeitschrift für Volkswirtschaft, Sozialpolitik und Verwaltung* 6 (1897): 39.

64 Else Cronbach, “Die neuere Gesetzgebung über die Heimarbeit unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des österreichischen Regierungsentwurfes (Schluß),” *Zeitschrift für Volkswirtschaft, Sozialpolitik und Verwaltung* 21 (1912): 383.

65 “Gesetz vom 19. Dezember 1918 über die Regelung der Arbeits- und Lohnverhältnisse in der Heimarbeit,” in *Staatsgesetzblatt für den Staat Deutschösterreich, Jahrgang 1918*, 32. Stück (Vienna: deutschösterreichische Staatsdruckerei, 1918), 225–31.

performed in the home. Home industries in the countryside, on the other hand, alongside agriculture and forestry, were still excluded, and remain in a legal grey area even today.⁶⁶

Conclusion

When remote work grew vastly in popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic, the hitherto existing laws on *Heimarbeit* in Austria did not apply to this type of work. They were very limited in scope, concerned with manual labor completed by order of subcontractors, and did not affect the remote knowledge work that had developed in connection with satellite-related communication technologies since the 1970s. Therefore, the laws had to be adapted during the pandemic to include remote office work, while yet again distinguishing *Heimarbeit* from other types of work in the home such as the “domestic second occupations” performed by members of the rural household. Consequently, ever since the mid-nineteenth century, rural home industries have remained exempt from Austrian trade and labor law until the present day.⁶⁷ This chapter shows that this was not the result of mere oversight or because the issue lacked economic, social, or cultural importance. By drawing on legislation, reports, and surveys, it reveals instead how rural home industries were actively maintained as unregulated labor in the Austro-Hungarian empire. They were first excluded from the notion of “trade” in the 1859 Trade Ordinance, then from the narrower definition of “artisanal trade” in the 1883 reform, and finally from the definition of the 1918 *Heimarbeitsgesetz*. This trend continued despite persistent debates expressing the desirability of formalizing rural home industries. In fact, the 1907 amendment to the Trade Ordinance even declared the legislator’s intention to draft special laws for the domain of *Hausindustrie*.⁶⁸ However, these laws never came into existence across all the political ruptures of the twentieth century.

66 “Kundmachung der Bundesregierung vom 21. Juni 1960 über die Wiederverlautbarung des Heimarbeitsgesetzes,” in *Bundesgesetzblatt für die Republik Österreich*, 24. Stück (Vienna: Verlagspostamt Wien, 1961), 561.

67 Rechtsinformationssystem des Bundes, “Bundesrecht konsolidiert: Gesamte Rechtsvorschrift für Gewerbeordnung 1994, Fassung vom 29.07.2023,” § 2 Abs. 9, <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10007517>.

68 “Gesetz vom 5. Februar 1907 betreffend die Abänderung und Ergänzung der Gewerbeordnung,” in *Reichsgesetzblatt für die im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreiche und Länder, Jahrgang 1907*, 16. Stück (Vienna: kais. kön. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1907), 220.

The labor regulations introduced from the 1850s onwards collided with the ways people had organized work in rural communities. Legislation reproduced the divide between city and country, associating the former with trade and the latter with agriculture. This left no space for rural workshops. Self-employed craftspeople and small traders in rural home industries found themselves caught between two stools: they were neither peasant, nor worker enough to benefit from the process of labor formalization. As a result, they were relegated to the informal economy and faced legal insecurity. The sources of this chapter indicate that this insecurity of rural workers did not emerge directly from the informal status of their labor. It was rather their partial and ambiguous subjection to laws, usually disadvantageous, that rendered their labor insecure. The discussion of taxation revealed conflicts in the application of laws and the inconsistent practices performed by the different state institutions during labor formalization. Therefore, rural home industries could be categorized as a trade by tax collectors, although they were at the same time excluded from the very same category in the Trade Ordinance. Members of parliament, industrial inspectors, and others expressed confusion, and disapproved of this unsustainable conflict. The rural communities on the other hand reckoned with the unfavorable circumstances by resisting the arrival of the state in their workshops and by evading the new trade and labor regulations, in particular through tax avoidance.

In effect, the informal status of rural home industries was maintained by both craftspeople and the legislature as well as by tax-collecting state officials. At first glance, this seems to confirm the hypothesis made by historical scholarship that bypassing legal obligations was part of a strategy to save on production costs.⁶⁹ However, this chapter has made evident that the interests behind maintaining informality were more nuanced. Legal obligations were not merely bypassed but rather formulated in ambiguous ways from the start. This was due to the divergent interests of ministries and the various state departments trying to expand worker protection to places outside the factory: to restrict unwanted competition of licensed small trade artisans in cities, generate as much municipal income as possible from taxes, uphold pre-industrial power relations between noble estate owners and peasants, and, finally, ensure

69 See Komlosy, "Textiles Verlagswesen, Hausindustrie und Heimarbeit. Prototypen des informellen Sektors im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert," in *Ungeregelt und unterbezahlt. Der informelle Sektor in der Weltwirtschaft*, ed. Andrea Komlosy et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 1997), 68.

low production costs for subcontractors. For rural craftspeople, these interests oftentimes presented themselves as overlapping once “the state” arrived in their workshops. For instance, when the industrial inspectors compiled their reports on home industries, respondents in the countryside were aware that a reform of income tax was underway. This made them wary of the officials making enquiries, as they suspected that they were on the lookout for taxes. Coincidences like this in legislative processes were noted by ministry figures as aggravating factors when gathering information on rural regions.⁷⁰ They also reinforced the already strong suspicions among the rural population about the true motives behind the process of labor formalization and the efforts by the state to improve working conditions.

Home industries remained one of the most precarious economic domains in Europe well into the twentieth century. In the Austro-Hungarian empire, the rural home formed a particular interest of reformers, economists, and politicians, who faced immense challenges in their efforts to reach the countryside with new regulations. Between 1859 and 1914, long debates ensued on the formalization of home industries in parliament, the crownland diets, the ministries, the state agencies, and the press. The reports and surveys published by the Ministry of Trade provide valuable insights into how members of rural households and small traders themselves experienced the ambiguity of labor formalization. They shed light on the conflicting values and expectations guiding the making and trading of goods. This chapter has diverged from the tendency of historical scholarship to focus on the factory, on employed and wage labor, and the monetary system. Instead, it has shown that the empirical data reveals an umbrella under which home-based workshops, self-employed artisans, and persistent countertrade coexisted. These types of work were disproportionately performed by those without the opportunity to take up skilled labor, either because of their location in a rural region lacking large industries, as a result of gender-related restrictions, disabilities, and health issues, or because poverty prevented them from making an initial investment in obtaining qualifications. For these people working in their own homes, the process of labor formalization did not always improve their situation but could create even more uncertainties instead. Their resistance against this insecurity finally contributed to upholding the informal status of their work.

70 k. k. Handels-Ministerium, *Bericht der k. k. Gewerbe-Inspectoren über die Heimarbeit*, V.

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3. Ambivalences of (In)Formality: Prospects, Problems, and Pitfalls of Investigating “Informal Work” in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries¹

Sigrid Wadauer

Abstract: This chapter addresses the problems and pitfalls of historicizing (in)formality. Drawing on empirical studies of various forms of self-employment and of the formalization of employment in Austria from the late nineteenth century to 1938, it highlights the ambivalences and conflicts surrounding formalization. Formalization of wage labor did not necessarily imply social security or protection but also provided opportunities to discipline laborers. On the other hand, precarious forms of self-employment—today often synonymous with informality—could be highly regulated. To understand why informal work was not necessarily the last option, the chapter considers workers’ individual possibilities, ambitions, and expectations, critically reflecting on the frictions and contradictions between reasoning and (self-)representation, political propaganda, regulations, and (individual) practices.

Keywords: concepts of (in)formality, boundaries of work, regulation and documentation of work, self-employment, Austria, historicizing

¹ This chapter builds upon various research projects. My current research, which addresses co-production and the usage of identity documents and the various ways individuals are registered, was/is funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) [10.55776 / P32226 and PAT9328724]. I would like to thank Jessica Richter for her comments.

For some time now, historical research on work or labor has addressed an increasingly wide range of practices. It now includes more ambiguous and contested forms of work and subsistence, raising questions about how boundaries have been drawn and hierarchies and distinctions have been established. For a social and economic historian who investigates—from this perspective—practices such as street vending, itinerant trades, job-seeking, and casual work that reach the boundaries of begging and drifting, reflection on the debates about informal and precarious work seems almost self-evident and inevitable. Firstly, it provides ways to link historical research to current developments, sociological research, and contemporary political issues. Secondly, it allows research on particular regions and historical cases to be connected to broader international and global developments. However, today's notions of informal/formal work are quite ambiguous: they entail various explicit and implicit assumptions and judgments that can be misleading and/or create blind spots from a long-term historical perspective.

This chapter represents a reflection on the benefits, problems, and pitfalls of historicizing (in)formality. It does not present a particular empirical case study in detail but is based on and points to examples from my empirical research on struggles and negotiations concerning work and sustenance in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Austria.² I first discuss (interrelated) notions of informality, work, and approaches to historicization. I then address incentives and the effects of documentation and legal regulation in various historical contexts. I go on to illustrate how regulation and formal agreements can serve sometimes different or sometimes contradictory interests. Finally, I argue that it seems useful to disentangle the aspects of work, (in)formality or regulation, and security.

Informal Work?

In current debates, notions of informal work can refer to a multitude of practices.³ These relate to various different—old and new—strands of

2 See, e.g., Sigrid Wadauer, *Der Arbeit nachgehen? Auseinandersetzungen um Lebensunterhalt und Mobilität (Österreich 1880–1938)* (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau, 2021); Sigrid Wadauer, ed., *Die Erzeugung von Arbeit: Variationen, Unterschiede und Hierarchien von Erwerb und Unterhalt* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023).

3 The literature on the topics and areas of research addressed in this chapter is extensive; the bibliography is highly selective. For an overview on concepts of informal work, see, e.g., Marcel Erlinghagen, “Informelle Arbeit: Ein Überblick über einen schillernden Begriff,” *Schmollers Jahrbuch* 120, no. 2 (2009): 239–74; Patricia Fernández-Kelly, “Introduction,” in *Out of the Shadows*:

discussions, to scholarly and political challenges, and to so-called “narrow” concepts of work and economy.⁴

Firstly (and probably even *avant la lettre*), it has been a long-standing (feminist) critique that a focus on formal employment and waged work disregards multiple activities—mostly performed by women—which can provide sustenance, but which are often unremunerated, are not equally acknowledged as work, or are not tied to rights and formal entitlement to social security. Examples of this would be domestic work, care work, or reproductive work, etc.⁵

Secondly, since the late 1950s, anthropologists and sociologists have highlighted various gainful activities and identified relatively large parts of the populace that exist outside of the formally regulated or legal economy and employment, parts which are (more or less) undocumented and untaxed.⁶ Those activities have been labeled—depending on the context—the “informal sector” (a term coined in the 1970s by Keith Hart) but also the shadow economy, hidden economy, irregular work, etc.⁷ In

Political Action and Informal Economy in Latin America, ed. Patricia Fernández-Kelly and Jon Shefner (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 1–22.

4 Manuel Castells and Alejandro Portes, “World Underneath: The Origins, Dynamics, and Effects of the Informal Economy,” in *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries*, ed. Alejandro Portes et al. (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 11–37; Alfonso Morales, “Epistemic Reflections on the ‘Informal Economy,’” *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 17, no. 3/4 (1997): 1–17; Martha Alter Chen, “Rethinking the Informal Economy: Linkages with the Formal Economy and the Formal Regulatory Environment,” DESA Working Paper, no. 46 ST/ESA/2007/DWP/46, July 2007, <http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/>; Hans-Jürgen Burchardt et al., “Prekarität und Informalität – eine Annäherung in globaler Perspektive,” in *Arbeit in globaler Perspektive: Facetten informeller Beschäftigung*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Burchardt et al. (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2013), 9.

5 See, e.g., Karin Hausen, “Arbeit und Geschlecht,” in *Geschichte und Zukunft der Arbeit*, ed. Jürgen Kocka and Klaus Offe (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1999), 343–46; Per H. Jensen et al., “The Development of Informal Work in the Work-Welfare Arrangements of European Societies,” in *Formal and Informal Work: The Hidden Work Regime in Europe*, ed. Per H. Jensen et al. (New York/London: Routledge, 2009), 3–20; Deborah Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work: 1700 to the Present* (London/New York: Taylor & Francis, 1998), 263; Alice Sindzingre, “The Relevance of the Concepts of Formality and Informality: A Theoretical Appraisal,” in *Linking the Formal and Informal Economy: Concepts and Policies*, ed. Basudeb Guha-Khasnobis et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 58–74.

6 For an overview on the history of such research, see Stuart Henry and Stephen Sills, “Informal Economic Activity: Early Thinking, Conceptual Shifts, Continuing Patterns and Persistent Issues – a Michigan Study,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 45 (2006): 263–84.

7 Keith Hart, “Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 1, no. 1 (1973): 61–89; Philip Harding and Richard Jenkins, *The Myth of the Hidden Economy: Towards a New Understanding of Informal Economic Activity* (Milton Keynes/Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1989); Henry and Sills, “Informal Economic Activity,” 264.

the Global South, informal work or economy initially referred primarily to self-employed work like street vending, agricultural work, prostitution, etc.⁸ In the Global North, terms such as moonlighting, “off the books” work, or the underground economy were also used, or referred to criminal activities like hustling, drug dealing, etc.⁹

Thirdly, since the 1980s tendencies towards informalization and precarization have been described in European countries. These have resulted in the “erosion of standard employment” and produced “a-typical”¹⁰ forms of employment that are—comparatively—less well-paid, stable, regulated, protected, or represented; there has also been an increase in self-employment, etc.¹¹

Finally, distinct from such practices that are instead (but not exclusively) understood as makeshift—as related to a “culture of poverty,”¹² of un- or underemployment, vulnerability, precarity, and insecurity—sociologists and economists have more recently identified and tried to measure the economic and social value or importance of unorganized and unpaid activities like volunteering, mutual help, etc.¹³ In this sense, informality does not always imply poverty, and precarity does not necessarily mean informality.¹⁴

Consequently, the term “informal work” in its current meaning encompasses a broad, colorful multitude of often vaguely defined practices that are denoted differently in various contexts and areas of the world.¹⁵ “Informal

8 Dennis Arnold and Joseph R. Bongiovi, “Precarious, Informalizing, and Flexible Work: Transforming Concepts and Understandings,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 57, no. 3 (2013): 291; Alejandro Portes, “The Informal Economy and its Paradoxes,” in *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg, (Princeton/New York: University Press, 1994), 427.

9 Louis Ferman et al., eds., *Work beyond Employment in Advanced Capitalist Countries: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives on the Informal Economy* (Lewiston/New York: Mellen, 1993); Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2006).

10 Ulrich Mückenberger, “Krise des Normalarbeitsverhältnisses – ein Umbauprogramm,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialreform* 56, no. 4 (2010): 403–20.

11 Starting with Robert Castel, *Die Metamorphosen der sozialen Frage: Eine Chronik der Lohnarbeit* (Konstanz: UVK, 2000); see also Robert Castel and Klaus Dörre, *Prekarität, Abstieg, Ausgrenzung: Die soziale Frage am Beginn des 21. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2009); Ralf M. Damitz, “Prekarität: Genealogie einer Problemdiagnose,” *Mittelweg* 36, no. 16 (2007): 67–86.

12 Oscar Lewis, *Die Kinder von Sánchez: Selbstporträt einer mexikanischen Familie* (Düsseldorf/Wien: Econ, 1963).

13 Erlinghagen, “Informelle Arbeit,” 264.

14 Castells and Portes, “World Underneath,” 12.

15 Hans-Jürgen Burchardt et al., “Prekarität und Informalität,” 18; Arnold and Bongiovi, “Precarious,” 293.

work” is a concept, as Henry and Sills put it, “of questionable usefulness.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, the concept highlights the important fact that sustenance is often not or not exclusively based on free waged employment and that not everything which might be regarded as “work” is (equally) regulated, organized, and documented.¹⁷

Historicizing?

From various points of reference “informal work” has been described as an anachronism, as an element of inequality, or as the “return of the social question,” and even as a new trend in civil society. In this sense, informality, insecurity, or precarity are understood as relative terms:¹⁸ they refer synchronically to possibilities in a certain historical situation within a national or global context. (In the twenty-first century, the ILO prominently contrasted the term informality with the idea of “decent” work.¹⁹) From a diachronic perspective, the same terms refer to what has already been established as a standard or what is historically required.

A common point of critique is that sociological debates on informal and/or precarious work are often rather oblivious to history, or at least to further-reaching historical developments. Usually, work is considered in comparison only to (more or less) recent standards and developments from the late nineteenth century on (and in particular, from the twentieth century), with the “golden age” of standard employment in Europe serving specifically as a benchmark.

16 Henry and Sills, “Informal Economic Activity,” 265.

17 Wolfgang Bonß, “Zwischen Erwerbsarbeit und Eigenarbeit: Ein Beitrag zur Debatte um die Arbeitsgesellschaft,” *Arbeit* 11, no. 14 (2002): 5–20.

18 Nicole Mayer-Ahuja, “Die Globalität unsicherer Arbeit als konzeptionelle Provokation. Zum Zusammenhang zwischen Informalität im ‘Globalen Süden’ und Prekarität im ‘Globalen Norden,’” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. 2 (2017): 264–96. This idea can also be found in Social Democratic publications. See, e.g., Karl Renner, *Der Mensch in der Wirtschaft* (Wien: Wiener Sozialdemokratische Bücherei, 1930), 8.

19 “The informal economy is understood as the set of all economic activities by workers and economic units that are—in law or in practice—not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements. Workers in the informal economy are usually covered insufficiently or not at all by social protection; indeed, the lack of social protection coverage is sometimes used as a criterion by which to identify informal employment. At the same time, extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy helps to address some of the risks that trap workers in informality (such as the lack of health coverage) and support transitions to formalization.” ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2014/15. Building Economic Recovery, Inclusive Development and Social Justice* (Geneva 2014), footnote 3.

This has provoked historians to “historicize” informal work. Firstly, they have reflected on the origins, context, and developments of the debates about and notions of informality and precarity from a global perspective.²⁰ Secondly, global labor historians have argued that insecurity and informality are nothing new at all. Feebly organized and insecure, casual work (they maintain) could be found long before the debates started, not only regularly in most parts of the world but throughout history, from antiquity to the present.²¹ (The relativity of all of these terms seems to have gotten lost here.) Even in the golden age of standard employment, and even in the Global North, many people “worked” (particularly in the broad sense of the word) outside of such standardized labor relations. Hence, regardless of the ups and downs of social security systems, it is not informal work but standard employment which must be regarded as atypical both globally and over the long term.²²

This kind of “historization” does not diminish the ambiguity of “informal work.” On the contrary, it not only raises the question of what we mean by “informality” but also of what we think of as “work” in different historical contexts.

Work?

(Global) labor historians usually proceed from their own “analytical,” abstract definitions of work.²³ In debates on (informal) work, however, a range of practices are addressed. These practices are often highly disputed and not universally denoted or acknowledged as work by contemporaries,²⁴ not

20 Eloisa Betti, “Historicizing Precarious Work: Forty Years of Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities,” *International Review of Social History* 63, no. 2 (2018): 273–319; Eloisia Betti, *Precarious Workers: History of Debates, Political Mobilization and Labor Reforms in Italy* (Budapest/Vienna/New York: CEU Press, 2022); Sergio Bologna, *Die Zerstörung der Mittelschichten: Thesen zur Neuen Selbständigkeit* (Graz/Wien: Nausner und Nausner, 2006).

21 A critique of Castel’s rather simplistic narrative can be found in Josef Ehmer, “Robert Castel, Die Metamorphosen der sozialen Frage: Eine Chronik der Lohnarbeit,” *Historische Anthropologie* 11, no. 2 (2003): 314–16.

22 Marcel van der Linden, “San Precario: A New Inspiration for Labor Historians,” *Labor* 11, no. 1 (2014): 9–21; Marcel van der Linden, “Robert Castel’s Les métamorphoses de la question sociale (1995),” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 89 (2016): 153–61; Timo Luks, “Prekarität: Eine nützliche Kategorie der historischen Kapitalismusanalyse,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 56 (2016): 51–80.

23 For example, Andrea Komlosy, *Arbeit: Eine globalhistorische Perspektive. 13. bis 21. Jahrhundert* (Wien: Promedia, 2014).

24 Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Worthy Efforts: Attitudes to Work and Workers in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012), 1.

even by those who tried to secure their sustenance through such activities or justify them as necessary and legitimate. Some historical epochs and cultures explicitly or implicitly addressed globally and over such a long period did not even know the term or the abstract notion of work as we are familiar with it today.²⁵

Great narratives usually allow little space for such problems. However, what practically matters is the different and changing ways in which societies distinguished, understood, and assessed these activities and the positive and negative sanctions that then resulted from them. It seems arbitrary to subsume every kind of activity we might value nowadays under the (“objectivist”) term *work*. Moreover, by ignoring the ways societies understood such activities and made distinctions between them, we miss important aspects of the social world, e.g., the struggles over categories of perception. We thereby risk producing anachronisms and ahistorical artefacts.²⁶

The so-called “narrow” and abstract notion of work that is so dominant nowadays and which serves as a reference point with respect to “informal work” seems to be a rather recent invention.²⁷ It is related to a state social policy that emerged during the Habsburg monarchy, as it did in various other European countries of the late nineteenth century. That policy made work a prominent subject of politics, legislation, and administration. It more clearly defined, specified, and codified the terms and conditions of work while also attaching certain rights and obligations to it: who should work? What were the requirements and preconditions? What constituted the right age, gender, nationality? What were to be understood as a vocation, a trade, training, skills? How should those aspects be documented and certified? What was a legitimate work contract, and how should it be created and terminated? What was a workplace? What was a job search and how should it be organized and supported? The establishment of public labor intermediation,²⁸ labor market policy, and social insurance was crucial in

25 Maurice Godelier, “Aide-Memoire for a Survey of Work and Its Representations,” *Current Anthropology* 21, no. 6 (1980): 831–35; Keith Thomas, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Book of Work*, ed. Keith Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xiv; Richard van Dülmen, “Arbeit in der frühneuzeitlichen Gesellschaft,” in *Geschichte und Zukunft der Arbeit*, ed. Jürgen Kocka and Klaus Offe (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1999), 80–87.

26 On this problem, see Wadauer, *Der Arbeit nachgehen*; Wadauer, *Erzeugung von Arbeit*.

27 Sebastian Conrad et al., “Die Kodifizierung der Arbeit: Individuum, Gesellschaft, Nation,” in *Geschichte und Zukunft der Arbeit*, ed. Jürgen Kocka and Klaus Offe (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1999), 449–75; Wadauer, *Erzeugung von Arbeit*.

28 Sigrid Wadauer et al., eds., *The History of Labour Intermediation: Institutions and Finding Employment in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2015);

this process, as it institutionalized work which not only required explicit and binding definitions and categorizations but also formal administrative procedures and measurements.

This produced work in a new and clearer sense (and, logically, practices which were not acknowledged as work). It was likewise the basis for statistical representations and research into abstract notions of work and social facts, such as labor force, labor market, or unemployment. At the same time, social policy established legitimate and appropriate forms of not working, such as the official status of unemployment or unemployability, leisure, childhood, retirement, etc. On the flipside of the coin, illegitimate and criminal forms of not working—such as vagrancy—were redefined and sanctions reorganized. In this course, work—understood as formally regulated, stable, vocational employment which provided sufficient income and the prospect of betterment and a career—became a dominant way to secure sustenance. In addition, it became a general model and scale for all kinds of activities which did not therefore remain unaltered.

However, this production of work was certainly neither a linear and necessary process nor solely an invention of state policies, social politicians, bureaucrats, or great thinkers.²⁹ It was not merely enforced in a “top down” manner, once and for all. The categories and distinctions as well as the legitimacy and hierarchies of practices relied on consensus and on conflict: they were (and remain) a result of a combination of ongoing struggles, negotiations, and everyday practices and presentations. After all, work (in this new sense) was never the only way people organized a way of making a living or wished to organize one.

A simple dichotomy between work versus non-work,³⁰ as is often implied in current debates on the history of work, omits the fact that there were always contested distinctions as well as varieties and hierarchies of work

Irina Vana, “Gebrauchsweisen der öffentlichen Arbeitsvermittlung (Österreich 1889–1938)” (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 2013).

29 A history of work from a long-term perspective has often been a history of ideas; see, e.g., Werner Conze, “Arbeit,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 1, ed. Otto Brunner et al. (Stuttgart: Klett, 1979), 154–215; Hans Frambach, *Arbeit im ökonomischen Denken: Zum Wandel des Arbeitsverständnisses von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Marburg: Metropolis, 1999).

30 Van der Linden includes “anti-work”; Marcel van der Linden, “Studying Attitudes to Work Worldwide, 1500–1650: Concepts, Sources, and Problems of Interpretation,” *International Review of Social History* 56, special issue 19 (2001): 25–43; I include “negative work,” see Sigrid Wadauer, “Mobility and Irregularities: Itinerant Sales in Vienna in the 1920s and 1930s,” in *Shadow Economies and Irregular Work in Urban Europe (16th to Early Twentieth Centuries)*, ed. Thomas Buchner and Philip R. Hoffmann-Rehnitz (Münster/New York: LIT, 2011), 197–216.

and non-work. At the same time, historical debates never exclusively refer to “work” or “labor.” We can find several practically and legally highly relevant notions and concepts, such as vocation, trade, earning, and honest livelihood. Differences, varieties, and hierarchies of practices have to be understood as *multidimensional*.³¹

Regulation and Documentation

The emergence of social security systems required and produced definitions, regulation, and documentation of work. However, this modern social policy was certainly not an absolute starting point for regulation³² or documentation that could serve diverse interests and purposes.³³

This can be illustrated by using the example of crafts and trades.³⁴ Over the course of early modernity, we can find an increasing number of written guild statutes, formal registrations of apprentices/apprenticeship contracts³⁵ and journeymen, and the right to work independently as masters. These all created the possibility for mediating conflicts, managing memberships, and establishing mutual obligations and transfers. They could also aim to restrict competition and to define illegitimate and irregular activities as *Störer* (literally: somebody who disturbs) or *Pfuscher* (the term describes an incompetent person, not formally trained or not belonging to a guild). Activities outside of guilds, however, were, as Josef Ehmer argues, not

31 This is illustrated by the chapters in Wadauer, *Erzeugung von Arbeit*. See also Sigrid Wadauer, “Immer nur Arbeit? Überlegungen zur Historisierung von Arbeit und Lebensunterhalten,” in *Semantiken von Arbeit: Diachrone und vergleichende Perspektiven*, ed. Jörn Leonhard and Willibald Steinmetz (Wien/Köln: Böhlau, 2016), 225–46.

32 Because of the modernist notion of formalization, Buchner and Hoffmann-Rehnitz suggest speaking of regular/irregular instead. Thomas Buchner and Philip R. Hoffmann-Rehnitz, “Introduction: Irregular Economic Practices as a Topic of Modern (Urban) History – Problems and Possibilities,” in *Shadow Economies and Irregular Work in Urban Europe*, ed. Buchner and Hoffmann-Rehnitz, 3–36.

33 On the history of codification, see, e.g., Joachim Rückert, ed., *Arbeit und Recht seit 1800: Historisch und vergleichend, europäisch und global* (Köln/Wien: Böhlau, 2014).

34 Josef Ehmer, “Traditionelles Denken und neue Fragestellungen zur Geschichte von Handwerk und Zunft,” in *Handwerk, Hausindustrie und die historische Schule der deutschen Nationalökonomie*, ed. Friedrich Lenger (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1998), 19–77; Josef Ehmer, “Zünfte in Österreich in der frühen Neuzeit,” in *Das Ende der Zünfte: Ein europäischer Vergleich*, ed. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2002), 87–126.

35 Georg Stöger and Reinhold Reith, “Actors and Practices of German Apprenticeship, Fifteenth–Nineteenth Centuries,” in *Apprenticeship in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Maarten Prak and Patrick Wallis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 138–62.

completely undocumented or unregulated, but (just like the economic status of members of the guilds) highly diverse. Such trades could be based on privileges and conducted under the protection of the court, the military, the nobility, or monasteries; they could also be performed without any permit and regulation.³⁶ As Thomas Buchner and Philip R. Hofman-Rehnitz highlight, the “irregular” only seems irregular from the outside.³⁷ According to Ehmer, a guild’s provisions were intended to find a *modus vivendi*, rather than manifesting a dichotomy between regulated and completely unregulated sections of the economy.

Over time, guild practices became more closely monitored and controlled by state authorities. The Trade Law (*Gewerbeordnung*) of 1859 abolished guilds and formulated general legal terms for starting and conducting a trade—differentiating between types of trades—as well as governing workers engaged in those trades. This law (which underwent several reforms in the following decades) transferred various tasks from guilds to trade associations. For instance, the associations now certified workers’ training, status, and employment. Not only were associations legally obliged to provide at least some support for workers and to organize job placement, they also had to mediate and decide on labor-related conflicts. According to the *Meldegeseztz* of 1857 (the law on registering and reporting of change of place, residency, and stay), all employers had to report to their municipalities on the comings and goings of journeymen, apprentices, servants, etc.³⁸ In addition, employers of more than twenty workers had to keep track of their employees.³⁹ The distinction between self-government and the administration of what emerged as a state government was not always obvious here: it was a matter of conflict.⁴⁰

Hence, even before social insurance and public job exchanges were established, individuals and their labor relations were regulated and registered in a variety of (sometime controversial or competing) ways. The fact that records were kept of those who belonged to a guild, a trade, or a vocation, or

36 Josef Ehmer, “‘Traditionelle’ Handwerker und ihre Zünfte als starke Akteure in der neuzeitlichen Expansion von Warenmärkten und Arbeitsmärkten,” in *Arbeit, Bevölkerung, Alter und Migration – historisch und im interkulturellen Vergleich: Eine persönliche Retrospektive. Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, Supplement no. 34 (2023): 251–52; Gustav Otruba: *Gewerbe und Zünfte in Niederösterreich* (St.Pölten/Wien: Niederösterreichisches Pressehaus, 1989), 26.

37 Buchner and Hoffmann-Rehnitz, “Introduction,” 18.

38 RGBl. 1857/33, § 12.

39 RGBl. 1859/227, § 83; This obligation was extended to all workshops with RGBl. 1885/22, § 88.

40 On this problem in general, see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Social Structures of the Economy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

who worked in a company, implied recognition. But while the emphasis was on legal certainty as well as on control, such registration did not necessarily establish social welfare or eliminate what in the late nineteenth century was called the workers' "insecurity of existence."⁴¹ This becomes more apparent when it came to the conflicts over the documents people had to carry around with them.

Contested Work Records

From the early eighteenth century, journeymen were obliged to own a *Kundschaft*, a certificate proving their regular training and employment and the orderly termination of such employment. (The enactment of this requirement led to protests.)⁴² In the 1820s, these documents were replaced by *Wanderbücher* (booklets serving as passports and work documents for traveling journeymen) issued by local authorities. After the abolition of guilds, *Arbeitsbücher* (labor booklets) became obligatory.⁴³ Initially they were stipulated for all skilled workers in crafts and factories, both men and women. Subsequently, this requirement was extended to include all regular employed workers, e.g., miners, seamen, and construction workers. Employees in sales positions and with better occupations needed different kinds of work certificates. Yet casual work of the "lowest kind" (as it was expressed) remained completely excluded from this regulation.

Officially, labor booklets issued by municipalities (which had to keep records on all documents issued) had various functions. Over time, they included more and more information, including personal data, training,

41 This phase can be found in various contexts, e.g., "Zur ersten Arbeiterversammlung," 1; in the 1891 "Erfurter Programm" of the German Social Democratic Party ("Das neue Programm," 11); in the Austrian Social Democratic press (e.g., "Sicherheit und Ordnung," *Arbeiterwille*, January 28, 1891, 1; "Zum Parteitage," *Arbeiterwille*, July 2, 1891, 2). It can also be found in publications of the Christian social labor movement, e.g., "Aus der Provinz," *Freiheit!* October 2, 1896, 3.

42 Sigrid Wadauer, "Einführung und/oder Abschaffung von Arbeitsbüchern als Innovation," *Administory. Zeitschrift für Verwaltungsgeschichte*, no. 6 (2021): 54–71; Sigrid Wadauer, "Contracts under Duress: Work Documents as a Matter and Means of Conflict in the Habsburg Monarchy/Austria in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in *Coercion and Wage Labor: Exploring Work Relations through History and Art*, ed. Anamarija Batista et al. (London: UCL, 2024), 51–78; Sigrid Wadauer, "Papers and Wages: Identity Documents and Work in Habsburg Austria during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century," in *The Value of Work since the Eighteenth Century: Custom, Conflict, Measurement and Theory*, ed. Massimo Asta and Pedro Ramos Pinto (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2023), 83–103.

43 RGL. 1859/227, § 74.

and vocation. In the case of minors, required to own labor booklets since 1885,⁴⁴ the parents' or a legal guardian's consent to their apprenticeship or employment could be noted.⁴⁵ The booklets of apprentices were supposed to contain basic information on the terms of their training, e.g., duration of their contract, board, and payment. In cases where these labor booklets served as travel documents, permits specifying the duration and destination of travel were entered by the authorities. The booklets also contained documentation of any consecutive formal employment. Employers were obliged to enter the place and date of employment while also specifying the position of the worker and remarks on his/her conduct. (Such certificates had to be validated by the trade associations or municipalities.)

In theory, these booklets—which had to be submitted to each employer and retained for as long the work contract lasted—were a precondition of regular employment. The booklets categorized and documented employment, and they were also regarded as a tool to enforce it. An excerpt from the Trade Law concerning the work contract and workers' rights and obligations was included in the form. I emphasize “in theory” because there were multiple violations of the regulations. Furthermore, large numbers of workers did not own this type of document, and many employers apparently did not ask for it. Nevertheless, work contracts issued without the stipulated documents were still regarded as valid. Even when no explicit (written or oral) agreement was made—which was obviously not uncommon—the terms and conditions of employment, defined as usual or customary, were applicable, and so we cannot regard the system as completely unregulated. Yet, lack of documentation made it more difficult to enforce specific agreements.⁴⁶ This was a problem for workers, and it was also perceived as risky by employers' organizations, which highly recommended insisting on written confirmation of agreements and work regulations.⁴⁷ Companies kept accounts, and they did register and document their workers for their own purposes, but not always in congruence with the ways stipulated by the Trade Law.⁴⁸

44 RGBL 1885/22, §§ 80 and 93.

45 Specific labor cards for children were introduced in 1919. StGBL 1919/103. Already in 1868 (CLIV Sitzung des Abgeordnetenhauses) specific labor booklets for children were in discussion. “Verhandlungen des Reichsraths,” *Die Presse*, December 18, 1868, 19.

46 The term *Schwarzarbeit* (literally: “black work”) only came up in interwar years or even later, when insurances were established more broadly.

47 “Die Normal-Arbeitsordnung,” *Die Arbeit*, October 6, 1909, 2; “Die letzte Normalarbeitsordnung der ‘Hauptstelle,’” *Die Arbeit*, February 8, 1914, 2.

48 Examples of that can be found in the Trade Inspectors' Reports, e.g., *Bericht der k.k. Gewerbe-Inspektoren über Ihre Amtstätigkeit im Jahre 1908* (Wien: k.k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1909), CXXXII–III.

Documents and work records required by the Trade Law were supposed to distinguish the decent, diligent worker both from one who did not receive a certificate because they had breached a contract (an offense against the Trade Law and a public order offense, for which one could be arrested) and one who did not work regularly, the “work-shy” or vagabond. Authorities and employers’ representatives argued that the work record allowed them to identify suitable, reliable workers while also protecting the bone fide workers, permitting those workers to move about freely and qualify for adequate positions and pursue a career. Documents were also required in order to officially get support,⁴⁹ to register as a work seeker at trade associations’ lodgings or the labor exchange, and to receive shelter and board at relief stations for traveling work seekers (*Naturalverpflegsstationen*).⁵⁰ At the end of the nineteenth century, such registers were used to create statistics on work seekers, unemployment, and job placement—in other words, a first attempt to describe/construct a labor market.⁵¹

However, there was no consensus on the advantages and benefits of work documents or the documentation of employment (something we are nowadays used to as part and parcel of social security schemes). Organized workers emphasized, rather, the coercive and harmful aspects of documentation, which exposed them to arbitrary judgment. Being dismissed from or quitting work, how frequently they changed posts, the periods of time

49 Being able to identify oneself as journeymen had been a way to receive support from fellows and masters of one’s vocation already in the times of the guild system. The amount and binding character of such a support varied according to the trade. To accept an open position was a requirement. The custom of giving a *Geschenk* or *viaticum* (travel allowance) for work-seeking journeymen persisted until the twentieth century.

50 Even before unemployment benefits were established, joblessness or mobility were not *per se* undefined statuses; they could but did not automatically lead to disaffiliation, as Castel suggests. Journeymen’s tramping was defined, organized, and supported within the context of crafts. The establishment of labor booklets and relief stations adapted this system. They were justified as a measure to systematically identify and distinguish unemployed workers from work-shy vagrants, those without booklets and without access to relief stations. Although it seems highly implausible that journeymen or workers could survive with only the support which relief stations for unemployed wayfarers provided, numbers on convictions for vagrancy (not begging) declined from the 1880s on. In interwar Austria, in more than 1,000 court records on vagrancy from interwar Austria, I found almost none with valid wayfarers’ relief books (*Wanderbücher*), which defined the status of workseekers who received no unemployment benefit but who still had access to relief stations (*Herbergen*). See Wadauer, *Der Arbeit nachgehen*, chapter II.

51 On this problem see, e.g., Thomas Buchner, “Arbeitsmärkte ordnen oder konstruieren? Öffentliche Arbeitsnachweise in Deutschland (circa 1890 bis 1914),” *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 100, no. 3 (2013): 292–310; Sigrid Wadauer, “Tramping in Search of Work: Practices of Wayfarers and of Authorities (Austria 1880–1938),” in *The History of Labor Intermediation*, ed. Sigrid Wadauer et al., 286–334.

they went without a job, the amount of short-term as well as permanent employment—these factors could all be interpreted differently and held against a worker. Additionally, employers were accused of misusing these documents, such as by refusing to return them to the worker after termination of employment, issuing unfavorable certificates, or using secret codes to stigmatize workers (especially organized workers). Hence, labor booklets were criticized as being a means of repression and also a form of humiliation. They reduced the worker, as some formulated it, to the same level as servants, prostitutes, or even slaves. In this sense, organized workers expressed their understanding of a hierarchy of work and status.

Fewer Rights, Less Regulation?

In many respects, servants (I will not address the documentation and regulation of prostitution or slavery here) faced requirements of registration and documentation similar to those of workers in trades, but did not have equal status and rights.⁵² Since early modernity, one can find various enactments by authorities of rules for regulating labor relations, work contracts, and termination of contracts.⁵³ Laws for servants of the nineteenth century stipulated that booklets should be carried quite similar in form and function to labor booklets.⁵⁴ They were a legal requirement for obtaining a formal post or contract. It was recommended that servants enter information on advances and contractual terms in these documents. Likewise, the documentation of posts and work certificates (which focused on conduct and performance) were obligatory. Employers had to register servants with the municipality in charge of writing down or verifying certificates in the booklets. (Some of the booklets I found in archives also included entries on time spent outside of employment, e.g., stays with families.)

52 Jessica Richter, *Die Produktion besonderer Arbeitskräfte: Auseinandersetzungen um den häuslichen Dienst in Österreich (1880–1938)* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2024), particularly chapter 2.

53 Hugo Morgenstern, *Österreichisches Gesinderecht: Handbuch und systematische Darstellung des gesamten, in Österreich geltenden Gesinderechtes nach den bestehenden 24 Dienstbotenordnungen einschließlich der Gesindepolitik und des Verfahrens in Gesindestreitigkeiten* (Wien: Hölder, 1912); Hugo Morgenstern, *Gesindewesen und Gesinderecht in Österreich* (Wien: Hölder, 1902); Thomas Pierson, *Das Gesinde und die Herausbildung moderner Privatrechtsprinzipien* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2016).

54 Dorothea Wiesenberger, “Das Dienstbotenbuch: Ein Beitrag zum steirischen Dienstbotengewesen von 1857 bis 1922,” *Mitteilungen des Steiermärkischen Landearchivs* 34 (1984): 113–36.

Like labor booklets, such documents were used to stabilize employment even against the servant's will.⁵⁵ Contracts running over a longer period of time—more common in rural than in domestic service—could represent some form of security (e.g., sustenance during wintertime). Yet they could also represent coercive aspects, since “running away” without a legitimate reason was an offense.

Hence, although service did not fit well into emerging notions of waged labor, it would be highly misleading to regard it as undocumented or unregulated. Servants were not without basic rights, and they could file complaints. However, there was no institution like trade inspectors who could supervise working conditions and enforce regulations in the workplace, or who might be addressed in cases of conflict. Service did not entail the same entitlements and emerging forms of social security as work in the trades and crafts, where insurances for sickness and work accidents had been established in the 1880s. For example, provisions for servants who took ill remained in the hands of employers until the First Republic, at which point servants were finally included in public health (1921) and accident insurance (1935) programs. Servants and agricultural laborers were also not given access to the relief stations for work-seeking wayfarers that had been established in the 1880s. It was argued that they did not need to search for work that way. (Private placement services and the abuses that took place in this context were nonetheless an important topic of debate on labor intermediation, in Austria as in other countries. Specific forms of intermediation seemed necessary.) Even in the interwar years, servants and agricultural laborers remained excluded from unemployment insurance. (The same applied to all workers in predominantly rural districts.) Whereas the labor booklets were abolished in 1919—symbolizing a new area of social legislation and a strengthened labor movement—servants' booklets remained obligatory until 1920, in smaller municipalities and some federal provinces (*Bundesländer*) even until 1926.⁵⁶ Labor booklets for agricultural laborers were reintroduced again in some federal provinces in the 1930s. Like workers, servants did organize politically, but to a much lesser extent.⁵⁷

All in all, the regulation, codification, registration, and documentation of labor relations were a matter of security, yet these could refer to public

55 Staying over winter could be seen as favorable in respect to service in the context of agriculture. Norbert Ortmayr, “Ländliches Gesinde in Oberösterreich 1918–1938,” in *Familienstruktur und Arbeitsorganisation in ländlichen Gesellschaften*, ed. Josef Ehmer and Michael Mitterauer (Wien/Köln: Böhlau, 1986), 325–416.

56 StGBL. 1920/101; StGBL. 1920/144; BGBL. 1926/72.

57 See Richter, *Produktion*.

order and legal security as well. They included to some extent workers' or servants' social security, entitlements, and rights, but did not necessarily emphasize these aspects. Fewer rights did not necessarily go along with less regulation or documentation. Nor was formalization the same as accumulation of social rights.

Regulation of Self-Employment

The trend towards more detailed regulation was also not restricted to waged employment. This can be illustrated with respect to self-employment, which in current debates is often closely related to or even equated with informal work or the informal economy.⁵⁸ In the historiography of work, however, self-employment has not been a prominent topic.

In the lives of workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, self-employment was not an uncommon way of earning income. It could represent a temporary or makeshift solution but also betterment or pursuit of a career,⁵⁹ although it was not necessarily a step from formal to informal work. In Austria, even the most precarious trades, such as peddling, street vending,⁶⁰ busking, shoe-shining, etc., were not unregulated, undocumented, or unorganized. Such activities required almost no capital and no fixed location, and often no formal training, while offering (when conducted within the limits of legality) little income. But from the nineteenth century onwards, a growing number of regulations and enactments defined the requirements, terms, and conditions of conducting trades in general and of the aforementioned itinerant trades in particular: specified were age, nationality, training, physical fitness (some trades were reserved for old and invalid persons), goods (type, origin, amount) and services, geographical areas and places, means of transportation, possible employees, etc. Applying

58 See Sigrid Wadauer, "Einen Erwerb ergreifen: Auseinandersetzungen über die Möglichkeiten und Bedingungen eines selbständigen Lebensunterhaltes," in *Erzeugung von Arbeit*, ed. Wadauer, 171–220.

59 See, e.g., Wenzel Holek, *Lebensgang eines deutsch-tschechischen Handarbeiters. Mit einem Vorwort*, ed. Paul Göhre (Jena: Diederichs, 1909).

60 John Cross, "Street Vendors, Modernity and Postmodernity: Conflict and Compromise in the Global Economy," *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 20, no. ½ (2000): 29–51; Gracia Clark, ed., *Traders Versus the State: Anthropological Approaches to Unofficial Economies* (Boulder/Colorado: Westview, 1988); John Cross and Alfonso Morales, eds., *Street Entrepreneurs: People, Place and Politics in Local and Global Perspective* (London/New York: Routledge, 2007); Kristina Graaff and Noa Ha, ed., *Street Vending in the Neoliberal City: A Global Perspective on the Practices and Policies of a Marginalized Economy* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2015).

for a trade permit could be comparatively easy in respect to some “free trades,” even those without a permanent base such as traveling marketers. But it could also require an extensive bureaucratic procedure when it came to some other trades like peddling, shoe shining, busking, etc. Additionally, some trades required the worker to frequently register, validate, and renew the permit. The more precarious and controversial a trade was, the more administrative effort it entailed. Trades in general required membership in a trade association, and it is possible to find occupational self-organizations even of peddlers, which had no formal trade association until the 1930s. Representing their members’ interests against those of potential competitors, such organizations advocated (particularly after World War One) even stricter rules and more restricted access to permits.

Conducting business without a permit could be punished with fines or the confiscation of goods. In this respect, making the effort to apply for an official permit made sense. Nevertheless, as we can conclude from the complaints of peddlers and traveling marketers, a permit did not protect from harassment by the authorities or by competitors. Strict regulations did not prevent irregular activities and could not safeguard tradespeople from prejudice and defamation. From the perspective of small shopkeepers and traders in a fixed location, any self-employment outside of workshops and stores was considered underregulated or unmonitored. Itinerant traders were frequently depicted as nuisances on the verge of begging, avoiding decent work, or engaging in illegitimate competition. They were accused of selling goods of low quality, of fencing, fraud, usury, or tax evasion, of violating the trade regulations, etc. Compared to trades established in a stable location, they allegedly did not face the same tax burden, restrictions, and expenses regarding employees.

In the long run, sedentary tradespeople were successful in their call for stricter formal regulations to be imposed on their itinerant competitors. Apart from competition, however, other agendas also impacted the development of regulations, such as public health and hygiene concerns, the regulation of national markets, consumer protection, and (last but not least) antisemitic or antiziganist stereotypes of certain trades. As a result, the landscape of trades diversified and significantly changed from the end of the nineteenth century on. In the interwar years, some permits, e.g., for peddling, became almost a privilege awarded to unemployable individuals who were not able to make a living otherwise, war invalids in particular. Those trades were represented and justified by officialdom as an exceptional substitute for work and social welfare. (Self-employment in general was only included in public social insurance schemes after World

War Two.)⁶¹ Practiced within the limits of legal regulations, they offered only a meagre income.

In sum, trade regulations show that more regulation and formal requirements did not necessarily imply more social security or a “decent” income. Of course, trades were not always conducted within the limits of the law or with a permit.⁶² Since the administrative burden was huge while at the same time the chances of getting such a permit—which legally promised very little—were small, the regulations could also provoke people to engage in irregular activities.

Enforcing, Violating, and Ignoring Regulations

Many of the laws and regulations on trades and labor I have sketched out had very little efficacy and did not reduce vulnerability. Firstly, this was the case because social policy of the nineteenth century—e.g., labor protection or insurances—often covered just a minority of workers.⁶³ What is more: publications on social legislation, trade inspectors’ reports, and court cases documented numerous violations of the law, indicating openly challenging or totally ignoring regulations. Often it seemed that certain measures of social policy merely existed on paper and that the authorities lacked the power and tools to enforce them.

It will likely come as no surprise that employers tended to ignore regulations and violated rules in multiple ways for profit since it was convenient and not very risky to do so. Trade inspectors—established by law in 1883⁶⁴—could only report, not sanction; moreover, they were few in comparison to the number of enterprises. Nor did they include larger areas of labor relations. Their reports also highlighted how trade associations neglected their duties and how even municipalities did not necessarily work according to the rules. (Some municipalities, for instance, refused to

61 Roman Sandgruber, “Soziale Sicherheit für Handels- und Gewerbetreibende,” in *Soziale Sicherheit im Nachziehverfahren: Die Einbeziehung der Bauern, Landarbeiter, Gewerbetreibenden und Hausgehilfen in das System der österreichischen Sozialversicherung*, ed. Ernst Bruckmüller et al. (Salzburg: Neugebauer, 1978), 130–73.

62 Wadauer, *Der Arbeit nachgehen*.

63 Special-Comité für Socialökonomie, Hygiene und öffentliches Hilfswesen, ed., *Sociale Verwaltung in Oesterreich am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts: Aus Anlass der Weltausstellung Paris 1900* (Wien/Leipzig: Deuticke, 1900); Béla Tomka, *A Social History of Twentieth-Century Europe* (London/New York: Routledge, 2013).

64 RGL. 1883/117; BGBl. 1921/402.

issue work documents, or they issued the wrong documents, or they failed to register workers and servants.) Unsurprisingly, workers themselves also did not always stick to the rules and apparently did not feel obliged to do so. The work contract, it was argued, should not be binding for the weaker party of an agreement.⁶⁵ Moreover, some forms of social security that we nowadays are used to seeing as major historical achievements—such as public insurance schemes—were not universally approved of, either collectively or by individuals.

Social reform served various purposes, as it was not exclusively and directly a product of class struggles. State social policies—as some authors contend⁶⁶—aimed at safeguarding an exploitable labor force against unlimited exploitation by individual capitalists. They were thus an attempt to pacify and integrate workers while also securing social order. Such policies were also a product of competition between various sectors of employers (small shopkeepers and tradespeople versus factory owners), between conservative political parties and liberal ones, between different sectors of the workforce, and/or between states. (Protection of women and children can serve as an example in this case.)⁶⁷

65 Isidor Ingwer, *Der sogenannte Arbeitsvertrag: Eine sozialpolitische Studie* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Metallarbeiter, 1895), 32; see also Gustav Schmoller, "Die Natur des Arbeitsvertrages und der Kontraktbruch," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft* 30, no. 3/4 (1874): 470.

66 The literature is extensive, see, e.g., Georg Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social: The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Herbert Obinger and Klaus Petersen, "Die historische Entwicklung des Wohlfahrtsstaates: Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Goldenen Zeitalters," in *Handbuch Sozialpolitik*, ed. Herbert Obinger and Manfred G. Schmidt (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019), 9–31. On Austria, see, e.g., Gerhard Melinz, "Von der Armenfürsorge zur Sozialhilfe: Zur Interaktionsgeschichte von 'erstem' und 'zweitem' sozialen Netz in Österreich am Beispiel der Erwachsenenfürsorge im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert" (unpublished *Habilitationsschrift*, Wien, 2003); Gerald Stourzh, "Zur Institutionengeschichte der Arbeitsbeziehungen und der sozialen Sicherung: Eine Einführung," in *Historische Wurzeln der Sozialpartnerschaft*, ed. Gerald Stourzh and Margarete Grandner (Wien: Geschichte und Politik, 1986), 13–37; Peter Lachnit, "Staatliche Sozialpolitik für und gegen die Arbeiterschaft: Arbeiterbewegung und Sozialversicherung in Österreich von den Anfängen bis 1918" (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 1989); Susan Zimmermann, "Armen- und Sozialpolitik in Ungarn im Vergleich zu Österreich," in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. IX, *Soziale Strukturen*, 1. Teilband: *Von der feudal-agrarischen zur bürgerlich-industriellen Gesellschaft*, ed. Helmut Rumppler and Peter Urbanitsch (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 1465–1535; Emmerich Tálos and Karl Wörster, *Soziale Sicherung im Sozialstaat Österreich: Entwicklung – Herausforderungen – Strukturen* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1994).

67 See, e.g., Theresa Wobbe et al., "Nationale und globale Deutungsmodelle des Geschlechts im arbeitsstatistischen sowie arbeitsrechtlichen Klassifikationssystem: Ein vergleichstheoretischer Beitrag (1882–1992)," *Soziale Welt* 68 (2017): 63–85.

Because of multiple experiences with political repression, organized workers were—for some time—highly skeptical of state policies. The constitutional right to organize, established in 1867,⁶⁸ allowed workers to develop their own system of self-help. Replacing them with public insurances, it was suspected, might take away their political control over such funds. They wished to unburden the municipalities which were in charge of poor relief and instead assign the costs to workers.⁶⁹ Nor was support regarded as sufficient when compared to the costs. Organized workers also did not want to give up their influence over support in cases of unemployment or labor intermediation, for doing so would undermine their capacity to strike and/or to boycott employers. None of this seemed to change until around the turn of the century when labor parties became represented in parliament and involved in boards on social policy. Even Social Democrats then became proud of the state's achievements.⁷⁰

Analogously, such ambivalences can also be illustrated when citing autobiographical accounts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many authors describe the multiple ways in which they made a living throughout their lives.⁷¹ Individuals often switched between posts, between categories of employment (work/service/self-employment), between documented and undocumented activities, and between relatively stable employment and more casual forms that were on the verge of begging or even illegality. In their work lives they combined a mixture of income sources and support from various sides. Stable, regular employment—if available—was not always or in every situation their first choice. As mentioned above, stable employment came with obligations (e.g., providing periods of notice) while at the same time labor conditions in such employment were not always good, not offering much in the way of security. It was also time-consuming to successfully file complaints against employers.⁷² Because of its repressive or humiliating aspects (e.g., of relief stations or labor exchanges), formal support or welfare was also not the first choice for many, either.⁷³ However,

68 RGBL 1867/142.

69 I. Popp and G. Häfner, ed., *Verhandlungen des Parteitages der österreichischen Sozialdemokratie in Hainfeld* (Wien: Bretschneider, 1889): 49–51.

70 See, Lachnit, *Sozialpolitik*, 178.

71 Holek, *Lebensgang* is an example of that.

72 Jodlbauer's account illustrates how difficult it was to insist on rights. Josef Jodlbauer, *Ein Mensch zieht in die Welt/Ein Mensch sieht die Welt: Selbstbiographie eines Altösterreicher*, unpublished typescript, *Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen* (Universität Wien, 1947–1948), 120, 150.

73 Karl Steinhardt, *Lebenserinnerungen eines Wiener Arbeiters*, ed. Manfred Mugrauer (Wien: Alfred-Klahr-Ges., 2013), 110–11; Jodlbauer, *Ein Mensch*, 118; Josef Winkler, *Ohne Titel*, unpublished

the opportunity and willingness to change and maneuver between such possibilities certainly varied, and life course and family context were crucial for that.

Regulations were not uncontested. Nor is it clear whether they were enforced or even noticed. However patchy and weak the enforcement of them was, legal regulations nonetheless still had an impact. They clearly created possibilities: for violating the rules, and for observing, reporting, and sanctioning such violations. And they were a tool in conflicts as well as a point of reference for defining, distinguishing between, and justifying activities.⁷⁴ In the process, multiple sources emerged in which irregular or allegedly undocumented activities were then addressed and assessed. These ranged from political debates in parliament and in newspapers, to administrative files, trade inspector reports, court cases, and statistics. Police records and litigation on violations of the Vagrancy Act likewise document highly ambiguous practices in which individuals engaged outside of employment and usually without valid work documents or trade permits. They document negotiations regarding the character, legality, and legitimacy of such practices. Apart from notions of work, concepts of trade, honest livelihood, entitlement obligations to care for others, and necessity played a role here.⁷⁵

A trade was legally defined by the intention to make a profit independently; it should not be an occasional activity or a favor; it could not be immoral; it did not just cover one's own needs.⁷⁶ A trade or craft conducted without an official permit was regarded as illicit, a violation of the Trade Law, though it was still regarded as trade, or at least was not regarded as a violation of the Vagrancy Act. Legal commentaries emphasized that an activity which could in principle be legally allowed (such as busking, peddling, itinerant crafts), could not be dishonest.⁷⁷ However, my analysis of police and court records from interwar Austria shows that apart from the amount and regularity of income, also the degree of destitution played a role in practice. Additionally, individuals labeled as "Gypsies" were more likely

manuscript, *Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen* (Universität Wien, 1996), 14, 21.

74 On such problems, see Pierre Bourdieu, "Das Recht und die Umgehung des Rechts," in *Pierre Bourdieu: Neue Perspektiven für die Soziologie der Wirtschaft*, ed. Michael Florian and Frank Hillebrandt (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006), 19–41.

75 I described the aspects which led to sentence or acquittal in my book, *Der Arbeit nachgehen*.

76 Wadauer, *Der Arbeit nachgehen*, 87; Alois Heilinger, *Österreichisches Gewerberecht: Kommentar der Gewerbeordnung*, ed. Michael Plachy and Alois Tischler, 3rd edition (Wien: Manz, 1909), 8–9.

77 Honest livelihood in the sense of the Vagrancy Act could also represent entitlements on support by others (relief stations, trades associations, family).

to be defined as “vagabonds” than others. The fact that such individuals were often in possession of formal permits was discussed as problematic, since—as the provincial government of Carinthia highlighted in 1923—it made it difficult for the authorities to persecute, expel, or forcefully remove them within the framework of the law.⁷⁸

Conclusion

In the preceding sections, I have addressed a broad variety of rules and regulations which could serve different and contradictory purposes and interests. Should a history of formal work instead just focus on specific rules and regulations related to social protection? Key elements of “decent” and formal labor, as defined by the ILO today, have already been mentioned—for example in Ludwig Brügel’s book from 1919 on social ideas and legislation in Austria between 1848 and 1918. In this book Brügel outlines the scope of social policy in European states. He points to the regulation of working hours and the implementation of Sunday rest; to the social protection of women and minors; to health and accidents insurances; to provisions against the hardships of unemployment, old age, and invalidity; to the monitoring of working conditions by labor inspectorates; and to conflict mediation by arbitration courts.⁷⁹ However, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writings on work and labor—such as the chapter on *Arbeitsrecht* (labor law)⁸⁰ in Ernst Mischler’s and Josef Ulbrich’s widely disseminated handbook of legal and political terms *Österreichisches Staatswörterbuch*, also address a much broader range of different types of laws and regulations, such as the Civil Code, Trade Laws, Servants’ Ordinance, right of residence (*Heimatrecht*), specific regulations on social security, and the Penal Code. Those altogether—directly and indirectly—defined the possibilities, rights, obligations, and constraints of work and sustenance. From this perspective, restricting our discussion on the history of formal/informal work to aspects of regulation we see as relevant today, would appear arbitrary and anachronistic.

78 Kärntner Landesarchiv, BH Hermagor, Sch. 119, J1 13262/23, Zl. 8142/Präs. Klagenfurt am 19. Dez. 1923, *Zigeunerwesen, Bekämpfung desselben*. (Circular to district authorities).

79 Ludwig Brügel, *Soziale Gesetzgebung in Österreich von 1848 bis 1918: Eine geschichtliche Darstellung* (Wien/Leipzig: Deuticke, 1919), 12.

80 Ernst Mischler, “Arbeitsrecht,” in *Österreichisches Staatswörterbuch: Handbuch des gesamten österreichischen öffentlichen Rechtes*, ed. Ernst Mischler and Josef Ulbrich, 2nd edition, vol. 1 (Wien: Hölder 1905), 146–318.

In this chapter I have tried to nail down my concerns on the usefulness of the term “informal work” from a long-term historical perspective. (I am aware that I have touched on various huge areas of research here.) Current notions of informal/formal work bring a range of assumptions and expectations which seem inapplicable to the time period addressed here and as a result produce various blind spots.

Firstly, the concept of “informal work” neglects the fact that not all activities nowadays subsumed under the term were equally acknowledged as work at the time; moreover, it tends to overlook the historical production of such notions, distinctions, and hierarchies.

Secondly, legal regulation and documentation were not per se benign and uncontested. Seen from a historical perspective, regulation and documentation could serve diverse purposes and interests. They could just as well imply coercion or produce precarity; they did not necessarily imply social security for workers.

Thirdly, regulations were not enforced strictly, yet struggles over regulations produced multiple sources. As a result, practices that did not fit under what we might understand as “formal work” were not undocumented at all; rather, they were frequently addressed and evaluated.

Fourthly, differences between and hierarchies of practices did not relate exclusively to *work*. In the decades addressed in this chapter, we can find several relevant concepts and notions apart from work, such as trade, livelihood, and honest living. These were substantial and determined the legitimacy and legality of practices.

Consequently, I would suggest that we should avoid projecting current concepts of formal/informal work onto historical practices. Rather, we should instead investigate struggles over documentation and regulation and reconstruct the emergence of (and changes in) notions of livelihood and work which were neither linear nor necessary.

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4. The Political Economy of Informal Crafting Commerce in Helsinki at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Leena Enbom

Abstract: At the turn of the twentieth century, Helsinki was an expanding city in an early phase of industrialization. A substantial share of its population remained on the margins of the formal labor market, engaging in the home-based production of clothing, household textiles, and utility items. These activities largely took place outside recognized employment relations, and participants often lacked occupational titles in population registers. This chapter examines the functioning of the informal labor market connected to remunerated handicrafts and needlework, practices especially common among the urban poor. Drawing on local administrative records and poor-relief case files, it investigates the number and social background of participants, their labor relations, and the role of charities as intermediaries linking self-employed homeworkers to their commissioners.

Keywords: homeworkers, handicrafts, informal labor, charities, urban poverty

In 1913, a government-commissioned social investigator, Vera Hjelt—the first female labor inspector in Finland—forecasted the growth of industrial homework in Finland over the following decades. At the time, Finland was in the early stages of industrialization, and systematic investigations into labor conditions among home industry participants had not been conducted.

Marti, Sibylle, and Christof Dejung, eds. *Informal Work in Europe, ca. 1870–1970*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press / Central European University Press, 2026.

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Hjelt's assessment, based on discussions of labor conditions in Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Scandinavia, suggested that industrial homework would become a relevant issue in industrializing Finland.¹

Contrary to these predictions, industrial homework did not become widespread in Finland. Finland was a country of late but rapid industrialization and urbanization. At the turn of the twentieth century, Finland was one of the poorest countries in Europe. It had an economic structure that relied heavily on agriculture but on few industries, most importantly on the forestry and timber industry. Meanwhile, Finland's social legislation was embryonic and did not provide social protection to most of its population. On the eve of World War One, Finland lacked sickness, old-age, and unemployment insurance. Although an accident compensation law was enacted in 1896, it only covered a limited segment of the population in steady employment.²

In these circumstances, home-based work was far from being insignificant to households. Rather than industrial homework, various handicrafts became crucial sources of income for the lower classes and individuals with limited access to the formal labor market. Conducted within the confines of homes, this type of work remained largely invisible, with low and irregular incomes going unreported and untaxed. Population registrars and census authorities showed little interest in such activities, often dismissing them as insignificant sidelines rather than proper occupations. Consequently, remunerated handicrafts and other forms of home-based work remained absent from population statistics and were marginalized in formal economic discussions.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Finland was a peripheral economy, in which a certain part of economic activity took place under informal conditions. Although it had a few rapidly developing and expanding industries, Finland's economy retained features of proto-industrialism. Compared to Western European economies, Finland had no consumer society, and many consumer goods were still fabricated using methods based on handicrafts rather than on industrial production. In his study on the industrial revolution in London, L.D. Schwarz has argued that as soon as a product came onto the mass market, its manufacture was liable to become sweated.³ In the Finnish

1 Vera Hjelt, *Undersökning af nälarbeterskornas yrkesförhållanden i Finland* (Helsinki: Edlundska Bokhandeln, 1908); Vera Hjelt, *Det industriella hemarbetet: föredrag* (Helsingfors: Föreningen för arbetareskydd och socialförsäkring i Finland, 1913).

2 Michael Huberman and Wayne Lewchuk, "European Economic Integration and the Labor Compact, 1850–1913," *European Review of Economic History* 7, no. 1 (2003): 10–11.

3 L.D. Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labor Force, and Living Conditions, 1700–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 203.

case of the limited consumption market, it is more accurate to speak of the self-exploitation of craftswomen and artisans and not of sweated outwork.

Late nineteenth-century Helsinki was a rapidly growing capital in an agriculturally dominated country. The industrial sector was an amalgam of modern technologies but also of more traditional production methods. The service sector was relatively small. Helsinki was a city of general labor, i.e., an urban center with a large population of laborers without a trade-specific occupation. Meanwhile, Helsinki was a highly socially segmented community. It was the only city in Finland with both a considerable clerical elite and a large middle-class population. At the same time, it had a large population of unskilled laborers, while nearly 10% of the population, according to official records, consisted of household heads without occupation.⁴ Although a relatively large share of the population had no officially registered source of income, this does not mean they were economically inactive. The figures suggest that the urban economy of late nineteenth-century Helsinki had room for marginalized non-registered tertiary activities. Home-based work, as part of these tertiary activities, was an arena of diversified endeavors, sometimes referred to as small trades.

This chapter delves into the dynamics of home-based work in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Helsinki. First, it provides an estimate of the extent of home-based work in early industrial Helsinki; second, it highlights the diverse production modes present in home-based labor; third, it analyzes the sociodemographic characteristics of participants in these trades—including age, household composition, and working ability—in order to capture the varied profiles within this group and to identify the drivers behind their involvement in such labor; and fourth, it examines the role of charitable organizations as intermediaries in facilitating home-based work among the urban poor, addressing questions of agency, exploitation, and the broader socio-economic structures that shaped informal labor practices. Through these inquiries, the chapter aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding poverty, informal labor, and charity assistance in the context of urban industrialization.

In this chapter, “home industries” is used as an umbrella term to encompass both unique, small-scale artisanal types of work and extensive forms of serial production carried out within the home.⁵ By definition, it is a

4 Statistical Yearbook Helsinki (*Statistik årsbok för Helsingfors stad*), 1942/1943, Table 28, based on the 1870–1930 censuses.

5 The Finnish language does not distinguish between industrial homework and remunerated handicrafts. For instance, City of Helsinki administrators used the term “home industry”

concept emphasizing the place of production (home) and the method of production (preparation by hand or with a minor apparatus). In general, it subsumes a heterogeneous group of practices ranging from small-scale and occasional making do's to more stable family workshops.

Home-based production in Helsinki was largely unregistered work carried out by women in diverse employment settings and, as such, cannot be fully captured through official sources such as census statistics, population registers, or tax records. Historians of women's labor have long recognized these limitations and developed various techniques to address them in order to clarify the obscured contours of women's participation in the labor market. For example, Lotta Vikström devised methods to adjust statistics on women's occupations and labor market participation in late nineteenth-century Sweden by contrasting how women's occupational titles were represented across different records.⁶ Inspired by her approach, this chapter does not privilege so-called official sources, which offer little insight into the actual contributions of female home industry workers. Instead, estimates of participation in home industries are drawn primarily from housing surveys, samples of charitable poor relief case files, and alternative readings of census statistics. Bringing together the evidence provided by these sources serves above all to make women's otherwise invisible work visible within the urban economy.

Meanwhile, charitable and poor relief case files are applied as core sources to study the nature of home industry. The collected material is structured into two small datasets. The first dataset (Dataset A), which is the primary focus of analysis, represents recipients of charitable poor relief, containing 37 cases of home industry participants from the years 1895–1905; the second dataset (Dataset B), which serves as a reference point mirroring the analysis of the first sample, represents recipients assisted by the municipal welfare office, containing 28 cases of home industry participants from the years 1926–1936.⁷ These datasets were generated by first randomly selecting a

(*kotiteollisuus*) for industrial homework, remunerated handicrafts, or the activities promoted by the home-industry movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the Swedish language—the other official language of Finland—distinguished between industrial homework (*hemindustri*) and cottage industry (*hemslöjd*).

6 Lotta Vikström, "Different Sources, Different Answers: Aspects on Women's Work in Sundsvall, Sweden, 1860–1893," *Interchange* 34, no. 2 (2003): 241–59.

7 The Dataset A is drawn from Helsinki City Archives, Charity Organization Society (COS) of Helsinki (*Föreningen för välgörehentens ordnande i Helsingfors*), poor relief case files, 1895–1905; Dataset B is drawn from Helsinki City Archives, Helsinki Welfare Office, poor relief case files from the years 1927, 1933, and 1936.

number of cases from poor relief recipients, and then by specifically focusing on those engaged in home-based work. The analysis employs thematic coding and classification of textual material, presenting findings through tables and quantified descriptions. Key variables, such as the types of home-based work and production methods, their duration and regularity, the presence of middlemen, and the health status of the applicants, were recorded and analyzed. These datasets offer insights into the survival strategies of the most impoverished individuals and into the structural dynamics of Helsinki's urban economy, encompassing workers, customers, subscribers, intermediaries, and the institutional framework.

Home-Industry Participants—Who and How Many?

Like most female-dominated occupations of the time, home industries comprised a highly under-registered field in urbanizing Finland. Married women who participated in home industries of any kind were usually recorded as “wives” in official registers. The absence of an occupational title also applied to a widow or single mother acting as a head of a household, although to a lesser extent. In real life, working-class women were usually engaged in various occupational activities in order to sustain their families. This was a common phenomenon among all industrializing Western countries. Discussing France, for example, Jean-Paul Burdy emphasizes that “activities of the needle” were notably non-existent in any registers, even though it would have been exceptional for a working-class woman not to work after her marriage. The term “activities of the needle,” in this context, refers to all occupational activities relating to textile and thread performed at home and offered to private clientele.⁸ Note that sewing itself encompasses a variety of subfields based on different techniques (e.g., line sewing, embroidery, dressmaking). These subfields provided participant women with many different ways of earning money.⁹ And, although sewing has perhaps

8 Jean-Paul Burdy, *Le Soleil noir. Un quartier de Saint-Etienne 1840–1940* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1989), 39.

9 Malin Nilsson, “Taking Work Home: Labor Dynamics of Women Industrial Homeworkers in Sweden during the Second Industrial Revolution” (PhD diss., University of Gothenburg, 2015); Malin Nilsson et al., eds., *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers 1800–2021*, Studies in Global Social History 45 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2022). In the Finnish context, this area has been broadly studied by Eliza Kraatari, *Domestic Dexterity and Cultural Policy: The Idea of Cottage Industry and Historical Experience in Finland from the Great Famine to the Reconstruction Period*, Jyväskylä Studies in Education, Psychology and Social Research 544 (Jyväskylä: University

historically been the most common form of home-based work, women have also earned money in various other home-based trades, adapted to local conditions.

Home industry participants, especially women, were, then, mostly absent from occupational statistics, which included among the economically active population only those who worked full-time in a particular profession or trade. Sometimes even full-time work did not count as an occupational activity if carried out by a married woman. Home industry work of all kinds was often done intermittently, part-time, and alternating with other forms of earning income.¹⁰ This does not contradict the fact that these forms of work reached a large part of the city's households and that the incomes generated from home industries were an essential addition to their household budgets. Interruptions and irregularities were the very nature of the industry. As practitioners of home industry cannot be directly traced from any single national statistic (e.g., a census), information drawn from housing surveys, charitable poor relief cases, and the occupational category of unskilled casual workers recorded in the census statistics is combined. Although the population segments referred to in each case partly overlap, by summarizing them it is possible to roughly estimate the number of individuals engaged in Helsinki's home industries. The year 1900 is taken as a cross-section for analysis as it allows for the best possible combination of different sources.

Compared to the statistics, surveys often provide richer information on labor market participation.¹¹ An important source for the assessment of the number of home-based workers is the report of the Investigation on Working Class Housing, published in 1904 and written by Wilhelm Sucksdorff, the first officer of public health in Helsinki. According to this report, based on data gathered in a housing survey conducted in 1900, home-based crafts were performed in 524 working class dwellings and engaged 983 individuals, 33% of whom were engaged in shoemaking, 22% in tailoring, 18% in ironing, and 17% in sewing, with the remaining 10% in other occupations. The survey analyzed the residents it classified as the working class, amounting to 45,514 inhabitants, which was roughly half of

Jyväskylä, 2016) and Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen, "Handicrafts as Professions and Sources of Income in Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Turku (Åbo)," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 48, no. 1 (2000): 40–63.

10 See, e.g., Leena Enbom, "The Working Poor: Labor Strategies of Welfare Recipients in Helsinki, 1890–1970" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2023).

11 Compare Tobias Karlsson, "Pushed into Unemployment, Pulled into Retirement: Facing Old Age in Gothenburg, 1923–1943," *Göteborg Papers in Economic History*, no. 19 (2015): 4.

Helsinki's population.¹² In the light of Sucksdorff's figures, the number of home-based workers seems quite small.

Sucksdorff's calculation, however, represents a narrow understanding of home industry and his figures are dependent on this definition. Sucksdorff only included the home-based trades that were recognized as professions by those local investigators who visited working-class dwellings. At the same time, he ignored less standardized forms of home-based work. The survival methods mentioned in the poor-relief case files were the products of miscellaneous handicrafts either made for individual clients or put up for sale in most cases. It is most likely that the number of individuals engaged in small-scale craftwork greatly exceeded Sucksdorff's figures. The poor relief documents provide the most accurate view of this invisible type of home industry. Looking at the charitable poor-relief case files reveals that one third of the assisted households between 1895 and 1905 were involved in some form of home-based production.¹³ This ratio (1:3) is used to estimate the number of households practicing home industries but which were not included in Sucksdorff's study. Although not visible in the statistics, these hidden forms of home industry should not be ignored in the historiography of poverty as the incomes derived from them were generally crucial for the subsistence of the involved families.

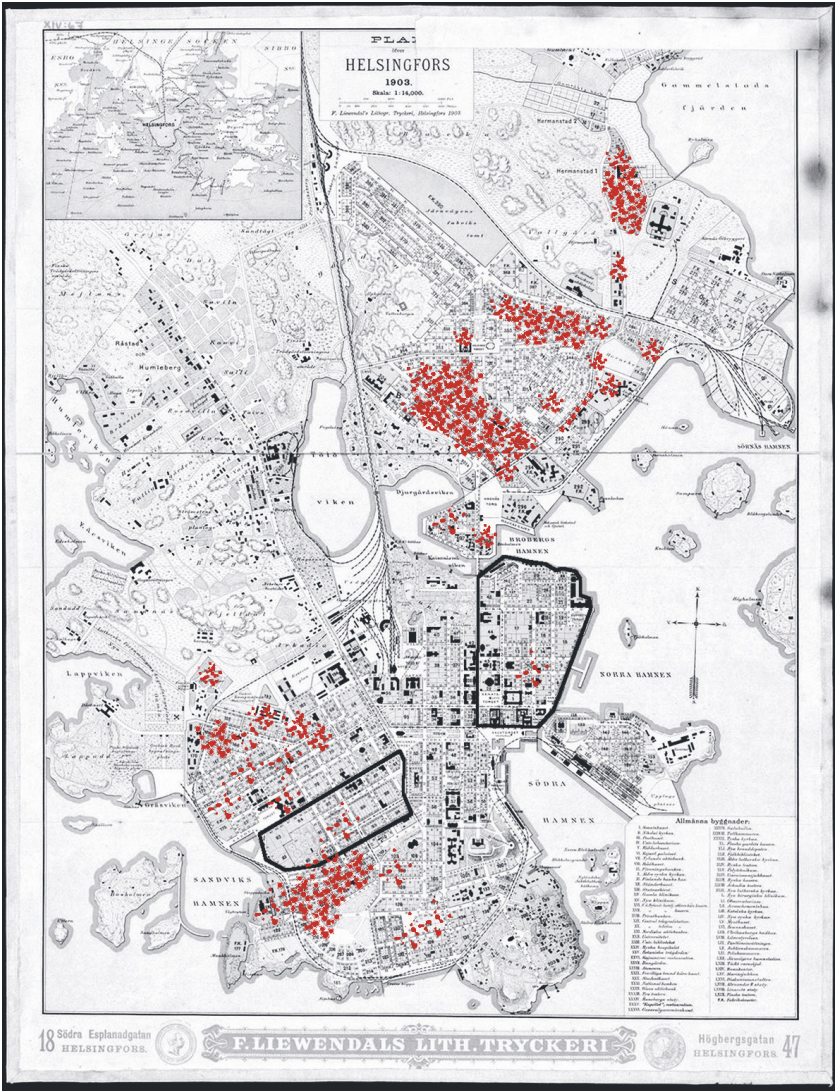
Putting the figures of these two sources on a map shows that these categories only slightly overlap. According to Sucksdorff's survey, home industry was most frequent in the centrally located city wards I and V,¹⁴ whereas the poor-relief cases files attest to the high frequency of home-based crafts on the outer fringes of the city. A comparison of these two sources confirms the hypothesis that home industries were practiced in various forms and to varying extents. It also shows that the city parts shown as the key areas of home industry according to Sucksdorff's survey were not the city wards with the highest poverty rates but rather the housing areas of the middle classes or well-to-do working classes. By contrast, the most invisible forms of home industry were those practiced in the outer fringes,

12 Vilhelm Sucksdorff, *Arbetarebefolkningens i Helsingfors bostadsförhållanden år 1900* (Helsingfors: Hälsovårdsnämnden, 1904), 266, table 147.

13 The calculation is based on a sample of 111 charitable poor-relief case files from the years 1895–1905, preserved in the Helsinki City Archives, Charity Organization Society of Helsinki, case files, 1895–1905. Of these, 37 (= Dataset A) include evidence of participation in home-based production.

14 In city wards I and V, 4–5% of the population earned their living from home-based trades. See Sucksdorff, *Arbetarebefolkningens i Helsingfors*, 264, table 146.

Map 1. Spatial manifestation of home industries in Helsinki



Circulated areas indicate city wards with a high prevalence of home industries (i.e., official home-based trades), while red dots mark the main locations of poor-relief recipient households (i.e., the primary areas of informal handicraft production). Sources: Sucksdorff, *Arbetarebefolkningens i Helsingfors*; Sven-Erik Åström, *Samhällsplanering och regionsbildning i kejsartidens Helsingfors: Studier i stadens inre differentiering 1810–1910* (Helsingfors: Helsingfors Stad, 1957), 292. Background map: Helsinki town plan from the address directory, *Plan af Helsingfors* (1903), F. Liewendal Lithographic Printing Company, Helsinki City Museum.

which were also the city zones with the highest numbers of unhealthy housing, overcrowding, and poverty. It can be thus assumed that these two sources mostly cover the different segments of the population engaged in home industries.

Based on the figures of Sucksdorff's housing survey, the participants in home industry (as primary occupation) had more living space than an average working-class family. According to Sucksdorff's study, 39% of the home-industry participants inhabited one-room dwellings, while 42% inhabited dwellings comprising one–three rooms and a kitchen. The corresponding numbers for the whole working-class population in Helsinki were 67% for one-room dwellings and 28% for dwellings comprising one–three rooms and a kitchen.¹⁵ By showing the disparities between locations, a comparison of Sucksdorff's survey and the poor-relief case files reveals a stratification within the urban population engaged in home industries.

Neither the housing survey nor the poor-relief statistics alone can provide full information on the total number of home-industry participants—remunerated home-based work was presumably a broader phenomenon. Therefore, the overall picture requires piecing together information also from census sources. The poor-relief case files bear witness to the fact that home-based handicrafts and comparable earning methods were particularly common in those households that also received income from unskilled manual labor, often in the form of day-laboring. This phenomenon is also recognized in the research literature. For instance, Sheila C. Blackburn argues that women's poorly paid work at home was inextricably linked to men's wages in industrializing Western societies. This was particularly pronounced in regions where large sections of the population were engaged in casual trades, such as the dockworkers in East London. The irregularity of their wages increased the amount of sweated tailoring on the part of their wives. In other words, women were frequently exploited precisely because they were married to sweated males, Blackburn concludes.¹⁶

To estimate the scale of home-based work among unskilled working-class families, this analysis retrieves information from 1900 Helsinki population census. According to the census, there were 6,637 unskilled male workers in Helsinki. Although the census does not provide data

15 Sucksdorff, *Arbetarebefolkningens i Helsingfors*, 23, 268.

16 Sheila C. Blackburn, "'No Necessary Connection with Homework': Gender and Sweated Labor, 1840–1909," *Social History* 22, no. 3 (1997): 275.

on marital status, it is reasonable to assume—based on typical family structures of the time—that approximately half were married, resulting in around 3,300 potential household heads. To avoid double counting of households already captured in poor-relief and charity records, the estimate excludes approximately 1,300 unskilled workers. This figure corresponds to the expected number of unskilled workers receiving assistance. It was derived by applying the proportion of unskilled workers (34.4%), as indicated in the poor-relief statistics, to the combined total of poor-relief (1,559) and charity (2,300) recipients.¹⁷ When this group is subtracted from the pool of married unskilled workers, the remaining 2,000 households represent the upper-bound estimate of the potential home industry participants within the category of unskilled worker households. There are no available sources to verify the number of households in which spouses engaged in home-based work while remaining outside both welfare records and housing surveys. The estimate therefore carries a considerable margin of uncertainty, but it is assumed that these households constitute one of the most important pools from which the informal labor force of the handicraft and home industry sectors could be drawn.

Based on these calculations, the estimated number of individuals engaged in various forms of home-based industry in early twentieth-century Helsinki was between 2,700 and 4,700. The lower end of the range is based on identifiable cases in poor relief records and various surveys, while the higher estimate accounts for unassisted households of unskilled male laborers whose spouses may have participated in informal production, but who did not appear in welfare or housing surveys. The majority of these individuals worked informally—either regularly, part-time, or occasionally—producing goods or clothing within the home. This range should be interpreted as an informed approximation rather than an exact count, given the limited visibility of informal labor in contemporary sources. The estimate does not account for assisting family members or skilled artisans whose homes fell outside the classification of working-class housing and who were thus excluded from Sucksdorff's housing survey. It is therefore more accurate to regard 2,700 individuals as a minimum threshold, while acknowledging the potential for a significantly larger number of participants in home-based work—possibly up to 4,700 individuals, corresponding to approximately 6–11% of the city's working-class population as defined by Sucksdorff.

17 Official Statistics of Finland XXI A, Poor Relief Statistics 9, 1901, 27.

Table 1. Estimate of the number of individuals engaged in various forms of home industries (excluding independent artisans) in Helsinki, 1900

Source	Type of work	Home-industry participants	Explanation
Investigation on Working-Class Housing in 1900, report written by Wilhelm Sucksdorff from 1904	Mainly traditional male-dominated crafts; some female-dominated crafts (sewing, ironing)	983	The number of household heads practicing an occupation within the home
Municipal poor relief statistics	Knitting, sewing, joinery, and small woodwork	520	1/3 of the total number of poor-relief recipients, which was 1,559 in 1900 ¹⁸
Charity organization records (Charity Organization Society of Helsinki, Helsinki City Mission, and Ladies Society of Helsinki)	Knitting, sewing, joinery, and small woodwork	767	1/3 of the total number of those assisted by charities, which is estimated to be 2,300 in 1900 ¹⁹
Workhouses for women in poor-relief statistics	Sewing, joinery, shoemaking, shoe repair	187	The number of workhouse entries ²⁰
Inquiry into children in public primary schools, 1906	Home industries	245	Nearly 3% of children in public schools worked in home industries ²¹
Census, 1900	Sewing, joinery, shoemaking, and shoe preparing	Up to 2,000	The number of home industry participants in households headed by unskilled male laborers and not included in the above-presented figures if not assisted by charities or the welfare office ²²
Total (rounded estimate)		Between 2,700 and 4,700	

Sources: See footnotes.

18 Statistical Yearbook of Helsinki, 1953, 97, table 83.

19 The number is based on the following estimates on the number of the assisted individuals in 1900: COS Helsinki approximately 1,000, Helsinki City Mission approximately 1,000, Ladies Society of Helsinki 300. See Enbom, *Working Poor*, 172.

20 The number is based on the following figures: 187 adult inmates in 1900. See Statistical Yearbook of Helsinki, 1905, table 132.

21 Marjatta Rahikainen, *Centuries of Child Labour: European Experiences from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 138. See also Statistical Yearbook of Helsinki, 1905, tables 109–111.

22 Helsinki population census of 1900. See Statistical Yearbook of Helsinki, 1942/43, 32.

To place Helsinki's figures in a broader European context, it is useful to note that several countries and cities conducted surveys or occupational censuses on industrial homework and home-based work around the turn of the twentieth century, London and Vienna among them. All of these inquiries emphasized the difficulty of drawing clear boundaries between cottage industry, industrial homework, and own-account seamstresses; consequently, the figures must be seen as indicative rather than definitive. Moreover, these surveys predominantly recorded workers for whom home-based production was a principal occupation, whereas the estimate for Helsinki presented above also includes part-time and occasional homeworkers, particularly wives of unskilled laborers. Thus, the datasets are not fully comparable.

Even with these caveats, the surveys from the major European metropolises point to the existence of a large pool of industrial homeworkers, something that appears absent in Helsinki. For instance, the 1909 Medical Officer's Report for London counted 32,765 industrial homeworkers in the garment trades alone, excluding other forms of home-based work.²³ In 1902, Vienna reported more than 30,000 home-based workers, the majority in the clothing industry, and the actual figure was likely higher if part-time workers are considered.²⁴

When the difference in scale is taken into account—Vienna's population being approximately eighteen times larger and London's over forty times larger than that of Helsinki—the estimated proportion of home-based workers in Helsinki is not insignificant and remains broadly comparable to Vienna's. The critical distinction lies not in quantity but in character: home-based work in Helsinki was less industrial and more closely connected to cottage industry forms of production, often informal and household-based.

Finland did not conduct a dedicated survey of industrial homework comparable to those in the United Kingdom, Austria, or Germany. The closest equivalent is Vera Hjelt's 1908 investigation into the working conditions of needleworkers, which identified only 329 industrial homeworkers in the entire country, and merely 38 in Helsinki (in the strict sense of the term, i.e., workers formally employed by firms but carrying out their work at home).²⁵ This suggests that industrial homework in both Finland and Helsinki was of minor importance, and that the city's home-based work

23 James A. Schmiechen, *Sweated Industries and Sweated Labor: The London Clothing Trades, 1860–1914* (London/Canberra: Croom Helm Limited, 1984), 194.

24 Edith Rigler, *Frauenleitbild und Frauenarbeit in Österreich: vom ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Wien: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1976), 63.

25 Vera Hjelt, *Undersökning af nälarbeterskornas yrkesförhållanden i Finland* (Helsingfors: Kejsarliga senatens tryckeri, 1908), 54 and table 17 on page 47 in appendices.

belonged predominantly to the artisanal and informal economy rather than to systems of factory-organized home production.

Varied Production Models in Home-Based Labor

Having explored the quantitative dimensions of the informal labor force in early twentieth-century Helsinki's handicraft commerce, we now turn our attention to the varied settings and dynamics that characterized this mostly informal economy. Going beyond mere numbers, individual cases of home industry participants are scrutinized. This is essential for understanding the inter-actor connections and power dynamics behind informal handicraft commerce. Since the datasets used are made up of charity and municipal poor relief applicants who participated in the crafts market in different ways, they open up an angle to investigate the labor market in which the poorest of the town's population participated.

The most prevalent items crafted in working-class homes in Helsinki were woolen socks. Other common objects from the 1890s through to the 1930s were slippers, sheets, carpets, linen, buttons, wooden spoons, stools, bath whisks, decorative handicrafts, and various pieces of clothing.²⁶ These were, overall, goods aimed at local consumers. The range of products reflects the availability of materials (e.g., wood) as well as local demand. The coldness of the climate and the lack of central heating in most properties explains the high demand for knitworks prepared from wool yarn. The range of items manufactured in homes was largely the same as items produced in workshops integrated into municipal workhouses or poorhouses.²⁷ The similarities between the products suggest that the individuals who spent time in municipal workhouses or poorhouses represented largely the same stratum of society as the informal handicraft producers and needleworkers working from their homes. In some of the examined cases, service in a poorhouse or workhouse was an extension of home-based handicrafts or needlework, the income from which was too low to live on.

Among the households examined in this chapter, the consumer goods were manufactured both as custom-made items and for sale. Certain products were made in large batches whilst others were usually produced

26 Dataset A, Helsinki City Archives, COS Helsinki, poor relief case files, 1895–1905; Dataset B, Helsinki Welfare Office, case files, 1926–1936.

27 Helsinki City Archives, Municipal report, 1902 (*Berättelse angående Helsingfors stads kommunalförvaltning*, År 1902), 208.

as individual pieces. How work was organized in the production of rather simple consumer goods varied significantly. This was a typical phenomenon in late nineteenth-century societies where several modes of production co-existed. Merja Uotila, a historian specializing in handicrafts, has divided the pre-industrial methods of producing consumer goods into four categories: official crafts, informal crafts, cottage industries, and manufacturing.²⁸ Uotila applies this distinction to the context of the agrarian economy, but it is also applicable to the analysis of the urban economy with certain modifications. During the industrial era, factory production, alongside its decentralized form of industrial homework, gained prominence in the production of consumer goods, gradually superseding traditional modes such as crafts and cottage industries. This case study illustrates how the succession of different modes of production manifested at the grassroots level.

By definition, craftsmanship as a mode of production refers to the process of creating goods or products through skilled manual labor, typically involving specialized techniques, tools, and knowledge passed down through generations. It is work performed by own-account artisans and craftsmen creating unique or customized items tailored to individual needs or preferences. This primarily involved made-to-order work, but the preparation of products for sale was also an important subcategory.²⁹ As several historians have shown, similar work was sometimes done by self-taught craftspeople without official professional status. Often this lack of status was related to gender.³⁰

Another mode of production, the cottage industry, refers to small-scale production carried out within individual households or small workshops, often using simple tools and equipment. In cottage-industry production, multiple stages might be carried out within a single household or distributed across several households within a community. Unlike the craftspeople who made their products to order, the cottage industry practitioner made them for stock and for sale.³¹ The cottage industry was originally understood as comprising small-scale local crafts for the maker's own needs or to be sold in order to generate income. According to the official interpretation,

28 Merja Uotila, "Käsityöläinen kyläyhteisönsä jäsenenä: Prosopografinen analyysi Hollolan käsityöläisistä 1810–1840" (PhD diss., University of Jyväskylä, 2014), 65.

29 Uotila, "Käsityöläinen kyläyhteisönsä jäsenenä," 59.

30 Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen, "Handicrafts as Professions and Sources of Income in Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Turku (Åbo)," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 48, no. 1 (2000): 40.

31 Kraatari, *Domestic Dexterity*; Uotila, "Käsityöläinen kyläyhteisönsä jäsenenä."

the practice of cottage industries generally required minor artisanal skills compared with traditional craft occupations. In reality, though, the division between craftsmanship and cottage industry was blurred, and the complexity of tasks varied a lot. In general, cottage-industry products were described as modest everyday objects.³² Due to these factors, home-based work labeled as cottage industry occupied lower societal status than traditional crafts. This was related not only to skill requirements but also to gender. Unlike the traditional craft occupations, cottage industries were a realm of female work and therefore remained thought of as auxiliary labor and not a proper occupation.³³

Industrial homework, in turn, involved individuals or households performing specific tasks or processes in the production of goods under contract to a business or employer. In essence this was large-scale batch production. This mode of production allowed employers to outsource labor-intensive tasks to home-based workers, who typically worked on a piecework basis and were paid based on the quantity or quality of work completed.³⁴

In this analysis, attention is paid to the extent to which different types of home-based work appear in the material. In empirical reality, distinguishing between different modes of productions is, however, challenging. For example, remunerated handicrafts and industrial homework overlap and there are blurred lines between the two. While remunerated handicrafts typically involved smaller-scale production and individualized, often informal craftsmanship, there were instances where craftspeople and handicraft makers produced goods in larger quantities, resembling industrial homework.³⁵ This was particularly true among those individuals whose incomes remained close to the subsistence line. In those cases, it was necessary for workers to search for earnings wherever they could be obtained and where they could therefore become engaged in a variety of production methods.

Moreover, in practice, many production processes involved elements that could take multiple forms. For example, craftspeople may have worked from home on a made-to-order basis, but their production of goods often involved some level of standardization akin to industrial homework. Some products were more likely to have been manufactured in the settings of outwork

32 Kraatari, *Domestic Dexterity*, 58.

33 For example, Vainio-Korhonen, "Handicrafts as Professions and Sources of Income," 40–63.

34 Jamie Faricellia Dangler, "Industrial Homework in the Modern World-Economy," *Contemporary Crises* 10 (1986): 257–58.

35 Laura Ekholm, "Reading the Margins of Business Censuses: The Garment Industry and Home-Based Industrial Work in Sweden and Finland, 1930s to 1960s," in Nilsson et al., *Home-Based Work*.

whereas others were more commonly made on a made-to-order basis. The boundaries between the categories are thus fluid, and what constituted industrial homework, cottage industry, or handicrafts was dependent on context, historical period, and regional differences. The knitting of woolen socks, for instance, in late nineteenth-century European towns would likely have encompassed elements of both cottage-industry production and made-to-order production, reflecting the diverse nature of handicraft production during this period. Against this background, these classifications should be understood as ideal types which do not exist as such in empirical reality. However, this categorization is a necessary tool for research that attempts to explain where the various forms of production came from or how they changed over time. In this analysis, cases are classified in the above-mentioned categories according to the main—though often not the only—form of home-based work carried out in the household.

The following table shows how cases revealed in the poor-relief case files are divided into categories reflecting different production forms.

Table 2. Distribution of the examined cases into the categories of home-based work

Mode of production	Craftmanship (mostly informal)	Cottage industry	Industrial homework	Centralized (here: non-residential workhouse)
The main feature of home-based work	Handicrafts on demand	Handicrafts for stock and for sale	Large batches, standardized form	Mostly large batches, standardized form
Number of practitioners	21 (57%)	10 (27%)	4 (11%)	2 (5%)

Sources: Dataset A, Helsinki City Archives, COS Helsinki, poor relief case files, 1895–1905.

The analysis shows that the majority of low-income home-based workers were primarily engaged in bespoke or made-to-order production, i.e., crafting goods tailored to the specific preferences and needs of individual clients. As such, craftsmanship emerged as the prevalent mode of production among these workers, even though they operated in an informal capacity without official occupational titles. Slightly more than a quarter of the cases in the analysis were households that received income from craft-based activities resembling cottage industry. These households manufactured utility items and decorative objects that were sold in public places, either by the producers or through middlemen. Those who made handicrafts for sale operated in a similar way to craftspeople and peasants from rural areas.

Only a fraction were industrial homeworkers. Historically, industrial homework has been common in textiles, garment and needle work, cigar-making, and hand-made craft goods.³⁶ Helsinki was not a great city for cigar production, but it had a sizable workforce in the garment industry. By 1910, the garment industry was the city's second largest field of industrial production, employing over 7,000 individuals in 1910.³⁷ The finding that only a few industrial homeworkers were among the recipients of charitable aid supports the view that Helsinki's garment factories did not rely on home-based employees to any significant extent.

Overall, the analysis suggests that remunerated handicrafts, characterized by labor relations akin to craftsmanship—albeit informal in nature—were the predominant form of labor among the urban poor engaged in home-based work at the turn of the twentieth century. Among the urban poor, cottage industry was also not uncommon, despite its unusual presence in urban settings. However, the most surprising finding is the low incidence of industrial homework among the poorest segment of the urban population. This challenges both contemporary views and scholarly understanding, indicating that industrial homework was a typical form of sweated labor in industrializing societies.

The low incidence of industrial homework in Finland derives from broader structural characteristics of Finnish industrialization. Finland's industrial development differed markedly from that of its Nordic neighbors. Due to its later and more centralized industrialization, Finland largely bypassed the phase of small-scale manufacturing and subcontracted home-based work (i.e., the putting-out system) that had been common in countries like Sweden and Denmark. Instead, larger-scale, mechanized production was favored from early on, especially in dominant sectors such as forestry, mining, and paper. Even in sectors where home-based work might have been more typical—such as garment production—evidence suggests that homeworkers were rare and played no significant role in the industry's development. By the 1950s, Finnish garment production was dominated by small, family-owned companies, often with blurred lines separating artisanal and industrial work but not structured around widespread home-based subcontracting. Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that the limited prevalence of industrial

36 Eileen Boris, "Sexual Divisions, Gender Constructions: The Historical Meaning of Homework in Western Europe and the United States," in *Homeworkers in Global Perspective*, ed. Eileen Boris and Lisa Prügl (New York: Routledge, 2016), 19.

37 Official Statistics of Finland, *General Population Census in 1910*, VI Population Statistics, no. 48, Helsinki, 1–12.

homework in Finland, particularly in garment manufacturing, is a key reason why few such workers appeared among charity applicants in investigated sources.³⁸ Unlike industrial homework, home-based remunerated handicrafts in urban settings did not attract significant legal regulatory attention from Finnish authorities during the same period. While industrial homework raised concerns related to health, occupational safety, and child welfare, remunerated handicraft work remained fully unregulated, despite exposing individuals to similar health risks and operating outside the bounds both of taxation and licensing practices. In contrast, handicrafts were often viewed more favorably by authorities and were even promoted by the state-led cottage industry policy. The promotion of rural handicrafts had become a political project in the aftermath of Finland's Great Famine of the 1860s, and it had two far-reaching objectives: in the first place, it was a heritage movement aiming to develop Finnish society by supporting a traditional way of life; in the second, it operated to reduce poor people's reliance on society by making cottage industry a prominent form of self-help among smallholders.³⁹

Social and Demographic Profile of Informal Home-Based Workers

At the heart of the analysis on unregistered home-based work is the question of who performed it. When analyzing the poor-relief case files, two main household types emerge. The most common—nearly half of all cases—were small households without dependent children, typically widows or older individuals living alone or with a spouse. Slightly more than half were families with children, evenly divided between two-parent households and those headed by women.

Gender shaped how this work was distributed. Women, especially widows and single mothers, were overrepresented among low-income home industry participants. They worked from home while caring for children or managing ill health.⁴⁰ The data also shows a clear age divide: older individuals, mostly

38 Ekholm, "Reading the Margins," 46–50.

39 Kraatari, *Domestic Dexterity*.

40 Ill health is rarely examined as a determinant for entering home-based work; however, Rosemarie Beier identifies poor health as one of the conditions under which unmarried women in imperial Germany undertook such work. Rosemarie Beier, *Frauenarbeit und Frauenalltag im Deutschen Kaiserreich: Heimarbeiterinnen in der Berliner Bekleidungsindustrie 1880–1914* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1983), 40.

women over 55, were engaged in occasional or part-time work, usually handicrafts. They were dependent on poor relief to supplement their income. Illness and disability were common in this group, limiting their access to formal employment. The elderly rarely worked under the supervision of an official employer. Instead, they accepted job offers and undertook commissioned work whenever their state of their health allowed it. This kind of periodicity often continued for years. Younger women worked more regularly, yet part-time.⁴¹

The abundance of elderly handicraft makers highlights the vulnerability of older adults, particularly widows living in minimal family units. It is also a sign of the large-scale poverty among the old in society. The struggle for survival of the elderly poor was a common feature of nineteenth-century Western countries. For instance, the poor in Victorian England resorted to combinations of poor relief, charity, kinship help, and occasional work. Only half of individuals over 65 years of age survived on their earnings and income from property. The rest combined several income sources, including poor relief and income from casual jobs.⁴²

Finland was a latecomer in setting up a universal pension system. It was not until 1937 that a national pension scheme with universal coverage was established. Various sickness and pension funds had been established in factories along with industrialization as of the mid-nineteenth century, but they covered only some of the paid employees, and pensions were often very modest.⁴³ In these circumstances, for individuals who had passed the conventional age of being employed by others handicrafts offered a way to make a living—or, at least, to alleviate poverty. Poor relief served as the last resort, and around the turn of the twentieth century old age was always the main reason for poverty in the Finnish poor relief statistics.⁴⁴ In practice, as all the elderly poor participated in working life in some forms, these people made up a segment of the labor force that was not officially recognized as such.

Despite their participation in the labor market, the elderly were not the most desirable labor force in the eyes of employers. Social historian Marjatta Rahikainen has pointed out that working-life discrimination due

41 Dataset A, Helsinki City Archives, COS Helsinki, poor relief case files, 1895–1905.

42 George R. Boyer and Timothy P. Schmidle, "Poverty among the Elderly in Late Victorian England," *The Economic History Review* 62, no. 2 (2009): 259–60.

43 Matti Hannikainen and Jussi Vauhkonen, *Ansioiden mukaan yksityisalojen työeläkkeiden historia* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2012).

44 Marjatta Rahikainen, "Ageing Men and Women in the Labor Market: Continuity and Change," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 26, no. 4 (2001): 309.

to old age is not a phenomenon related to modernization and advanced industrialization—as is generally thought—but instead was also common in pre-industrial societies. Women are penalized for their age earlier than men. Thus, the share of older age groups in the female labor force in various industries steeply decreased. The labor market of all fields was highly exclusive, tilted in favor of younger women. In tobacco and textile manufacturing, two female-dominated industries, over half of all workers consisted of young women aged under 30 years, while only about one-sixth of workers were aged 40 years or over.⁴⁵ The fewer number of older women workers did not remove their need for income. The age profile of the informal handicraft workers suggests that for many women ageing did not mean retirement from the labor market but instead pushed them towards informal forms of labor.

When examining the participation of low-income home industry participants of different ages in various forms of production clear patterns emerge: older individuals predominantly engaged in handicrafts involving made-to-order works, while younger individuals, mostly in their 20s and 30s, were more involved in industrial homework. In the data analyzed, none of the elderly were employed in industrial homework. No children participating in industrial homework or handicraft production are reported in the files that made up this research data, except for the work done in non-residential workhouses for children.⁴⁶

Industrial homework and craft work represented distinct fields of work with unique requirements and expectations for individual participants. In addition to the age discrimination that shaped most fields of industrial production, older individuals were more inclined to participate in craft trades due to their extensive knowledge of traditional techniques. Industrial homework, in turn, required a narrower range of skills but was potentially more binding, as an employee was required to commit to assignments. Industrial homework also needed more resources, for instance the possession of a sewing machine and usually a more extensive physical space. As the previous examples have shown, choosing between which form of work was based on the characteristics of both the individual and the household, but also on the structure of the labor market. Individual “choices” were dictated by social norms and institutional factors. It seems likely that industrial homework was scarcely available to the elderly.

45 Rahikainen, “Ageing Men and Women,” 306; Marjatta Rahikainen, “Medelålders kvinnor på arbetsmarknaden i 1900-talets Finland,” *Työelämän tutkimus* 5, no. 2 (2007): 85–94.

46 Dataset A, Helsinki City Archives, COS Helsinki, poor relief case files, 1895–1905.

Another noteworthy aspect highlighted by this analysis is that destitute craftspeople typically operated independently, with minimal assistance from family members, even in households with multiple members. This represents a local peculiarity, as previous literature has often emphasized the prevalence of family workshops as the primary mode of production, whether in artisanal crafts, traditional cottage industries, or industrial homework. However, Helsinki's case reflects broader structural features of Finnish industrialization. As discussed above, industrial development in Finland relied on centralized factories which left little room for the subcontracting chains that often accompany family-centered home production. Family workshops were therefore not the predominant organizational structure for informal handicraft commerce in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Helsinki. Only some of those engaged in cottage-industry-type production collaborated with family members. A common example of this would be an aged couple engaged in woodworking, such as carving spoons. In such cases, the husband usually served as the main producer, while the wife was responsible for sales, often conducted at street markets.⁴⁷

In the 1920s, several changes that shaped the social dynamics of the urban economy and town life took place. First, the reform of the welfare system transformed the poor relief system and moved it in the direction of institutional care. The workshops attached to poorhouses preserved handicraft-based production of various goods at a time when industrial production was increasingly shifting to centralized, mass-scale methods. Second, the role of charity organizations in the distribution of allowances, but also as providers of labor exchanges, diminished.⁴⁸ As a result of these developments, the number of elderly poor still active in the labor market was decreasing, and there are only a few cases of the elderly poor performing handicrafts while being occasionally assisted by society in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴⁹ These developments marked a shift from earlier decades, when charity organizations had acted as key intermediaries between poor home-based workers and those who commissioned or employed them.

47 For example, Dataset A, Helsinki City Archives, COS Helsinki, poor relief case file 1554 (family Ahlbom), 1895.

48 Leena Enbom and Susanna Fellman, "Nödhjälp eller skapandet av ett ideal-samhälle? Filantropisk verksamhet i lokalsamhället under mellankrigstiden," *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 104, no. 3 (2019): 353–92.

49 Dataset B, Helsinki Welfare Office, poor relief case files, 1926–1936.

Charity Organizations as Middlemen

In the societal dynamics of the late nineteenth century, the charity organizations became actors whose operational area was not simply limited to social welfare; they also had influence on the labor market. Major charities of Helsinki began to broker job offers, commissions, and assignments, especially in the fields of household work, handicrafts, and needlework. This form of activity was based on the welfare ideology of the era, according to which the primary mode of assistance was to provide the assistance seeker with avenues of self-help while avoiding making direct financial contributions.⁵⁰ At least three of the largest charity associations of Helsinki—the Charity Organization Society (COS) Helsinki, the Ladies Society of Helsinki, and the Helsinki City Mission—organized such labor exchanges. These organizations, which operated in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Helsinki, were not unique to the city of Helsinki but rather were part of a broader philanthropic movement that held sway across Western societies at the time. They had counterparts in various European cities, reflecting their widespread influence and interconnectedness.⁵¹

The work orders delivered by these associations are here divided into three categories: commissions, direct hire, and sales promotion. Additionally, the organizations sometimes gave out loans. Commissions were given to those who made personalized and customized products for private consumers. Craftspeople, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, relied on the charities to connect them with potential buyers and patrons from wealthier segments of society. This was especially important in large towns in which craftspeople typically served a more diverse and anonymous customer base, with less opportunity for offering a personalized and individualized service.⁵² In late nineteenth-century Helsinki the charity organization served as a unique bridge between individuals from opposite ends of the social hierarchy: on one side the handicraft workers, representing

50 Peter Mandler “Poverty and Charity in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis: An Introduction,” in *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis*, ed. Peter Mandler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); John W. Mohr and Vincent Duquenne, “The Duality of Culture and Practice: Poverty Relief in New York City, 1888–1917,” *Theory and Society* 26, no. 2/3 (1997): 316.

51 Mandel, “Poverty and Charity”; Alexandra Ramsay, *Huvudstadens hjärta: Filantropi och socialförändring i Helsingfors; Två fruntimmersföreningar 1848–1865*, Bidrag till kännedom av Finlands natur och folk 144 (Helsingfors: Soc. Scient. Fennica, 1993).

52 In small communities, custom-made artisans relied primarily on word-of-mouth referrals in local communities. See, e.g., Uotila, “Käsityöläinen kyläyhteisönsä jäsenenä,” 140–44.

the laboring classes and the working poor, who relied on their craft skills for their livelihood; on the other the commissioners and customers, representing the middle and upper classes.

An impoverished tailor, whose name was Siponen, provides an example case to observe the role of charities in connecting craftsmen with their clients. After a home inspection of Siponen's abode, a charity activist reported as follows:

Both husband and wife, both still young, looked clean and decent. They complained that the man has no job—this is the reason for their poverty. They would ask to sewing work for a man. The wife would be happy to household work at others' home; while the man would sew at home, she could go out to do occasional domestic work. They also lack firewood. From Chamberlain Boehm, I learned that tailor Siponen does a decent job, including gentlemen's suits—and he works cheap.⁵³

Reports in the case file show that Siponen had been commissioned by upper class customers through the charitable society, and his wife had been set up with a couple of short-term jobs in a few families.

Siponen was a tailor—an official occupation holder and skilled craftsman—who fabricated customized products. But contacts with potential customers were equally crucial for the informal craftswomen who specialized in made-to-order items, constituting the majority of those seeking assistance from charities. These unnamed craftspeople comprised the largest group engaged in commissioned work facilitated by charitable organizations. Often, work was carried out without the craftsperson ever meeting the commissioner, with wages paid through the charitable society or by a member of the charity organization acting as an intermediary. This practice was especially common among those producing knitwear. An illustrative case involved a 55-year-old woman knitting socks on demand: in 1895, she crafted several pairs (likely dozens) of woolen socks, for which she received one–two marks per pair. The commissions were coordinated by the COS Helsinki, which typically disbursed payments in small increments, often two pairs at a time. For instance, in October 1896 she received two marks for two pairs of socks, equivalent to the daily wage of an unskilled general laborer.⁵⁴

53 Dataset A, Helsinki City Archives, COS Helsinki, poor relief case file 1527 (family Siponen), 1895.

54 Dataset A, Helsinki City Archives, COS Helsinki, poor relief case file 1502 (widow Konstantinoff), 1895.

These two cases illustrate how charity organizations typically operated in the handicrafts business: they recruited individuals with sewing or handicraft skills to produce goods ordered by private commissioners, with the price set by the commissioner. Additionally, the associations acted as intermediaries in various other ways, connecting commissioners with producers. At times, charities directly employed individuals, particularly those with access to a sewing machine, enabling the production of larger batches of items such as sheets. Some organizations, such as the Helsinki City Mission, subsidized by the municipality, operated workshops that distributed materials to impoverished women for sewing work.⁵⁵ According to a city government report, the output of these workshops, including that of their home-based workers, was sold on the open market, although the buyers were not specified.⁵⁶

Furthermore, associations sometimes lent families the money to buy sewing machines and sometimes lent the devices themselves. In one example, the case of a family named Kallio, the sewing machine possessed by the charity was pawned by the family in their extreme distress. This did not end the housewife's participation in home-based work, it only forced her to switch from sewing to hand-based needlework and knitting. The report does not show whether the family was able to buy back the pawned machine, but it seems that in the coming years they continued to accept small assignments and work orders from the association.⁵⁷ In the second case, a sewing machine was purchased with the help of a loan granted by the association. It was agreed with the association that the loan would be repaid through work. In this case too, the commissioning of small assignments continued, as it was the only feasible way for the family to repay their debt.⁵⁸

Also, for those who produced sales articles, the association provided a distribution channel. The Ladies Society of Helsinki maintained a sales point in the Kaartintori bazaar, where handicraft products available through associations were sold. However, the operation turned out to be financially unprofitable, and the association decided to abandon the point of sale around

55 Dataset A, Helsinki City Archives, COS Helsinki, poor relief case file 1512 (family Latvala), 1895.

56 Helsinki City Archives, 28 Reports of the Helsinki City Government (*Kaupunginhallituksen mietinnöt*), 1902, no. 2: *Handlingar i frågan om anslag för upprätthållande af ett arbetshem för kvinnor* (documents concerning the appropriation for maintaining a workhouse for women.)

57 Dataset A, Helsinki City Archives, COS Helsinki, poor relief case file 1525 (widow Kallio), 1895.

58 Dataset A, Helsinki City Archives, COS Helsinki, poor relief case file 1514 (family Isaksson), 1895.

1910.⁵⁹ Charitable societies also organized clubs whose aim was to teach craft skills to working-class women. This may have had an indirect effect on the prevalence of handicrafts and needlework as home-based trades among those struggling to make ends meet.⁶⁰

The scope of the charities' activities was broad, and the individuals involved played a significant role in shaping commerce that remained unrecorded in official registers. Based on the figures presented in table 1, it is estimated that about 770 households were involved in home industry work (mainly handicrafts) while receiving assistance from charities. About half of these households obtained work orders through charitable organizations. Consequently, charitable mediation impacted a significant share of families at risk of absolute poverty. This corresponds to about 15% of all charity-assisted households, indicating that charitable mediation accounted for a significant share of families at risk of absolute poverty.⁶¹

Understanding the role of middlemen is crucial for analyzing the political economy of handicrafts and its impact on informal craftspeople and society. For instance, charity societies' activity as money lenders and providers of machinery created debt-bondage-type dependencies between home-based needleworkers and intermediary associations. This was an expression of unfree labor, which, according to Marcel van der Linden, is work performed under conditions where the worker cannot freely choose their employment or negotiate the terms of their labor. This includes situations where individuals are coerced into working through force, threats, or legal constraints, limiting their autonomy and ability to leave their employment.⁶² Overall, the function of charities in the prevention of poverty remains contentious, with questions about their control over markets, clients, and wages. By positioning themselves as advocates for social welfare, charities could justify lower pay rates and substandard conditions, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exploitation. Their dual role as benefactors and gatekeepers gave charities significant power to shape industry, often to the detriment of craftspeople. Handicrafts performed by charity applicants were not seen as part of labor market participation but of social welfare, perpetuating their philanthropic ideals.

59 Helsinki City Archives, Ladies Society of Helsinki (*Fruktimmersföreningen i Helsingfors*), minutes 1890–1920.

60 Helsinki City Archives, City Council Reports, number 24, 1894.

61 However, after World War One, the field of activity of the associations contracted and it is not known whether another operator took over the mediation activities of the craft market. Handicrafts were reduced anyway and this led to the withdrawal of intermediaries.

62 Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labor History*, Studies in Global Social History 1 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008), 173.

The role of charity actors as middlemen is understudied in both European and global contexts. A more systematic analysis, based on primary sources linked to local actors, is required to shed light on remaining questions. It remains unanswered, for example, whether charities played a similar role in more advanced and industrialized Western societies. Despite these unexplored areas, it is plausible that the lack of subcontracting chains in Finland left space for charity organizations to operate in the field of handicrafts and needlework.⁶³ More work is needed to analyze the structural conditions that allowed charities to become significantly involved in the home-based production of goods.

Conclusion

Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Helsinki offers an interesting case study for examining the history of informal work in the field of crafts. Finland was a poor and peripheral economy, making it a fertile ground for informal small businesses and casual employment. This chapter suggests that Helsinki differed from the metropolises of Western Europe in the forms that home-based production took. Unlike the major European metropolises, industrial homework in Helsinki was relatively limited. In contrast, remunerated handicrafts played a significant role in the informal urban economy of Finland at the time. Helsinki thus developed its own form of sweated labor, characterized by handicraft production and small-scale home-based work.

Eileen Boris has argued that industrial homework (or outwork) is not to be confused with home manufacturing for family consumption or with independent entrepreneurship located in the home, as it represents a form of waged labor.⁶⁴ Yet this is a common theoretical distinction; in the realities of working life, it is a line drawn in water. Hybrid forms of production were common among home-industry participants in Helsinki. Most home-based workers operated in grey zones which combined the characteristics of handicraft production, industrial homework, and cottage-industry-type production. Similarly, the labor relations associated with these activities were often hybrid in nature, blending elements of paid employment and

63 Laura Ekholm and Matleena Frisk, "Kuinka trikoosta tuli päällysvaate? Trikoovaatteet 1960-luvun murroksena," in *Säädyllystä ja säädytöntä: pukeutumisen historiaa renessanssista 2000-luvulla*, ed. Arja Turunen and Susanna Niiranen (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2019).

64 Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 10.

contract work. Despite the absence of an employer, most craftspeople and needleworkers were subjected to control and the surveillance of actors involved in the labor process. Industrial homeworkers and handicraft workers lacked collective bargaining power, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation by middlemen and employers who dictated terms of work and compensation.

The discussion on informalized forms of labor has gained momentum from the growth of the current platform and gig economy.⁶⁵ Similar to contemporary platform and gig work, handicraft production and industrial homework in historical societies were the mainstays of amalgamated labor relations. Home-based work, both then and now, has been characterized by ambiguity over employment status. A certain number of home industry participants can be aligned with the status of entrepreneurs, albeit in an informal capacity. They engaged in independent craftsmanship without the formalities typically associated with business registration and taxation, as their income typically fell below taxable thresholds. This was entrepreneurship characterized by low gain and high risk, but also by low visibility and social recognition. However, the large majority of home industry participants in historical societies were employed in settings corresponding to what is currently understood as disguised self-employment. These ambiguities were inextricably linked to informality, precarious working conditions, and poverty.

As is the case today, the ambiguities in workers' employment status were related to the central role of middlemen in the labor processes of various home industries. In late nineteenth-century Finland, as elsewhere in Europe, charities were major players in urban areas. They had their own social policy programs, some of which focused on the employment of aid recipients. In Finland, these charities became significant employment agencies, particularly emphasizing (informal forms of) handicrafts. Due to their considerable authority, charities were able to dictate the terms of employment and pay. These associations also lent sewing machines or provided loans to home-based workers, creating debt-bondage-type dependencies between home-based needleworkers and intermediary associations. In the urban economy of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finland, poverty and reliance on charitable or municipal poor relief allowances exposed individuals to forms of work in which they had little say. Handicrafts

65 For example, Amparo Todolí-Signes, "The 'Gig Economy': Employee, Self-Employed or the Need for a Special Employment Regulation?" *Transfer: European Review of Labor and Research* 23, no. 2 (2017): 193–205.

and sewing were the prominent areas of work in which such informal and coercive settings were common.

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The Interwar Years

Informal Work in Times of Crises

5. Moving Between Formal and Informal Labor in Greek Cities, ca. 1890–1940

Leda Papastefanaki

Abstract: The chapter argues that formal and informal work coexisted in Greek cities from 1890 to 1940, a time when workers—men, women, and children—were constantly moving between different forms of work, both in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. The informal economy relieved social tensions to a certain extent and guaranteed a minimum subsistence level for the poor urban working classes. Especially in the interwar period, it was through the informal sector of the economy that some employment opportunities were created for the Asia Minor refugees. In this way, informal activities functioned as structural elements of the economy in modern Greece.

Keywords: informal labor, Asia Minor refugees, labor inspectorate, children's labor, women's labor, Greek cities

Discussion on the informal economy and the labor regimes of informality has been integrated into research since the 1970s, gradually challenging the assumption that a “standard employment relationship” is historically a norm and a logical result of capitalist development.¹ Defining “informal economy” and “work” is complicated and often debated. Labor historian Marcel van der Linden considers the term “informal economy” to be imprecise, but sees its

1 Marcel van der Linden, “How Normal is the ‘Normal’ Employment Relationship?” in Marcel van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History: Explorations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 197–203; Jan Breman and Marcel van der Linden, “Informalizing the Economy: The Return of the Social Question at a Global Level,” *Development and Change* 45, no. 5 (2014): 920–40.

benefit in the fact that “it draws attention to the plurality of human survival strategies and to the important roles played by women and children.”² As economic geographers Costis Hadjimichalis and Dina Vaiou have noted, the literature on (contemporary) informality in Southern Europe shows “a lot of controversy and confusion in the use of terms,” but they also point out that it embraces different theoretical and disciplinary approaches—which, to a certain extent, is reflected in those terms. On the one hand, “informal” is used to characterize the “economy,” “sector,” “employment,” “work,” or “activities.” On the other, it is often used interchangeably with “black” or “irregular” labor, or the “underground” or “shadow” economy. Economic activities and forms of work referred to as “informal” therefore vary according to the intentions and perspectives of the user.³ Literature from Northern Europe correlates informal activities with violations of welfare systems, while the (more recent) literature on Southern Europe focuses on tax evasion, criminal activities, and the quality of employment in diverse forms of work in small businesses and workshops—as these forms seem to be more widespread than in Western or Northern European countries. However, the boundaries between formal and informal work are less clear in the social and economic context of Southern Europe, where the model of formal labor has been only partially applied, the productive structure is characterized by small firms, and welfare systems are weak, so that the dichotomies are not self-evident or easy to define.⁴

Informal work is undoubtedly a long-standing and integral aspect of labor in Southern Europe. According to Hadjimichalis and Vaiou, informal activities or informal labor are used

as a reference to legal and/or illegal practices which present a number of common characteristics: they are not officially recorded (totally or in part), thereby evading taxation; they are “invisible” by ordinary inspection; they absorb low paid, usually female, labor; they avoid the ever-increasing reach of the state, especially with regard to the enforcement of safety and insurance legislation, or the observation of collective bargaining agreements.⁵

2 Marcel van der Linden, “San Precario: A New Inspiration for Labor Historians,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 11, no. 1 (2014): 16.

3 Costis Hadjimichalis and Dina Vaiou, “Informalisation along Global Commodity Chains: Some Evidence from Southern Europe,” in *Economia Sumergida: el estado della question en Espana*, ed. J.A. Ybarra (Murcia: UGT-Murcia, 1998), 297.

4 Hadjimichalis and Vaiou, “Informalisation along Global Commodity Chains,” 297–98.

5 Costis Hadjimichalis and Dina Vaiou, “Whose Flexibility? The Politics of Informalisation in Southern Europe,” *Capital & Class* 14, no. 3 (1990): 81.

This definition encompasses various types of informal work in different regions of Southern Europe, i.e., informal activities that are usually linked to specific local conditions and regional specializations. Informal activities, however, appear to be subject to “varieties of regulation” by states and local authorities, ultimately constituting forms of control “by the dominant classes, gender, ethnic groups.”⁶ Thus, any attempt to study informal work—in Greece historically, and in the late nineteenth century up to the interwar period—must take into account these various forms of regulation and control, as well as the social ties or social relations that circumscribe these activities.

To put it another way, the informal sector in Southern European countries may constitute remnants of pre-capitalist economic practices and structures that prevailed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that tied up the workforce and excluded it from the (formal) labor market. Informal activities were mainly performed by casual day laborers, itinerant traders and artisans, and small-scale craftsmen with their working families;⁷ all these were connected via informal networks and informal agreements, while precarity seems to have been a common feature of informal as well as formal work.⁸ However, the informal economy and informal work both need to be historicized and placed in specific historical contexts by researchers to allow them to highlight their particularities and understand the policies regarding informal labor, as well as to uncover the political and social attitudes of informal workers and the ways in which they negotiated their various oppressions.

An attempt to historicize informal work in Greek cities in the early twentieth century was made by historians Antonis Liakos and Petros Pizanias, who described poor workers who did not receive a regular wage and who moved frequently from job to job, working mainly as unskilled laborers, as “a social category without a name” or “the urban poor.”⁹ For these urban

6 Hadjimichalis and Vaiou, “Whose Flexibility?” 89, 95–102, quote 102. On the discussion on varieties of regulation, see Sibylle Marti’s and Christof Dejung’s chapter in this volume, 15–16.

7 Antonis Liakos, *Εργασία και πολιτική στην Ελλάδα του μεσοπολέμου. Το Διεθνές Γραφείο Εργασίας και η ανάδυση των κοινωνικών θεσμών* (Labor and Politics in Interwar Greece: The International Labor Office and the Emergence of Social Institutions) (Athens: Research and Education Foundation of the Commercial Bank of Greece, 1993), 74.

8 van der Linden, “San Precario,” 9–21; on an attempt to historicize labor precarity in Southern Europe, see Eloisa Betti, *Precarious Workers: History of Debates, Political Mobilizations, and Labor Reforms in Italy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022).

9 Liakos, *Εργασία και πολιτική*, 74; Petros Pizanias, *Οι φτωχοί των πόλεων. Η τεχνογνωσία της επιβίωσης στην Ελλάδα το μεσοπόλεμο* (The Urban Poor: The Know-How of Survival in Interwar Greece) (Athens: Themelio, 1993).

poor, who made a living through dependent work or even self-employment, temporariness to varying degrees was a common feature of their working life. The historian Nikos Potamianos highlighted the role of itinerant traders and craftsmen in Athens at the beginning of the twentieth century by stressing the uncertainty of their class position, as independent employment in the informal sector of the economy was linked to low incomes, low prestige, and lack of prospects at a time when itinerant traders were obliged to pay, already in 1907/1908, very low taxes on their professions.¹⁰

This chapter argues that formal and informal work coexisted in Greek cities from 1890 to 1940, a time when workers—men, women, and children—were constantly moving between different forms of work, both in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. The informal economy relieved social tensions to a certain extent and guaranteed a minimum subsistence level for the poor urban working classes. In this way, informal activities functioned as structural elements of the economy in modern Greece. As has already been proposed for early modern and modern European towns by the historians Thomas Buchner and Philip Hoffmann-Rehnitz, regular (formal) and irregular (informal) economic practices “should not only be understood as two separate areas of the economy” but rather as twofold dimensions of an economy closely related to each other.¹¹

The first section of the chapter presents the particularities of the formal and informal labor market in Greek cities. The weakest and most vulnerable labor groups who experienced the conditions of informal work were children and women. For this reason, the chapter examines, in the second part, the legal reform introduced to ban child labor from the formal labor market and the difficulties that this reform encountered in its implementation. The third part of the chapter examines the issue of women's domestic work in Athens and Piraeus. The home as a place of production and labor often remains neglected in the literature, with the result that home-based workers have remained largely invisible and their contributions under-estimated, as

10 Nikos Potamianos, *Οι νοικοκυραίοι. Μαγαζάτορες και βιοτέχνες στην Αθήνα 1880–1925* (The “noikokyraioi”: Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Athens 1880–1925) (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2015), 71–80; Nikos Potamianos, “Between Workers and the Retailing Community: The Street Vendors of Athens in the First Decades of the 20th Century,” in *Labour History in the Semi-Periphery: Southern Europe, 19th–20th Centuries*, ed. Leda Papastefanaki and Nikos Potamianos (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021), 153–74.

11 Thomas Buchner and Philip R. Hoffmann-Rehnitz, “Introduction: Irregular Economic Practices as a Topic of Modern (Urban) History – Problems and Possibilities,” in *Shadow Economies and Irregular Work in Urban Europe (16th to Early 20th Centuries)*, ed. Thomas Buchner and Philip R. Hoffmann-Rehnitz (Vienna: LIT, 2011), 19.

studies have shown.¹² The sources used in this chapter are legal texts; the official reports of the Greek Labor Inspectorate (1914–1934); the press; and the personal archive of the feminist labor inspector Maria Svolou.

The Formal and Informal Labor Market in Greek Cities in the 1890s–1930s

In the late nineteenth century, during a period of agricultural crisis and increasing migration, the industrial sector of the Greek economy was dominated by small and medium-sized labor-intensive units producing basic consumer goods made up of cheap, low-quality products, which had limited access to external markets and unstable outlets in the domestic market; while at the same time there was increasing commercialization of household production and an expansion of domestic work. New textile industries were opened in towns such as Athens, Piraeus, Hermoupolis, and Volos, while the tobacco industry also took its first steps. The new fields of chemicals, cement, and urban equipment in Athens and Piraeus showed greater dynamism, accompanied by capital concentration, technological modernization, and modern methods of organizing production and work and increasing promotion of their products.¹³ The overall picture that emerges for manufacturing points to widening sectorial and regional inequalities.

In fact, the main characteristics of industry in Greece during the second period of industrialization (1890–1914) were: a) the overwhelming presence of small units with limited mechanization. These units did not constitute “survivals” of earlier eras, but provided a new space for the

¹² In particular, Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and The Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Malin Nilsson et al., eds., *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers 1800–2021* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

¹³ Christos Hadziioissif, *Η γηραιά σελήνη. Η βιομηχανία στην ελληνική οικονομία, 1830–1940* (The Old Moon: Industry in the Greek Economy, 1830–1940) (Athens: Themelio, 1993); Christina Agriantoni, “Βιομηχανία” (Industry), in *Ιστορία της Ελλάδας τον 20ου αιώνα. Οι απαρχές, 1900–1922* (History of Greece in the 20th Century: The Beginnings, 1900–1922), ed. Christos Hadziioissif, vol. A1 (Athens: Vivliorama, 1999), 173–221; Christina Agriantoni, “Οικονομία και εκβιομηχάνιση στην Ελλάδα του 19^{ου} αιώνα” (Economy and Industrialization in 19th-Century Greece), in *Εισαγωγή στη νεοελληνική οικονομική ιστορία (18ος–20ός αι.)* (Introduction to Modern Greek Economic History (18th–20th centuries)), ed. V. Kremmydas (Athens: Typotheto, 1999), 174; Leda Papastefanaki, “Η Ανώνυμη Ελληνική Εταιρεία Χημικών Προϊόντων και Λιπασμάτων (1909–1993). Κεφάλαια, τεχνολογία, αγορές, εργασία” (The Greek Chemical Products and Fertilizers Company S.A. (1909–1993): Capital, Technology, Markets, Labor), in *Ανώνυμη Ελληνική Εταιρεία Χημικών Προϊόντων και Λιπασμάτων (1909–1993), Λιπάσματα Δραπετσώνας* (Greek Chemical Products and Fertilizers Company S.A. (1909–1993), Drapetsona) (Athens: Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation, 2007), 15–55.

self-employed and artisans of the towns; b) the important differentiation between these small units and the new, larger industrial businesses, which almost gained a monopoly over the market; c) the concentration of the most important enterprises in Athens and Piraeus, while the presence of industry could also be felt in Hermoupolis, Volos, Patras, Kalamata, Chalkida, and Corfu; d) the orientation of industry mainly towards the domestic market under a regime of informal tariff protection, while exports impacted only a few sectors.¹⁴ Within this structure and with these limited market prospects, factories and cottage industries were unable to absorb the labor resources in the migration from agricultural areas to the industrializing cities. The imbalance between labor supply and demand pushed daily wages down. Employers began to consider this one of their competitive advantages, and they became accustomed to regularly hiring and firing workers, which had a negative impact on the productivity of the units.¹⁵

We do not know exactly the extent of employment in the cities, as the statistical information from the population censuses conducted by the Greek state is fragmentary and poses problems of reliability due both to the methods of classification and to the incompleteness of the records. There was, however, systematic under-recording of paid and unpaid male, female, and child labor throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Despite the problems of the reliability of the relevant sources, however, the first decade of the twentieth century shows: a) an increase in the active population in the industrial sector of the economy; b) an increase in the participation of women in paid work; and c) changes in the social and technical division of labor, with the presence of new occupations (e.g., engineers, stokers, railway workers).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the characteristics of work in manufacturing included oversupply of labor as a result of rural flight, low daily wages, flat rates, and a system of contract work, as well as long, exhausting hours, temporary work, and a lack of formal technical education. In those sectors where men and women worked together (e.g., textiles, tobacco processing), the division of labor according to gender prevailed: men and women performed different tasks, with women performing those considered to be “unskilled,” finding themselves lower in the hierarchy

14 Christina Agriantoni, “Βιομηχανία” (Industry), in *Η ανάπτυξη της ελληνικής οικονομίας κατά τον 19^ο αιώνα (1830–1914)* (The Development of the Greek Economy during the 19th Century (1830–1914)), ed. Kostas Kostis and Socrates Petmezas (Athens: Alexandria Publishing, 2006), 227–28.

15 Agriantoni, “Βιομηχανία,” 228.

and renumerated with smaller salaries.¹⁶ Since poverty and the lack of a thorough technical education forced many children of the lower social strata to work in cottage industries and factories as part of the family strategy for learning a trade and supplementing the family income, child labor created further divisions and distinctions and amplified the inequalities in the processes of work.¹⁷ In the small commercial and craft enterprises of Athens and Piraeus, the (unpaid) work of many family members, especially women, seems to have been a basic constant. Within small businesses, the “leader” of the business, as well as of the family, was the man, who was “helped” by his wife and children. In the industrial censuses, women and children appeared as “contributing members” to the family business.¹⁸ In the case of brickmaking in Athens, for example, the wives and daughters of the craftsmen involved in production worked mainly as auxiliary members: they labored, unpaid, in the brickmaking process mainly in subsidiary roles, while the brickmakers’ children, from the age of 10–12, were engaged in a variety of duties, also with unpaid labor.¹⁹

Occasional work and the occupational mobility of workers were also constant features of the labor market from the late nineteenth century up to the interwar period. Seasonal and casual labor characterized work in small and large units, for two main reasons: a) because male and female workers chose to move and seek better wages elsewhere, or to contribute in other ways to the family income—mobility, in this case, was combined with the life course of male and female workers; and b) because the limited domestic market and the dependence of certain sectors (such as textiles and machine shops) on orders, or on the processing of cash crops (e.g., tobacco), as well as by the fall in demand from external markets on other sectors (the mining industry, for example) often dictated the ways in which factories and mines had to operate—i.e., a casual or a seasonal way, depending on demand. On other occasions, crises in cycles of overproduction forced the factories to stop operating for a certain period, resulting in the casual

16 Leda Papastefanaki, *Εργασία, τεχνολογία και φύλο στην ελληνική βιομηχανία. Η κλωστοϋφαντουργία του Πειραιά (1870–1940)* (Labor, Technology, and Gender in Greek Industry: The Textile Industry of Piraeus (1870–1940)) (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2009), 285–318.

17 Michalis Riginos, *Μορφές παιδικής εργασίας στη βιομηχανία και βιοτεχνία, 1870–1940* (Forms of Child Labor in Industry and Manufacturing, 1870–1940)) (Athens: Historical Archive of Greek Youth, 1995); for the question of child labor, see more analysis below.

18 Potamianos, *Οι νοικοκυραίοι*, 99–112.

19 Michalis Bardanis, “Family Business in the Brick and Tile Industry in Athens, 1900–1940,” *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique* 15, no. 1 (2019): 91–132, <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.20446>.

dismissal of male and female workers, reduction of workers' incomes, and a rise in unemployment.²⁰

Both the maintenance of discipline in the places of production and the control of labor mobility was achieved mainly by the imposition of fines. Not all employers had the same ideas about the disciplining and management of the workforce; most employers must have adopted sporadic and idiosyncratic measures. The philanthropic activity of businessmen and their wives in Greek cities in the last third of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century constituted an attempt to morally influence, control, and integrate into the social fabric the urban poor strata, an attempt that was mainly a result of the transition from direct-personal philanthropy to institutional-impersonal philanthropic activity.²¹ In those cases where greater attachment of workforce to workplace was required, either because of the distance from urban centers or because of the need for a skilled workforce in the production process, employers did not limit themselves to a general form of charitable action but applied more integrated labor management practices combined with specific benefits (e.g., housing). In the first decade of the twentieth century, the dynamic new sectors of the cement and chemical fertilizer industries (in Piraeus) moved towards a "modern" (for Greek industry) approach to labor relations, with the provision of workers' housing and food in canteens and later, up until the interwar period, in healthcare, education, and entertainment.²² The range of benefits provided by employers in the cities of industry (Piraeus, Hermoupolis, Patras, Lavrion) certainly depended on the local labor market, the type of workforce needed in each enterprise, the organization of production, and the systematic operation of the enterprise, while aiming at the attachment of workers to the enterprise in order to ensure stability and continuity in work and to establish harmonious labor relations, but also to further the ideological legitimization of capitalist relations of production. In any case, the management of workers was not gender neutral. In order to stabilize the labor force in the factory, increase labor productivity, and reduce labor resistance in the workplace, gendered divisions were adopted for workers, both at the level of the production process and at the symbolic level. Workers, both men and women, were not only treated as workers who needed protection

20 Papastefanaki, *Εργασία, τεχνολογία*, 86.

21 Christos Loukos, *Πεθαίνοντας στη Σύρο τον 19^ο αιώνα. Οι μαρτυρίες των διαθηκών* (Dying in Syros in the 19th Century: The Testimonies of Wills) (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2000), 151–86; Vaso Theodorou, "Ερμηνευτικές προσεγγίσεις της φιλανθρωπίας. Από τον κοινωνικό έλεγχο στην αμοιβαιότητα" (Interpretative Approaches to Philanthropy: From Social Control to Reciprocity), *Μνήμων* (Mnemon) 25 (2003): 171–84.

22 Papastefanaki, "Η Ανώνυμη Ελληνική Εταιρεία Χημικών Προϊόντων και Λιπασμάτων," 41–48.

or discipline but also as members of families who performed differentiated tasks in the family and according to the social division of labor.

The demands of most of the trade unions that went on strike in the period 1903–1910 in Greek cities concerned (as in other industrial societies) wages, working hours, working conditions, and the treatment of unemployment. Central to most labor demands of the period was recognition of trade unions, so that the unions themselves could control the labor market. This demand was not linked to the control of the organization of work in the workplaces but to an attempt to control unemployment and reduce labor insecurity. As the paternalistic behavior of employers as “protectors” who ensured that workers received their daily bread receded, and as workers felt increasingly exposed to job insecurity, the role of labor market regulator was now assumed by the trade unions.

The labor legislation that was passed in 1910–1914 constituted a basic axis of the economic and social policy of the Eleftherios Venizelos Liberal government (October 1910–February 1915), which succeeded the short-lived government of Stephanos Dragoumis (1910), which had itself replaced the previous short-lived government of Kyriakoulis Mavromichalis after the 1909 upheaval (Coup or pronunciamiento of Goudi). The legislation—the result of a process of moving towards greater formalization of labor—foresaw a reduction in working hours for certain professions, prohibited the employment of children under the age of 12, protected child and women’s labor, improved the health and security conditions in businesses, and provided compensation for workplace accidents. This legislation strengthened the political hegemony of the Liberals and expanded the field of state intervention. The introduction of this legislation, however, was not simply an imposition from above of the Liberals’ modernizing program. The social policy that was introduced with this labor legislation did not seek, presumably, to satisfy specific demands but to reduce social conflict. The economic and social changes of the first decade of the twentieth century, the formation of labor organizations, and the increasing number of strikes all provided the context for the development of a bourgeois reform perspective. Thus, even though the general climate of social unrest led to the political changes of 1909–1910, the labor legislation passed by the Liberal government of 1910–1915 was the first step towards the recognition of a complex social reality: the class divisions of Greek society. It is worth noting that entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized businesses reacted negatively to the introduction of labor legislation in 1910–1914, considering it premature for the Greek case.²³

23 On Goudi Coup, popular protest, and radicalism, see Nikos Potamianos, “Populism in Greece? Right, Left, and Laclau’s ‘Jacobinism’ in the Years of the Goudi Coup, 1908–1910,” *Journal*

The Greco–Turkish War (1919–1922) resulted in the displacement of more than 1.2 million refugees, of whom the majority were women, children, and elderly people. The majority, 54%, settled in cities, while 46% settled in rural areas (Macedonia, Thrace, Euboea, Epirus). In 1928, refugees constituted 28.2% of the population of Athens (in refugee settlements such as Nea Ionia, Kaisariani, and Vyronas in the suburbs of Athens), 40% of the population of Piraeus (in refugee settlements such as Drapetsona, Kokkinia, Tavros), and 47.8% of the population of Thessaloniki (in refugee settlements such as Kalamaria, Toumpa, Neo Kordelio, Nea Menemeni).²⁴ The huge task of refugee rehabilitation was undertaken by the Greek state with the help of the Refugee Settlement Commission (RSC), under the auspices of the League of Nations. The RSC was established as an autonomous international body with full legal capacity in 1923 and operated until 1930.²⁵ The settlement of refugees was combined with land reform, the flotation of refugee loans

for the Study of Radicalism 14, no. 2 (2020): 127–55. On the social question and labor legislation, see George B. Leon, “The Greek Labor Movement and the Bourgeois State, 1910–1920,” *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 4, no. 4 (1978): 5–28; Stavros Moudopoulos, “Ο νόμος 281/1914 για τα επαγγελματικά σωματεία και η επίδραση του στην εξέλιξη του συνδικαλιστικού κινήματος” (The Law 281/1914 on Trade Unions and its Impact on the Development of the Trade Union Movement), in *Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός* (Venizelism and Bourgeois Modernization), ed. Giorgos Mavrogordatos and Christos Hadziiosif (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 1992), 225–53; Liakos, *Εργασία και πολιτική*; Efi Avdela, “‘To the Most Weak and Needy’: Women’s Protective Labor Legislation in Greece,” in *Protecting Women: Labor Legislation in Europe, the United States, and Australia, 1890–1920*, ed. Ulla Wikander et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 290–317; Leda Papastefanaki, “Καταμερισμοί εργασίας και πολιτικές διαχείρισης της εργασίας στις ελληνικές πόλεις τέλη 19ου–α΄ δεκαετία του 20ού αιώνα” (Division of Labor and Labor Management Policies in the Greek Cities in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries), in *Proceedings of the Conference Η πρώτη δεκαετία του 20ού αιώνα: αλλαγές και ανατροπές* (The First Decade of the 20th Century: Changes and Upheavals) (Athens: Society for the Studies of Modern Greek Culture and General Education, 2012), 158–59; Leda Papastefanaki, “Politics, Modernisation and Public Health in Greece (1900–1940): The Case of Occupational Health,” in *Health, Hygiene and Eugenics in Southeastern Europe to 1945*, ed. Christian Promitzer et al. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), 165–91; Leda Papastefanaki, “Technological Change, Mechanisation, and the Reactions of Craftsmen and Workers in Mediterranean Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” *Moving the Social: Journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements* 71 (2024): 3–22, especially 12–16.

24 Liakos, *Εργασία και πολιτική*, 32–33.

25 The RSC “was to have four members—one American, one Britisher, and two Greeks, the American to be the chairman.” Henry Morgenthau, *I Was Sent to Athens* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1929), 8. The former US ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, served as the first chairman of the League of Nations RSC for Greece in 1923–1924; he was succeeded by Charles P. Howland (1925–1926), who was succeeded by Charles B. Eddy (1926–1930). Elisabeth Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia. The Rural Settlement of Refugees, 1922–1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 89–92.

for Greece, and the formation of many small family firms of any kind by refugees. The state and the RSC encouraged informal production and the creation of small family firms by which refugees could make a living as self-employed traders, manufacturers, or shopkeepers,²⁶ and by using the (unpaid or cheap) labor of other refugees. The arrival of the refugees in urban areas was followed by a large supply of labor—men, women, and children—looking for any source of remuneration, as well as a shift to a variety of direct livelihood sectors and casual work. The supply of refugee labor put considerable pressure on real wages for skilled and unskilled labor. In conditions of labor volatility, the oversupply created an oversaturated labor market and led to higher unemployment.²⁷

As actual daily wages in industry remained stagnant or suffered downward trends in the 1920s and early 1930s, the political plans for the mandatory use of compulsory arbitration in labor disputes were abandoned after 1922, and labor legislation in general came to a standstill until the final four years of Eleftherios Venizelos' Liberal government (1928–1932), once employers realized that the solutions likely to come out of the arbitration process would be worse for them than the kinds of balances that arose from free labor markets. In Athens and Piraeus, the refugees tried to make a living through different kinds of non-permanent work: poor male refugees worked as water sellers, greengrocers, carriers, shoemakers, builders, bakers, or restaurant employees.²⁸ Some men, but mainly women, refugees worked in the textile factories in the suburbs of Athens (Peristeri, Nea Ionia) and

26 Lila Leontidou, *Πόλεις της σιωπής. Εργατικός εποικισμός της Αθήνας και του Πειραιά, 1909–1940* (Cities of Silence: Working-Class Settlement in Athens and Piraeus, 1909–1940) (Athens: Cultural Technology Foundation E.T.B.A., 1989), 179–84; Mark Mazower, *Greece and the Inter-War Economic Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), chapter 4; Mark Mazower, “The Refugees, the Economic Crisis and the Collapse of Venizelist Hegemony, 1929–1932,” *Δελτίο Κέντρου Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών* (Bulletin of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies) 9 (1992): 119–34, <https://doi.org/10.12681/deltiokms.133>; Christos Hadziioissif, “Το προσφυγικό σοκ, οι σταθερές και οι μεταβολές της ελληνικής οικονομίας” (The Refugee Shock, the Constants and Changes in the Greek Economy), in *Ιστορία της Ελλάδας τον 20ό αιώνα. Ο μεσοπόλεμος, 1922–1940* (History of Greece in the 20th Century: The Interwar Period, 1922–1940), ed. Christos Hadziioissif, vol. B1 (Athens: Vivliorama, 2002), 9–57.

27 Socrates Kladas, *Η ανεργία εν Ελλάδι* (Unemployment in Greece) (Athens: Hermes, 1935), 6–7; Hadziioissif, “Το προσφυγικό σοκ,” 9–57; Liakos, *Εργασία και πολιτική*, 43–48; Papastefanaki, *Εργασία, τεχνολογία*, 269–74; Leda Papastefanaki, “Salaires, division sexuée du travail et hiérarchies sociales dans l’industrie textile grecque, 1912–1936,” *Cahiers Balkaniques* 45 (2018): 8–9, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ceb.10949>.

28 Hadziioissif, “Το προσφυγικό σοκ,” 9–57; Kostas Paloukis, “Marking the Political, Cultural and Spatial Boundary Lines of the Working-class in Interwar Period: The Neighbourhood of Peristeri, Athens,” in *Labour History in the Semi-Periphery. Southern Europe, 19th–20th Centuries*, ed. Leda Papastefanaki and Nikos Potamianos (Berlin: Oldenburg De Gruyter, 2021), 227–51.

Piraeus. Women refugees also worked as domestic servants, in industries and workshops, and at home. As the head of the RSC, Henry Morgenthau noticed in 1924 that “many of [the refugee] girls single-handedly supported families of three and upward. They worked at anything they could find, in the shops of Athens, in rug and other factories, as domestic servants, and some of them on their sewing or knitting machines in their own homes.”²⁹ In the refugee camps at Polygono in Athens one could see people asking for work:

They are not beggars, they do not ask for charity, but for work. Work! Work! this is their cry, but alas! little or no work is to be found. They do not mind what work they have to do [...], so long as they get a few drachmas a day. Women who in their country did nothing else than take care of their children and house are now working in factories, 8, 10, and 12 hours a day. They go as washerwomen, char-women, use all their efforts, never grumbling, but pleased when they earn enough to bring some food to their hungry children, and even, whenever they can manage it, they help those who being old or sick cannot go out to work.³⁰

The expansion of small-scale production in the informal sector of the economy in the interwar years acted as a safety valve in Athens and Piraeus and was likely to have been favored by state policy as a way to address the survival of the poor and to absorb the social and political shocks of the economic crisis.³¹ Anthropological research has suggested that the informal economy of itinerant and self-employed artisans in Greece can be interpreted in cultural terms. The cultural value of self-employment is deeply rooted in the idea of independence and is linked to the concept of male integrity. It can be seen as an expression of the code of “honor.” This insistence on male individual independence is then combined with the employment of one family member, especially women, in dependent work to ensure the survival of the family as a whole.³² Small-scale production, often operating on the boundary between the formal and informal sectors of the economy, has considerable potential for labor recruitment, as it penetrates the home, makes intensive use of the (often unpaid or underpaid) labor of women

29 Morgenthau, *I Was Sent to Athens*, 54.

30 Morgenthau, *I Was Sent to Athens*, 56–57.

31 Leontidou, *Πόλεις της σιωπής*.

32 Renée Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). See also Efi Avdela, “Genre, famille et stratégies de travail,” in Efi Avdela, *Le genre entre classe et nation. Essai d'historiographie grecque* (Paris: Editions Syllepse, 2006), 37–60.

and family members of all ages, and makes use of flexible hours, turning workers into the self-employed through subcontracting.³³

Work in the informal sector of the economy was outside the scope of legislation and social security measures implemented throughout the period under study. It should be noted, however, that the introduction of social security for all categories of workers in the formal labor market did not take place, and only after much opposition from employers, until the Metaxas dictatorship in 1936. In the immediately preceding period, 1928–1935, employers had opposed the introduction of the institution of social security, which was promoted by the ILO in collaboration with the Eleftherios Venizelos' Liberal government (1928–1932). Employers argued that the social security arrangements were unsuited for Greek conditions where labor-employer relations were governed by “old patriarchal honesty and deep social humanism, cultivated on the fertile ground of mutual respect.”³⁴ As labor protests intensified in Greece in 1928–1936 with major strikes, the Association of Greek Industrialists demanded from the state not the implementation of social security but more active intervention in the repression of strikes and the defense of “entrepreneurial freedom,” which, according to the industrialist Nikolaos Kanellopoulos, was the basis of the bourgeois state. At the same time, governments were reluctant to intervene by implementing a policy of labor legislation and social security to improve the position of workers. They did not, however, show the same reluctance when it came to using authoritarian and violent means to break up demonstrations and strikes or to displace trade unionists.³⁵ In 1936, under the authoritarian regime of Metaxas, social security was introduced; in the same year, the implementation for the first time of collective labor agreements would stabilize labor income in the formal labor market at certain rudimentary levels by setting minimum wages. However, these increases in the wages of workers brought about by the collective agreements also enshrined the inequality between the wages of men and women in law.³⁶

33 Liakos, *Εργασία και πολιτική*, 75.

34 “Η κρίσις της βιομηχανίας. Ποία μέτρα προτείνουν οι βιομήχανοι” (The Crisis in Industry: What Measures are Industrialists Proposing?), *Οικονομολόγος Αθηνών* (Economist of Athens), January 18, 1930, 11.

35 Christos Hadziiossif, “Η βενιζελογενής αντιπολίτευση στο Βενιζέλο και η πολιτική ανασύνταξη του αστισμού στο μεσοπόλεμο” (The Venizelist Opposition to Venizelos and the Political Reorganization of the Bourgeoisie in the Interwar Period), in *Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός*, ed. Giorgos Mavrogordatos and Christos Hadziiossif (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 1992), 443–48; Christos Hadziiossif, *Η γηραιά σελήνη*, 292–303.

36 Papastefanaki, *Εργασία, τεχνολογία*, 269.

The Legal Reform for Child Labor: An Ineffective Attempt?

Both in the formal and informal sectors of the Greek economy, child work of both sexes was important and dependent on the family economy. Research has explored the family strategies and the responses of rural and urban communities to diverse needs, crises, and changes in different parts of Europe. Scholars use notions such as “economy of makeshifts” (as Olwen Hufton proposes), or “adaptive family economy” (as Richard Wall suggests), or “household/family strategies” (according to Louise Tilly and others) to conceptualize this particular economic and cultural phenomenon of the (non-homogenous) family/household as an organizational and working unit that “struggles for subsistence.”³⁷ Child labor was one of the strategies that agricultural and laboring families employed for diverting the time of their members (men, women, children, adults, elderly people) into the various jobs essential for the reproduction of the family, including minor agricultural production jobs or those in the workshops, factories, and shops in towns, or by incorporating their members into (formal and informal) labor markets. The division of labor within families among all of the above activities was carried out on the basis of distinctions of gender and age.

Child and youth labor in Greek cities had been a problem for the bourgeoisie since the end of the nineteenth century and had gradually created a flow of charity and private paternalism, mainly for the recovery and moralization of children engaged in itinerant trades. The “street children” in particular, i.e., those who were wanderers or who had worked on the streets (bread distributors, grocery store clerks, polishers), emerged as a special category that seemed to threaten the social order; bourgeois reformers undertook to protect and civilize those children, but also to protect society from “dangerous” children. The issue of the unsuitability of working conditions for children and young people in Greek factories arose towards the end of the nineteenth century, after the first laws for the protection of child labor had already been passed in European countries, which established age limits

37 Louise A. Tilly, “Individual Lives and Family Strategies in the French Proletariat,” *Journal of Family History* 4, no. 2 (1979): 137–52; Richard Wall, “Work, Welfare and the Family: An Illustration of the Adaptive Family Economy,” in *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure*, ed. Lloyd Bonfield et al. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 261–94; Laurence Fontaine and Jürgen Schlumbohm, “Household Strategies for Survival: An Introduction,” *International Review of Social History* 45, no. 8 (2000): 1–17, quote 3; Manuela Martini and Leda Papastefanaki, “Des économies familiales adaptatives en temps de crise dans l’Europe méditerranéenne. Introduction,” *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique* 15 (2018): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.20442>.

below which children were not allowed to work.³⁸ In the last decade of the nineteenth century, certainly the fact that children of both sexes were, by the age of eight–ten years old, working in the textile factories of Piraeus, was not a sporadic or isolated phenomenon. Child labor, from a very early age, contributed to the family income of the working class of Piraeus.³⁹ Philanthropic bourgeois, private associations such as the Parnassus Literary Society (Φιλολογικός Σύλλογος Παρνασσός), the Society of Friends of the People (Εταιρεία των Φίλων του Λαού), the Society for the Dissemination of Greek Letters (Σύλλογος προς Διάδοσιν των Ελληνικών Γραμμάτων), and educational reformers were active in pushing against this direction.

State intervention for the protection of child labor took place in 1912, with Law ΔΚΘ' "On the Labor of Women and Children," which prohibited the employment of children under the age of 12.⁴⁰ This coincided with the years of mandatory primary education. This provision, which would come into force five years later, in 1917, also prohibited the employment of children under the age of 14 if they had not completed their basic education. Moreover, in addition to this general prohibition, the law also placed restrictions on the daily working hours of children above the age of 12. Thus, a child aged 12–14 should not work over six hours a day, while if he or she was 14–18 then they should work no more than ten hours a day, and no more than eight hours on the eve of holidays or on a Saturday. Nightwork was banned for children under the age of 18, while special prohibitions were applied to certain jobs and professions. For example, children under the age of 14 were forbidden from working in outdoor commercial work or in theatrical performances. It was forbidden to use children who had not

38 Liakos, *Εργασία και πολιτική*, 278–82; Pothiti Hantzaroula, *Σμιλεύοντας την υποταγή. Οι έμμισθες οικιακές εργάτριες στην Ελλάδα το α' μισό του 20ού αιώνα* (Sculpting Submission: Wage-Earning Domestic Workers in Greece in the First Half of the 20th Century) (Athens: Papazisis, 2012), chapter 5.

39 Eugenia Zografou, "Πως εργάζονται οι γυναίκες μας" (How Our Women Work), *Δημοσιεύματα* (Publications), vol. 4 (Athens, 1903), 34, 36, 50; Papastefanaki, *Εργασία, τεχνολογία*, 96–100, 201–14.

40 Law ΔΚΘ', "περί εργασίας γυναικών και ανηλίκων" ("On the Labor of Women and Children"), 1912; For the text of the laws, see Michalis Kritikos and Ioannis Zarras, *Εργατική και κοινωνική νομοθεσία* (Labor and Social Legislation), preface Spyros Koronis (Athens: 'Hermes' Alex. Vitsikounakis, 1929); Michalis Kritikos and Ioannis Zarras, *Εργατική και κοινωνική νομοθεσία. Συμπλήρωμα* (Labor and Social Legislation. Supplement) (Athens: 'Hermes' Alex. Vitsikounakis, 1932); Yannis Lixouri-otis, "Προστατευτικός νομοθετικός παρεμβατισμός και η εμφάνιση του εργατικού δικαίου στην Ελλάδα: η περίπτωση της παιδικής εργασίας" (Protective Legislative Intervention and the Emergence of Labor Law in Greece: The Case of Child Labor), in *Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός*, ed. Giorgos Mavrogordatos and Christos Hadziioissif (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 1992), 205–23; Riginos, *Μορφές παιδικής εργασίας στη βιομηχανία και βιοτεχνία*, 16–17.

reached the age of 15 in underground mine work.⁴¹ The law introduced a special “labor booklet,” which was to be provided to child workers and in which information on their recruitment and dismissal was to be noted by the employer, as well as relevant medical certification on their capacity to work.⁴² The minimum age for work was changed from 12 to 14 in 1920, although only for work in factories.⁴³ Despite the many specific regulations, the law did not cover the employment of children and young people in agricultural and animal husbandry work, nor did it cover servant labor.⁴⁴ In other words, the legislature hesitated to intervene in the “traditional” agro-pastoral production that was considered the backbone of the country, or within the middle-class family that employed young girls as servants.

Despite the intent of the law to protect child workers, it is certain that it failed in its application. One reason for this was the wide range of special provisions, which made the main protective principles unworkable because it did not offer child workers a clear sense that they had gained specific rights.⁴⁵ The law, despite its many special regulations, also left outside the framework of legal protection those children, particularly girls, who worked as the servants of foreign families. Furthermore, mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the law were lacking. The Labor Inspectorate, a small central service of the Ministry of National Economy, which carried out periodic inspections of certain enterprises, was limited to uncovering only the non-application of the labor laws, without having any means to enforce their application.

The Labor Inspectorate did frequently find violations of the child labor limits, violations which could be attributed both to poverty and to the specific conditions of the period. The war decade of 1912–1922, which saw the military recruitment of male adult family members, contributed to the increased presence of child workers in craft workshops and industries; later, the arrival of refugee families from Asia Minor, among them numerous orphans, led to an increase in the employment of children under 12 in factories. In the interwar period, many sectors witnessed high rates of

41 Lixouriotis, “Προστατευτικός νομοθετικός παρεμβατισμός,” 216–17.

42 Lixouriotis, “Προστατευτικός νομοθετικός παρεμβατισμός,” 217.

43 Lixouriotis, “Προστατευτικός νομοθετικός παρεμβατισμός,” 218.

44 In the interwar period, domestic work was regulated by police provisions and not by labor legislation. See, Pothiti Hantzaroula, “Children’s Domestic Labour: Intimate Relations, Family Politics and the Construction of Identity of Domestic Workers in Interwar Greece,” in *Working in Greece and Turkey: A Comparative Labour History from Empires to Nation States, 1840–1940*, ed. Leda Papastefanaki and M. Erdem Kabadayı (New York: Berghahn, 2020), 435.

45 Lixouriotis, “Προστατευτικός νομοθετικός παρεμβατισμός,” 219.

child labor: in box-making, spinning, and tobacco factories, as bookbinders and tailors, as well as in paid domestic service. In 1927–28, labor reports documented a high rate of child labor in carpet and silk mills and in the various craft workshops.⁴⁶ In Piraeus, child labor was mostly concentrated in textile factories, tobacco warehouses, and box-making factories. The poverty of the working classes and the lack of a social welfare mechanism meant that the labor inspectors tolerated “tacitly the circumvention of the law, so that we do not end up throwing them out onto the streets and thus being the bringers of greater evil.”⁴⁷ In 1921, in the textile factories of Piraeus, 78% of the 2,000 female workers who were asked, answered that “they had been engaged in work from the age of 10–12, and sometimes from the age of 7–8.”⁴⁸ In 1928, the number of children under legal age who were working in Piraeus’ spinning mills reached 4,000.⁴⁹

The attempt to control and document child labor encountered many obstacles, one of which was confirming the true age of working children. This was not a new problem: it had been noted as early as 1914 and again in 1921, and there were two aspects to it. Girls, and sometimes boys, too, were often not registered in the civil and municipal registers. Labor booklets were then issued for them based only on certificates issued by priests or on oral statements by witnesses from among the children’s relatives or family friends; these would falsely raise the age of the child so that the labor booklet would be issued and the child could find work.⁵⁰ Labor inspectors were certain that priests were issuing false certificates in the name of “charity.”⁵¹

46 Ministry of National Economy, Labor Inspectorate, *Εκθέσεις του προσωπικού επιθεωρήσεως εργασίας επί της εφαρμογής των εργατικών νόμων, έτος 1921* (Reports by the Labor Inspectors on the Implementation of Labor Laws, year 1921) (Athens: Typographie Nationale, 1923), 11, 14, 16, 83; Ministry of National Economy, Labor Inspectorate, *Περίληψις εκθέσεων του προσωπικού Επιθεωρήσεως Εργασίας επί της εφαρμογής των εργατικών νόμων δια τα έτη 1927–1928* (Summary of Reports by the Labor Inspectors on the Implementation of Labor Laws for the Years 1927–1928) (Athens: Typographie Nationale, 1930), 7; Riginos, *Μορφές παιδικής εργασίας*, 44–49.

47 Ministry of National Economy, Labor Inspectorate, *Εκθέσεις ... 1921*, 54, 79.

48 Ministry of National Economy, Labor Inspectorate, *Εκθέσεις ... 1921*, 83.

49 According to an ILO publication, as cited in Liakos, *Εργασία και πολιτική*, 289.

50 Labour Inspectorate, *Reports 1921*, 13; Papastefanaki, *Εργασία, τεχνολογία*, 98.

51 Ministry of National Economy, Labor Inspectorate, *Εκθέσεις και Πεπραγμένα Σώματος Επιθεωρήσεως Εργασίας επί της εφαρμογής των εργατικών νόμων και των συνθηκών εργασίας εν Ελλάδι κατά το 1932* (Reports and Proceedings of the Labor Inspectorate on the Implementation of Labor Laws and Working Conditions in Greece in 1932) (Athens: Typographie Nationale, 1933), 6–7; Ministry of National Economy, Labor Inspectorate, *Εκθέσεις και πεπραγμένα σώματος επιθεωρήσεως εργασίας κατά το 1934* (Reports and Proceedings of the Labor Inspectorate in 1934) (Athens: Typographie Nationale, 1936), 22–23; on the problem of false age registration in the sources, see Papastefanaki, *Εργασία, τεχνολογία*, 206–9.

Furthermore, it appears that the factory owners themselves hid the ages of the children who worked in their factories, because children who were aged 8–12 were “suitable” for certain kinds of work and cost less. Spyros Koronis, an economist who was a former student of the German economist Adolph Wagner at the University of Berlin and one of the first promoters of labor legislation in Greece, worked as head of the Section of Labor and Social Welfare in 1911–1916 at the Ministry of National Economy;⁵² he observed during the collection of data on “protected persons” in workshops and factories that “employers, knowing that the employment of persons under the age of 12 is prohibited, in their answers probably noted these persons as being older in age, or omitted them altogether.”⁵³

In the early 1930s, under pressure from the League of Nations, efforts were made by the Labor Inspectorate to fully apply the labor protection law to children. The inspectors were “instructed not to accept any justification for the employment of underage children in any form of work.”⁵⁴ The Labor Inspectorate, believing that the reasons for the tolerance shown—until then—on the issue no longer existed, attempted to implement the relevant legislation. Yet, even in the 1930s violations of the law can be observed; the extent of child labor was probably decreasing, but child labor (including under 14 years of age) remained. In the Greek textile industry as a whole, for example, in 1936 the apprentice staff consisted of young children usually aged 14–18 years, and often under 14 years.⁵⁵ There was a general tolerance regarding the non-implementation of the law, which grew thanks to the inadequate mechanisms of administrative control, but also regarding the general economic and social conditions of the relations of production. Legislation alone was not enough.

52 Alexandros-Andreas Kyrtsis, “Ο Α. Παπαναστασίου και οι θεωρίες κοινωνικής μεταρρύθμισης των αρχών του 20ού αιώνα” (A. Papanastasiou and the Theories of Social Reform in the Early 20th Century), *Ta Historica* 9 (1988), 350; Liakos, *Εργασία και πολιτική*, 215–17.

53 Spyros Koronis, “Παρατηρήσεις επί του αριθμού των εν Ελλάδι εις βιομηχανικάς, μεταλλευτικάς και υπαιθρίους εργασίας απασχολουμένων παιδιών, νεαρών προσώπων και γυναικών” (Observations on the Number of Children, Young People, and Women Employed in Industrial, Mining, and Outdoor Work in Greece), *Δελτίον του Υπουργείου Εθνικής Οικονομίας* (Bulletin of the Ministry of National Economy) 2 (1914): 4; Yannis Kordatos, *Ιστορία του ελληνικού εργατικού κινήματος* (History of the Greek Labor Movement) (Athens: Boukoumanis, 1974), 234.

54 Ministry of National Economy, Labor Inspectorate, *Εκθέσεις και πεπραγμένα Σώματος Επιθεωρήσεως Εργασίας επί της εφαρμογής των εργατικών νόμων και των συνθηκών εργασίας εν Ελλάδι κατά το 1931* (Reports and Proceedings of the Labor Inspectorate on the Implementation of Labor Laws and Working Conditions in Greece in 1931) (Athens: Typographie Nationale, 1934), 16–17; Papastefanaki, *Εργασία, τεχνολογία*, 98–99.

55 Highest Economic Council (ΑΟΣ), *Έρευνα και γνωμοδότησις επί της βιομηχανίας βάμβακος* (Research and Opinion on the Cotton Industry) (Athens: Typographie Nationale, 1937), 13.

The state's intervention in the labor market was aimed at tackling adult male unemployment and improving the country's image to the outside world. The liberal member of parliament Leon Makkas, who was in charge of the parliamentary committee responsible for the draft law "on the regulation of the labor market," admitted in 1931 that the legislation "subjecting the employment of minors to certain restrictions" remained "practically unworkable." He argued that if the legislation were applied, (male) unemployment would be reduced.⁵⁶ The specific link between male unemployment and child labor was not self-evident. On the contrary, it revealed the dominant perceptions of the social position of adult men and their role as "heads"—"protectors of the family"—responsible for the social reproduction of the other members of the family. In this respect, Leon Makkas's bourgeois reformist perspective aligned with the perspective of interwar labor unionism, which also insisted on the implementation of special protective legislation for children and women, thus treating these two working groups as defenseless and in need of help, aiming mainly to protect male employment. However, because of the inadequate inspection system the protective legislation for children and women remained largely "a dead letter," as diverse observers noticed.⁵⁷ During the interwar period, because of increased poverty, the oversupply of labor, and the specific strategies adopted by rural and urban working class families, boys and girls under the age of 12 (or 14) migrated to Athens and Piraeus to work as domestic servants, in workshops, and in shops, while also refugee children under the age of 12 (or 14) worked in factories, in workshops, and as domestic servants. Besides factories and workshops, child domestic labor was one of the dominant forms of child labor in interwar Greece. The expansion of the urban middle class created new needs for servant labor in the towns. Girls, often from the age of six or seven, entered domestic service as foster children (*psychokores*). As historian Pothiti Hantzaroula argues, the practice of fostering constituted "an informal form of adoption that aimed not so much at securing cheap labor but at establishing a contract of life service based on bonds of fictive kinship." Fostering was then an employers' strategy aimed at "securing care in old age, as well as the care

56 Labor Inspectorate, *Reports 1932*, 76; Leon Makkas, *Έκθεσις της επί της Εθνικής Οικονομίας Κοινοβουλευτικής Επιτροπής επί του σχεδίου Νόμου 'περί ρυθμίσεως αγοράς εργασίας'* (Report by the Parliamentary Committee on National Economy on the Draft Law on Labor Market Regulation) (Athens: Typographie Nationale, 1931), 61. The law 5288 *περί ρυθμίσεως αγοράς εργασίας* (On the Regulation of the Labor Market) (1931) provided for the establishment of Labor Offices and expressed a general state concern for the organization of the labor market.

57 E.g., Eliot Grinnell Mears, *Greece Today: The Aftermath of the Refugee Impact* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1929), 112–13.

of future generations.” On the other hand, for poor rural families, sending their daughters into service of people of a higher social class was a survival strategy, as they hoped to receive a dowry for the girls when they married, or to receive a lump sum after the employer’s death.⁵⁸

Regarding the multiple but often ineffective regulations governing child labor, the non-coverage of child labor in agricultural activities and domestic service, and the inadequacy of the Labor Inspectorate in monitoring the application of the law, we might suppose, as Hadjimichalis and Vaiou have argued, that the state “introduced forms of regulation that are a major condition for the development of informal activities. Regulation here takes a directly political status and is applied both through active policies and through passive tolerance.”⁵⁹ As the state and local authorities were unable to ensure the welfare of poor families in cities and rural areas, or guarantee the livelihood and education of poor children, the strategic “choice” of poor people to offer their children’s labor or that of members of their families (domestic labor, in workshops, etc.) led to more informal activities.

“Industrious Women” Working at Home

Working at home in manufacturing was a real and widespread phenomenon both in urban centers and in the countryside in Greece from the nineteenth century, constituting another side of informal labor. From the 1890s, small-scale garment, lace, and embroidery manufacturing developed thanks to cheap female homework. Women worked at home and on behalf of their husbands’ small businesses. In 1912, the wives of Athens’ mattress manufacturers sewed the mattresses their husbands made at home.⁶⁰ Women often worked at home in unstable and insecure conditions, combining unpaid reproductive and subsistence labor with waged labor for the market. It has already been shown that in Greece, as in other European countries, the diffusion of the domestic sewing machine led to the development of informal home-based work.⁶¹ Even the uniforms of the Greek army were sewn entirely by women at their houses or in workshops organized by women’s charitable institutions from the 1880s until the 1920s, with materials

58 Hantzaroula, “Children’s Domestic Labour,” 428.

59 Hadjimichalis and Vaiou, “Whose Flexibility?” 95–96.

60 Potamianos, *Οι νοικοκυράις*, 109.

61 Leda Papastefanaki, “Sewing at Home in Greece, 1870s to 1930s: A Global History Perspective,” in Nilsson et al., *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers*, 74–95.

distributed by the Army Material Depot of Piraeus through contractors, or, more rarely, through women's charitable institutions. During the war decade, 1912–1922, around 9,000 women conducted piecework in homes in Athens and Piraeus, sewing uniforms for the army, though after the end of the war the number of these women workers decreased to 2,300.⁶² The writer Alexandros Papadiamantis, in his short stories about working-class families living in the neighborhoods of Athens at the turn of the nineteenth century, has referred to the many “industrious women” (seamstresses, laundresses, pressers, knitters) working at home.⁶³

Working from home remained legally unregulated. As mentioned already, in the interwar period, the arrival of refugees created pressures on the labor market, leading to falling wages and an increase in working from home. In 1927–1928, the textile factories of Athens and Piraeus employed almost exclusively refugee women (of a total of 14,238 women, 10,445 were refugees and only 3,793 were from Greece). Greek women who worked in the textile sector left the factories and went to other jobs or, as the Labor Inspectorate noted, “remained in craftwork at home,”⁶⁴ while women refugees also often worked from home doing embroidery and lace, sewing garments, and weaving carpets. The labor inspector Maria Svolou (born Desypri) (1892?–1976),⁶⁵ who had been working in the Labor Inspectorate at the Ministry of National Economy since 1921 and was a leading member of the

62 Liakos, *Εργασία*, 293; Zizi Salimpa, *Γυναίκες εργάτριες στην ελληνική βιομηχανία και στη βιοτεχνία (1870–1922)* (Women Workers in Greek Industry and Manufacturing (1870–1922)) (Athens: Historical Archive of Greek Youth, 2002), 141–49.

63 There are a few short stories by Alexandros Papadiamantis (*Apanta*, vols. 1–5, Athens: Domos, 1981–1988) on “industrious women” in Athens. See also Papastefanaki, “Sewing at Home,” 92.

64 National Economy, Labor Inspectorate, *Περίληψις εκθέσεων ... 1927–1928*, 33–34.

65 In the Greek–Italian war (1940–1941), Maria Svolou volunteered as a nurse. During the German occupation she worked as an inspector for the National Organization of the Christian Solidarity (*Εθνικός Οργανισμός Χριστιανικής Αλληλεγγύης*) (1941–1944) and then as secretary and vice-president of National Solidarity (*Εθνική Αλληλεγγύη*). She was one of the five women elected to the National Council of the Liberated Greek Territories (*Εθνικό Συμβούλιο της Πολιτικής Επιτροπής Εθνικής Απελευθέρωσης*). She was imprisoned for her activities in the “National Solidarity” movement in 1948–1949 and for a few months in 1951. She was elected twice as deputy of United Democratic Left party (*Ενιαία Δημοκρατική Αριστερά*) in 1958 and 1961. She was a founding member of the Panhellenic Union of Women (*Πανελλαδική Ένωση Γυναικών*) in 1964. See Efi Avdela and Angelika Psarra, “Εισαγωγή” (Introduction), in Efi Avdela and Angelika Psarra, *Ο φεμινισμός στην Ελλάδα του Μεσοπολέμου. Μία ανθολογία* (Feminism in Greece during the Interwar Period: An Anthology) (Athens: Gnosi, 1985), 13–97; Efi Avdela, “Contested Meanings: Protection and Resistance in Labour Inspectors’ Reports in 20th-c. Greece,” *Gender & History* 9, no. 2 (1997): 310–32; Dimitra Samiou, “Svolou, Maria,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movements and Feminisms in Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe: 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Francisca de Haan et al. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), 552–57; Yannis Skalidakis,

Greek feminist movement and co-founder of the Greek League for Women's Rights (Σύνδεσμος για τα δικαιώματα της γυναίκας), published broadly about the working conditions of women workers during the interwar period. She highlighted the issue of homework by focusing on the absence of relevant legal regulation and the vulnerability of women working at home:

No legal provision has been made for the professions done at home. As is known, thousands of refugee housewives threw themselves into these sectors, especially embroidery, lace, simple forms of needlework, etc. [...] and widows came here, without any financial income, and hence were forced to practice any professions that were easily available to them they of course offered themselves for the so-called women's professions, embroidery, simple needlework, etc. Furthermore, [...] the mediation of third parties between the female worker and the merchant absorbs the minimal profit of the female worker, who works, when she has work, endless hours for a starvation wage. [...] The wages drop to an unimaginable level, because many housewives practice these professions as a side job and accept any payment.⁶⁶

And elsewhere, Svolou noticed:

Extremely depressing [is work from home], as it has changed with developments. Because, of course, I do not mean work that is commissioned directly by the consumer from the female worker, but work done on behalf of the merchant or contractor. All the ready-to-wear men's and children's clothing, all the army uniforms, a thousand and two types of decoration, and almost exclusively the lace and embroidery of the Aegean islands, Crete, Cyprus, Attica, are made by women who work at home. Yet everywhere, however, between the female worker and the customer comes the contractor, in the form of the grocer in the villages, who does this small trade too, or the businessman, here in the capital, who has the exclusive commission to hold the army auctions. All these newer forms of parasitism absorb the greatest part of the female worker's profit, who is drowning in this system, hence why it was named the sweated system, suffocating, and this female worker feels simply that the hours, the days, the months weigh upon her—without her earning enough—which she

"From Resistance to Counterstate: The Making of Revolutionary Power in the Liberated Zones of Occupied Greece, 1943–1944," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 33, no. 1 (2015): 169.

66 Contemporary Social History Archives (ASKI), Archive Maria Svolou, Report 1936; Report 1946.

expends on the finest embroidery, on the transparent lace. The female worker bent over her machine looks only with concern at the pile of ready-made clothes upon which the children sleep, and which she must finish this week in order to secure bread.⁶⁷

Maria Svolou did not condemn women's work at home, but she called for the abolition of the middlemen (merchants or contractors) who smashed the wages of piece-working women. She also called for the institutionalization of the apprenticeship system for seamstresses and the abolition of unpaid apprenticeships for apprentice seamstresses who provided their labor.⁶⁸

Women, both refugees and non-refugees alike, worked either at home in informal forms of work with flexible hours or in factories and workshops in more formal forms of work with fixed hours. One form of work did not exclude the other: women could choose, to some extent, which form of work was more suitable for them and their families, depending on their life course or on their need for a better wage or family income. Based on the data on the age composition of female workers in textile factories in Athens and Piraeus,⁶⁹ it is reasonable to assume that a large proportion of young female workers in the factories left due to marriage and/or the desire to have children and then raised their children (as there were no social welfare institutions for working mothers) while working informally at home. Women often returned to the factory at an older age, when family circumstances allowed or when there was a need for a more stable income. In this shift between paid formal work outside the home and informal work at home, working women sought to balance their time between productive and reproductive activities; and the time spent in paid work was adjusted according to the needs of the family and for reproduction. Women's work in factories and crafts until marriage, their leaving afterwards, the poorly paid informal work at home, or their work in a variety of low-paid jobs with flexible hours and occasional return to the factory, were not peculiar to Greece in the 1890s–1930s. They were widespread practices in countries that experienced the process of

67 ASKI, Archive Maria Svolou, Report, without date (1930s).

68 ASKI, Archive Maria Svolou, "Εισήγηση πάνω στην οικονομική και κοινωνική θέση της Ελληνίδας" (Proposal on the Economic and Social Status of Greek Woman), May 2, 1946.

69 Papastefanaki, *Εργασία, τεχνολογία*, 206–14; Leda Papastefanaki, "From the Ottoman Empire to Greece: Women's Work in Textile Industry in a Refugee Settlement of Athens in the Interwar period: The 'Moutalaski' Textile Factory in Nea Ionia," paper presented at the International Conference *Social Mobility, Gender, Workshop, and Business in Mediterranean Europe (19th and 20th Centuries)* (University of Barcelona, September 4–5, 2024).

industrialization, constituting working women's management of their time in matching their productive and reproductive duties.⁷⁰

Conclusion

Informal labor, especially for children of both sexes and women of all ages, was integrated in many ways into the everyday life of the working poor in Greek cities in the 1890s–1930s. Seasonality and casual labor characterized the work of men, but mainly women, both in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Informal labor in Greece has been associated with specific historical conditions of society and the economy, as informality has acted as a safety valve for social and political tensions and has been favored by state policies and state tolerance. During the interwar period, the informal sector of the economy had an important share of the overall economy. The presence of Asia Minor refugees put pressure on the labor market, and it was through the informal sector of the economy that some employment opportunities were created.

The Greek worlds of work in the 1890s–1930s consisted of the coexistence of industry and workshop labor with casual labor: male and female workers worked in industry and cottage industries, while poor day laborers, both men and women, worked as artisans in workshops, and as (“skilled” or “unskilled”) workers in factories. They also worked as itinerants: doing menial jobs, moving around from job to job without receiving a stable wage, or working in informal workshops or at home.⁷¹ The informal sector was a structural element of the Greek economy as a whole, assisted by the measures implemented by, or the omissions of, state policy. Informal labor was linked to the different demands of the internal market, with its diverse employment patterns and non-application of laws and regulations, most notably with regard to child labor. It was also linked to the political, administrative, and social tolerance towards this non-implementation of the laws and the absence of social security and social welfare. Under these specific conditions, informal work coexisted with formal labor in late nineteenth and the first half of twentieth-century Greece.

70 Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), 123–29, 194–205, 228; Catherine Omnès, *Ouvrières Parisiennes. Marchés du Travail et trajectoires professionnelles au 20^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 1997), 289–318.

71 Leda Papastefanaki, “Labor and Trade Unions in Modern Greece” (October 22, 2025), in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Greek History*, ed. Stefanos Katsikas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197759523.013.0020>.

It is worth noting that for male trade unionism, women's work was seen as subordinate and complementary to the work of the male head of the family, but also a threat to the interests of the working class and to the cohesion of the working family. Children's work was also seen as a threat to male work, contributing to the decline in male wages and an increase in male unemployment. The reformist demand for an increase in male wages in the formal labor market, combined with a call for legal restrictions on female and child labor, would, at an ideal level, lead to circumstances in which women stayed at home, where they could devote themselves to their reproductive tasks and work only to supplement the family income if needed. From the bourgeois reformist perspective, which took the form of state intervention in labor relations, this social question was thus linked to the health and morality of the working family. Women's work was seen as secondary to men's work and should not compromise their primary natural and social function: marriage and motherhood.

From a practical perspective, however, informal labor seems to have been a "choice" for working class families in urban and rural contexts: as one of their strategies for survival and for accruing income. For working class women, informal labor was just such a choice, a way to earn a living for themselves and for their families, while managing their time effectively. Informal labor allowed women to combine paid work with unpaid housework, family work, and caring duties. In modern Greece, certain cultural values define female identities and gender relations within the family: domesticity, housekeeping, cooking skills, and caring for the family were considered important female qualities until the end of the twentieth century, and women from the working and middle classes were expected to be, among other things, excellent housewives, exceptional cooks, and attentive caregivers to all members of their family, regardless of age. These characteristics were (and still are) a source of pride for most women in Greece. Overall, cultural patterns of gender and age hierarchies inside the family, along with women and children's subordination, have contributed to the long-standing tradition of informal labor in Greece.

About the Author

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6. Informal Labor and the “Extra Waiter” in Inter-War Britain

David Cowan

Abstract: This chapter considers informal work in the service sector in early twentieth-century Britain. “Extra waiters” were short-term workers employed by restaurants. This chapter adopts a biographical approach to exploring informal labor between the two world wars. It works outwards from the autobiography of an “extra waiter” published in 1937. Setting his experiences in a broader context, through social surveys and press discussions of restaurant work, this chapter explores how “extra waiters” sought to cope economically amid mass unemployment, through their relations with employers, customers, and fellow workers. More positive representations of these workers’ lives focused on their opportunities for flexible work, but circulated alongside growing attention to the insecurity they faced.

Keywords: service sector, autobiography, waiters, restaurants

When a diamond is stolen from a restaurant in “The Regatta Mystery” (1936), a story by the British detective writer Agatha Christie, the solution revolves around a temporary waiter. The jewel has been spirited away, “neatly attached with a morsel of chewing gum” beneath a dinner plate, by a “member of the gang” who “got himself taken on as an extra waiter at the Royal George.” Solving the crime requires an awareness of seasonal restaurant hiring patterns: “it was holiday time, remember, and they would need extra staff.”¹

1 Agatha Christie, *13 for Luck* (New York: Dell, 1974), 173.

The “extra waiter” at this time was an additional member of the service staff who would temporarily top up a restaurant’s labor force at peaks in demand, such as Easter.² These workers were also “called in to assist the permanent staff on special occasions,” like banquets. “No estimate of the number of these casuals is possible,” cautioned a contemporary study of London work. Yet the “extra waiter”—colloquially known as an “extra duck”—was clearly a sufficiently well-known figure to feature in one of Agatha Christie’s mysteries.³ A radio broadcast to mark the coronation of the new king in 1937 featured an actor with a “fruity chuckle” playing “an extra waiter” in an amusing feature.⁴

The visibility of the “extra waiter” also aroused caution and controversy in Britain before World War Two; the label suggesting the marginality of these workers employed before becoming surplus to original requirements and easily let go. A study of the “extra waiter” can offer insights into experiences of informal work in early twentieth-century Britain, and into whether the representations of these workers’ lives in the media centered solely on their insecurity. Crucially, because some members of restaurant staff moved between permanent service and temporary work as “extra waiters,” this chapter also highlights the cultural status of informal labor *in relation to* formal labor. And by focusing our attention on the differences of gender and nationality that, it was sometimes thought, weakened the rights of women and migrants to work as “extra waiters” in times of economic struggle, we can also see how in straitened circumstances this kind of informal work was seen as an opportunity non-migrant men deserved more than other people.

The hiring of casual restaurant staff was not, of course, a peculiarly British, inter-war phenomenon. In early twentieth-century Italy, when service workers went on strike, “many establishments were able to replace strikers with other workers (recruited from the pool of casual labourers that had swollen with rising unemployment).”⁵ In the United States shortly after the turn of the century, “hot weather in Sacramento sent waiters scurrying for cooler coastal towns, with itinerants filling the gaps.”⁶ But

2 “Situations Wanted,” *Daily Telegraph*, April 11, 1933, 22.

3 *The New Survey of London Life and Labour: Vol. VIII: London Industries III* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1934), 231. Except where noted, all subsequent references to *The New Survey* are to this edition.

4 “Broadcasting: The Coronation Programme,” *The Observer*, May 16, 1937, 22.

5 Paolo Raspadori, “Becoming Workers? Strikes by Hotel and Restaurant Staff in Italy (1902–1923),” *International Review of Social History* 60, no. 3 (2015): 406.

6 Mary Lee Spence, “They Also Serve Who Wait,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1983): 17.

in Britain, where "[t]he movement to eliminate the use of casual labour became almost a moral crusade" for social reformers, and when "in the early years of the twentieth century this particular reform was advocated repeatedly in discussions over unemployment" by notable thinkers including William Beveridge (later an important influence on the welfare state that followed World War Two), the figure of the casual waiter was bound to raise particular comment.⁷ This was, in part, because the British norm of partly or fully paying waiters through discretionary tips from their customers was becoming increasingly anomalous in Europe—and "extra waiters" were often denied the opportunity to claim tips. Commentary about "extra waiters" was further pronounced in inter-war Britain when mass unemployment left casual work in restaurants an increasingly common last resort for the jobless—at the same time as wealthy consumers wanted to continue to enjoy dining out. In an industrial country where casual work was becoming rarer, the British restaurant industry's enduring reliance on "extra waiters" became a focal point of debate among trade unions, managements, customers, and waiters themselves.

The figure of the inter-war waiter is of broader historical interest because of the ways in which his life could bridge social worlds that are often treated separately. Consider an advert sent to a local newspaper in 1922 from a desperate job-seeker: "SMART Extra-Waiter (22) wants Work."⁸ Within a matter of days, a lucky "extra waiter" might briefly move from a world of poverty to a world of plenty (and back again)—rendering starkly apparent the injustice that the two coincided. Though few historians would now propose that the working, middle, and upper classes had "rigid" boundaries, influential research depicts considerable residential and cultural segregation in "a country of social classes into which the English freely categorized themselves."⁹ This did not stop there being (infrequent) points of contact between these groups: "for many early-twentieth-century Britons, contact between servant and employer might be the only encounter they had with individuals of another class."¹⁰

A less well-studied site of "encounter" was the commercial restaurant, where contact between customers and waiting staff sparked far-reaching

7 Noelle Whiteside, "Welfare Insurance and Casual Labour: A Study of Administrative Intervention in Industrial Employment, 1906–26," *The Economic History Review* 32, no. 4 (1979): 507, 509.

8 "Situations Wanted," *Hull Daily Mail*, January 17, 1922, 1.

9 Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1998]), v.

10 Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014 [2011]), 18.

concerns around remuneration in British society. While most inter-war consumers were spatially distanced from the miners who hewed their coal and the factory workers who assembled their cars, the waiters who served their dinners stood far closer by. The writer of an article in a socialist paper related

a conversation that I had with a waiter in a fashionable London restaurant. There were four of us at lunch and our bill came to twenty-five shillings. "This," I remarked, "is probably more than the waiter gets in a week." My friends looked with surprise, but the waiter confirmed my remarks.

The waiter further explained "that at his previous job he had to pay five shillings weekly for the privilege of having a stand in the restaurant."¹¹ Concern about the conditions of waiting staff, and a determination to help, extended beyond radical publications. An article in the weekly newspaper *The Sphere* documented one organization's efforts "to assist the unemployed in the distressed areas with clothing and boots." It noted that any donated clothes might be suitable, and declared that:

Evening dress suits which you might think useless for an unemployed man, come in very handy for unemployed boys who have a chance of becoming waiters in large towns like London where new restaurants are always springing up, and the ranks of the foreign waiters need more and more strengthening from local talent.¹²

Although waiters were embroiled in some major debates in inter-war Britain, historians have neglected these men. (It is worth clarifying that in Britain, the inter-war waiter was always a male worker: while "waitresses were commonly employed in teashops and lunchtime venues," "it was considered essential for men to serve at the dinner table"—though this was not always realized in practice.¹³ Significantly, hiring casual "extra waitresses" meant denying a job to men, in a society with a strong association between masculinity and breadwinning.)¹⁴ Waiters, notes Brenda Assael, have been

11 Pavo, "Shop Slavery: Workers Forced to Live on Charity: Eleven and Sixpence a Waiter's Wage," *The Clarion*, July 1930, 196.

12 Charles Graves, "Personal Service," *The Sphere*, July 1, 1933, 16, 36.

13 Rosalind Eyben, "'The Moustache Makes Him More of a Man': Waiters' Masculinity Struggles, 1890–1910," *History Workshop Journal* 87 (2019): 190–91.

14 Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), chapter 2.

little studied by "economic, social, cultural, or labour historians," partly due to their relatively limited labor "organization and recognition."¹⁵ Paolo Raspadori writes:

Their seasonal work, their constant contact with the lifestyle of the middle classes and the aristocracy, and their complaisance with customers (due to the expectation of gratuities, the predominant pay in the profession) have made them the object of suspicion and sometimes scorn on the part of working-class representatives.¹⁶

As Patricia van den Eeckhout has suggested, this has left workers in the "service sector" obscured by comparison with the more militant workers in the "artisanal and manufacturing trades."¹⁷ In this respect, waiters may stand comparison with the domestic servants whose attitudes towards their employers earlier generations of historians unhelpfully characterized as mere "deference," and so "excluded [these servants] from histories of the working class."¹⁸ Fortunately, the historiographical treatment of waiters is expanding, but, as Frances Steel has written, "service work [is] only beginning to attract sustained historical attention."¹⁹ Moreover, the fullest studies of waiters in twentieth-century Britain—by Brenda Assael and Rohan McWilliam—focus on the period before World War One.²⁰ The sub-group of the "extra waiter" has been even more scantily documented. This chapter, then, breaks fresh ground in exploring the working lives of

15 Brenda Assael, *The London Restaurant, 1840–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 8–9.

16 Raspadori, "Becoming Workers?" 381–82.

17 Patricia Van den Eeckhout, "The History of Labour and Labour Relations in Hotels and Restaurants in Western Europe and the United States in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: An Introduction," *Food and History* 11, no. 2 (2013): 201–2.

18 Selina Todd, "Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900–1950," *Past & Present* 203, no. 1 (2009): 181–82, 188–90.

19 Frances Steel, "Waitresses at Sea: Gender, Race and Service Labour on Ocean Liners, c. 1930s–1960s," *Women's History Review* 30, no. 2 (2021): 223.

20 Assael, *The London Restaurant*, chapter 3; Rohan McWilliam, *London's West End: Creating the Pleasure District, 1800–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), chapters 13–14; Judith R. Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), chapter 4, offers a rich history of the Italian waiters working in London that stretches beyond World War One; Grace Whorral-Campbell, "Emotions and Sexuality at Work: Lyons Corner Houses, c. 1920–1950," in *Feelings and Work in Modern History: Emotional Labour and Emotions about Labour*, ed. Agnes Arnold-Forster and Alison Moulds (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 19–36, focuses on one employer and on waitresses in cafés, rather than on waiters in the restaurants that are this chapter's focus.

the “extra waiters” drafted in, at short notice and on casual terms, to serve meals to restaurant customers in the 1920s and 1930s.

Focusing on waiters helps broaden our understanding of “insecurity” beyond the level and frequency of the monetary wage. British waiting staff are of particular interest to historians of informal work because their form of remuneration was increasingly unusual in the modern era: their wages were supplemented by tips and, often, by a measure of payment in kind. (Germany and France, a radical British newspaper approvingly noted in the late 1930s, had eliminated discretionary tipping in favor of a proportionate and compulsory charge “for service.”)²¹ Cash tips varied in quantity and frequency—indeed, some “extra waiters” were prohibited from claiming them—whilst the meals waiters were offered while working differed considerably in quality. Without a permanent contract, the “extra waiter” also experienced an inconstant working life: their experiences varied from day-to-day in different establishments and depended on the choices individual customers made. These issues were exacerbated by a lack of effective regulation preventing over-long working hours: in “a recent case before a Court of Referees under the Unemployment Assistance Act” reported on by the same radical newspaper, several waiters “left their work because they had been compelled to work between 80 and 90 hours a week” and were told “that they had voluntarily relinquished their employment, because no regulations preventing such inhuman hours of labour were in existence.”²² Working in a customer-oriented industry, waiters’ experience of the *threat* of insecurity was also bound up in their interactions with the people whose food they served, as well as with their employers—a “triangular” relationship distinct from the everyday experiences of manufacturing workers—which makes waiters another revealing case.²³

Despite highlighting the insecurity experienced by “extra waiters,” this chapter also builds on efforts to stress the *agency* of waiters, which allowed some of them to cope even in challenging economic circumstances. Brenda Assael argues that we should “see the waiter as a key social actor in a metropolitan environment characterized by the power of commercial and capitalist forces. If these forces could render the waiter a degraded victim of exploitation, they also offered the opportunity for him to benefit from

21 Hamilton Fyfe, “Down with Tips!” *Reynolds News*, August 29, 1937, 6.

22 Reynolds Industrial Correspondent, “Waiters Who Pay to Work: Steps to End Scandals of the Catering Industry: Seaside Drudgery,” *Reynolds News*, August 15, 1937, 12.

23 Jacqueline Ross and John Welsh, “Service Labor, Freedom, and the Technique of Tipping,” *Critical Sociology* 49, nos. 4–5 (2023): 737–39.

an economy that was remarkably open and dynamic."²⁴ This remained so in the inter-war period, despite the onset of mass unemployment. Informal work as an "extra waiter" could, through hard graft or obsequiousness, metamorphose into a more stable form of employment. Canny "extra waiters" sought to earn extra money, off the books and under the table. They could exploit their proximity to customers, and a lack of constant oversight from bosses, to evade restrictions on collecting tips. But even then, unexpected events that dampened the demand for restaurant dining, such as the death of the monarch casting a pall over the national mood and discouraging celebratory banquets, could limit the opportunities available to any one temporary waiter. The self-presentation of the satisfied "extra waiter"—benefiting from not being tied down to work on any one day and having his choice of employer—may also have been a means of coping with and internally justifying the strains of economic insecurity, as much as it truly reflected his feelings. "Extra waiters" seem to have been least comfortable in older age and with dependents to support; for a young, unmarried man starting out, though, this could appear a liberating, if sometimes perilous, form of engagement with the urban world.

"Waiters' letters, diaries and even memoirs are next to non-existent," one scholar has noted—but, fortunately, they are not entirely inaccessible to historians.²⁵ This chapter draws on the autobiography of one British waiter, Arthur Henry Timmins, which was published pseudonymously as *Coming, Sir!* (1937) when he was just thirty years old. This text makes it possible to address the status of labor informality from the vantage point of a man who, moving between formal and informal work, had an especially sharp perspective on the latter's meaning.

This chapter, roughly following the course of one waiter's early life, raises the question of the usefulness of a biographical approach to understanding informality at work. It points to "the value of biography as a device in the writing of a history whose wider meanings unfold from the focus on one life."²⁶ Focusing on one well-documented individual enables an unusually deep account of the range of everyday decisions open to one waiter and provides a flavor of how working life was experienced. Although no autobiography is an unmediated reflection of experience, Timmins' book was written and published during his career, only a few years after many of

24 Assael, *The London Restaurant*, 82.

25 Eyben, "The Moustache Makes Him More of a Man," 191.

26 Mark Hearn and Harry Knowles, "Representative Lives? Biography and Labour History," *Labour History*, 100 (2011): 140.

the events he recalled. Tracing one person's life also shows how individuals could, over a short period, move between the informal and the formal labor force, complicating the idea that these were separate groups. Finally, this focus on an individual also challenges conventional geographical boundaries—particularly the treatment of labor in Europe as distinct from labor in the United States. A highly mobile worker, Arthur Henry Timmins would eventually settle on the other side of the Atlantic from the country of his birth. This chapter is therefore a different example of a British labor history, unlike older approaches that neglected “the ascendant forces of globalization, cross-national comparative, and transnational labour history.”²⁷

However, this chapter is not a strict biography: in order to fill out the full range of perspectives on informal work amongst waiters, it sets Arthur Henry Timmins' perspectives on work as an “extra waiter” alongside those gleaned from letters by other waiters appearing in the press and from contemporary commentary. It makes particular use of the results of a large study of London workers conducted a little before Timmins made his way to London, the New Survey of London Life and Labour, based partly on interviews with “around 30,000 households across 38 Greater London boroughs,” which collected information on their finances.²⁸ The research project intended to track changes in London by updating an earlier study, beginning (in 1928) “forty-two years after the beginning and twenty-five years after the conclusion of Charles Booth's epoch-making work.”²⁹ As well as presenting “the new Poverty Survey,” measuring the changes since Booth's research, the head of the survey aimed to produce “one or two [volumes] dealing specially with the industries of London, bringing up to date the contents of Booth's industrial volumes so far at least as concerns the principal groups of industries.”³⁰ These eventually included a chapter on catering; though vague about its methods, the survey seems to have relied partly on studying restaurants first-hand. (“Common observation shows a general lack even of seats on which a waitress may rest when not actively employed.”)³¹ Other chapters in the larger project were indebted to “official bodies, unofficial

27 Neville Kirk, “Challenge, Crisis, and Renewal? Themes in the Labour History of Britain, 1960–2010,” *Labour History Review* 75, no. 2 (2010): 175. For a newer example, see Seth Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), chapter 2.

28 Simon Abernethy, “Deceptive Data? The Role of the Investigators in the New Survey of London Life and Labour 1928–32,” *Historical Methods* 50, no. 1 (2017): 1.

29 H. Llewellyn-Smith, “The New Survey of London Life and Labour,” *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 92, no. 4 (1929): 531.

30 Llewellyn-Smith, “The New Survey,” 544.

31 *The New Survey*, vii, 219.

associations and companies, individual firms and private persons" for "shedding light on particular aspects," and these sources may also have informed the catering chapter.³² Though somewhat impressionistic, this is an unrivaled source that interrogated the London restaurant industry, making it possible to recognize where Timmins' attitudes and experiences were typical, and where they may have been more idiosyncratic.

This chapter's focus on one waiter does carry with it some analytical limitations, which suggest further lines of enquiry. It is largely focused on London's restaurant industry, which was larger than anywhere else in Britain—and as a result, even in hard economic times, likely afforded "extra waiters" more opportunities to switch jobs than in a smaller town. Provincial restaurant industries were consequently characterized by greater competition between "extra waiters" over a few jobs. To focus on this waiter is also to privilege the perspectives of a British-born, male staff member of a restaurant when service was in fact a more diverse occupation. While this chapter reflects on attitudes *towards* female and migrant workers, their own perspectives are relatively obscure.

However, there are virtues in focusing on an autobiography published within the period of study. One is that we can consider the responses of readers *at the time* to this testimony and understand why so many were interested in reading about these experiences of informal work. The other is that we can see, ultimately, how far a further shift of career for Arthur Henry Timmins—from waiter to literary writer—enabled him to escape the insecurity of service work that had plagued his life until his autobiography's publication.

Arthur Henry Timmins: A Biography

Arthur Henry Timmins was born in Southampton, on England's south coast, in 1907.³³ Although legislation passed while Arthur was a child had notionally capped working hours in the catering industry and mandated regular time off for workers, in practice many establishments circumvented these restrictions.³⁴ By the mid-1930s, trade union demands, pointing to

32 *The New Survey of London Life and Labour: Vol. II: London Industries I* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1931), viii.

33 England and Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, Births Registered in July, August, and September 1907, 547, https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/8912/images/ONS_B19073AZ-0588?pid=55487648.

34 The Assistant Manager of a Fashionable Hotel, "Behind the Swing Doors," *Fact* 1 (1937): 89–90, 92.

egregious conditions of over-work and under-pay in the industry, included a considerably shorter working week, an end to tipping, and a consistent system of paying “each grade” of employee.³⁵ This was the climate in which Timmins spent part of his working life. Before exploring his experiences of informal work in London restaurants in the mid-1930s, a brief overview of his life until that point will illustrate the norms around the labor contracts he had grown up with.

Almost all of the men in Arthur’s family worked at sea, at one point or another. These workers faced a situation where—as one voyager recalled—“Our contract lasted for that time we belonged to the ship.” At the end of each trip, such workers might, “as opportunity permitted, move from one ship to another, or to another shipping company”—although in practice workers considered loyal and effective “would return again and again, and occasionally even remain with one ship for many years.”³⁶ As Jonathan Hyslop has written, “some individuals managed to establish stable relationships with companies and to be taken on the same ship at every sailing,” though “this was unusual, and at the whim of the company.”³⁷ Rare it may have been, but this was certainly true of Arthur’s father, a seagoing confectioner and baker.³⁸ He was in near-constant employment, returning “home every two months,” Arthur recalled, whereupon, “he never failed to say to Mother, ‘I’ve got the sack.’” Arthur’s father was joking, and so was Arthur in re-telling the story. (“For years I wondered what he put in it.”)³⁹ As a well-rewarded worker,⁴⁰ Arthur’s father was almost guaranteed future employment, but this comment pointed accurately at the fate of many other workers, including his son. After Arthur found work as a steward on a ship “carrying emigrants from Hamburg to the United States” back and forth across the Atlantic, his crew “left New York on one voyage with the knowledge that we were due for a month on the dole, for the ship was to be laid up for repairs and the

35 Reynolds’s Correspondent, “Scandal of the Seaside Hotels: 5/- for 100 Hours Work,” *Reynolds’s Illustrated News*, June 16, 1935, 4.

36 Donald Hyslop et al., eds., *Titanic Voices* (Southampton: Oral History, City Heritage, Southampton City Council, 1994), 58. The first quotation has been unitalicized.

37 Jonathan Hyslop, “British Steamship Workers, c. 1875–1945: Precarious before Precarity,” *Labour History*, no. 116 (2019): 13.

38 “Crew List Entry for T.J. Timmins,” Crew List Index Project, <https://www.crewlist.org.uk/people/crewdetail?nameid=2545245&documentid=139772&reference=7453>.

39 Dave Marlowe, *Coming, Sir! The Autobiography of a Waiter* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1937), 20.

40 See the details of his pay in 1915, more than almost anyone else on board was earning: “Crew List Document for Vessel ‘Kinfauns Castle,’” National Maritime Museum, <https://1915crewlists.rmg.co.uk/document/189725#&gid=1&pid=6>.

crew were to be paid off."⁴¹ Arthur, then, was raised in a working culture founded on casualization that afforded some established workers—like his father—the privileges of near-permanent employment, while dealing less established workers—like Arthur himself—a less certain fate. The restaurant industry, Arthur later discovered, was different in that workers had the opportunity of securing genuinely permanent employment if they were willing to put up with often poor conditions.

Arthur became accustomed to rapidly changing service jobs, rushing to fill spaces in the sector when they opened up. Finding himself settled for a time in New York, he could not afford to be fussy about his work. Around 1930, he would later recall,

I had no lack of variety in my jobs. One week I would be engaged waiting on the *élite* of Manhattan at the Waldorf Astoria or the Sherry Netherlands, serving the pick of the "400" in one of their exclusive clubs; within a few days I would be slinging hash in an East Side chop-house or wiping down the tables of a frousy speak-easy, mopping up the beer spilled by some drunken bum spending his last dime in a "two-bit gin-mill."

As the Great Depression hit, Arthur welcomed temporary work out of necessity: "I knew there were plenty who would have grabbed at the chance to do just what I was doing, and it paid my rent." He was later offered "a steady job" in New Rochelle, in upstate New York.⁴² When he returned to Britain, moving to London, it was this "steady" work that he came to prefer.

The London Restaurant Industry

Arthur experienced periods of stable work in London's restaurants, as well as ones as volatile as those during his time in New York. However, the nature of service work in inter-war British restaurants meant that he *always* faced a measure of economic insecurity, whether he was regularly employed or not. In one spell of formal employment in the mid-1930s, he worked "twelve hours a day—from seven in the morning till ten at night, with three hours off duty," and half a day off per week "in one of London's best hotels"; after deductions, he was paid "not quite a shilling an hour."⁴³ (If Arthur's recall

41 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 51, 83.

42 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 149, 151.

43 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 189.

was accurate, this left him worse-off than the median weekly remuneration for waiters in licensed hotels with over 10 bedrooms in late 1929.)⁴⁴ The reason was that the hotel operated a “tronc” system where tips were pooled and distributed according to an arranged formula. Arthur claimed that he brought in far more in the value of tips than he received back at the end in wages. It is worth noting that even in this relatively stable form of work, Timmins’ earnings from tips far exceeded his “wages of eighteen shillings a week,” suggesting the potential for his pay to be considerably lower in weeks when customers were less generous with their tips. Spending nearly a year working at this hotel, he was unhappy, especially about the “tronc” system, and moved to work at a newer restaurant, popular with “visiting celebrities and film stars”—one that did not pool, and then re-distribute, tips. However, Arthur felt aggrieved that the Italian head waiters at the restaurant always allocated tables with the biggest tippers to the Italian staff: “I got so annoyed one day by this blatant form of favouritism that I told the Head Waiter just what I thought of his despicable conduct and what he could do with the job!” This was Arthur’s route into a period of casual labor.⁴⁵

Flux in employment was characteristic of the market for waiters in inter-war London, in which—the survey of London industries suggested—“the rate of labour turnover in this trade is high.” Waiting was a “seasonal” business, with demand waxing and waning in relation to the presence or absence of affluent restaurant-goers in London. There was “some tendency for workers to seek engagements outside London during slack months, for example at the seaside or in Scotland.” Repeated service there could build a degree of consistent annual employment—it was claimed that restaurant workers from the House of Commons would “go regularly to Weston-super-Mare” during periods of parliamentary recess—and any “well-trained waiter, waitress or kitchen worker” would, it was estimated, “experience little difficulty in finding a job at those centres to which public demand transfers itself during the holiday season.” However, it was “not so predictable” that these workers would be able to “take up their old job on their return to London.” There, they were typically appointed by “the head waiter or head chef” rather than by “the management” (who might have a better insight into an establishment’s finances). Accordingly, “staffs are suddenly increased and as suddenly reduced. This is not wholly to the

44 Ministry of Labour, *Report on an Enquiry into Remuneration, Hours of Employment, etc., in the Catering Trade in 1929* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1930), 26. This was a figure based on estimates from employers, rather than from workers.

45 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 189–90.

disadvantage of the worker. The odds in favour of his discharge from one job coinciding with the occurrence of a vacancy elsewhere, are clearly considerable in normal times."⁴⁶

The period Arthur Henry Timmins spent in London restaurants was not, however, wholly "normal." In the strained economic context of inter-war London, while new establishments continued to open their doors many restaurants had to economize on costs, and some hotels permanently closed.⁴⁷ Worse for waiters, in January 1936 the King died, and the somber mood that followed did not bode well for establishments catering to pleasure and leisure: "jobs were scarce in the hotel business just after the death of King George V," Arthur wrote, explaining, "Banquets were cancelled, dinners postponed, weddings put off, until an extra waiter stood an excellent chance of starving to death." Forced into work as an "extra waiter," Arthur "did not care very much for this haphazard and precarious mode of living, which was far too uncertain," writing: "I much preferred a steady job."⁴⁸

Arthur's distaste for informal work did not fully represent his profession's feelings. When he spent "a year of working round the West End, sometimes in restaurants, at other times in hotels," he noticed that "[m]any men [...] would not take a permanent job, preferring to work as extra waiters at banquets, wedding receptions, and various functions."⁴⁹ According to the survey of London industries, "some waiters prefer this mode of life to permanent employment owing to the greater freedom."⁵⁰ These attitudes towards casual work were not unique to London's restaurants: some workers on the docks "could earn a reasonable wage in a relatively short space of time" through picking up casual work, and "these work patterns were part of the attraction of the job; they gave the dockers the freedom—highly illusory in times of great unemployment—to work as he needed to and not as his employer demanded."⁵¹ Arthur conceded that with steady employment he was guaranteed "only one evening in the week free."⁵² By contrast, the choice of casual work could be discretionary for an "extra waiter," who might change jobs not only at the market's whim but on their own volition—and accordingly have evenings (and indeed, full days) free of work whenever

46 *The New Survey*, 207–8.

47 John Burnett, *England Eats Out: A Social History of Eating Out in England from 1830 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2004), 196, 198.

48 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 203, 190–91.

49 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 190–91.

50 *The New Survey*, 231.

51 Whiteside, "Welfare Insurance and Casual Labour," 518.

52 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 191.

they wanted. Furthermore, there may have been longer-term benefits for waiters who accepted a degree of temporary insecurity because, as the survey suggested, “to rise in this profession, wide and varied experience is often more valuable than continued employment on one spot.”⁵³

Prompted by these distinct understandings of casual work in London’s restaurants, this chapter next draws out three features of life as an “extra waiter” that were tied to experiences of informal work. These relate to how restaurant work was secured, how well it was rewarded, and whether casual work could effectively become permanent. These themes, joined together by moments in the working life of Arthur Henry Timmins, offer insights into larger questions around the *agency* of service staff: how they could collectively organize, navigate restrictions on their earnings, and deflect criticisms of their work. By these means, some “extra waiters” managed to cope with an insecure working life.

Recruitment

Many “extra waiters” in the 1930s did not take on this work because they had made a calculated choice about future career advancement or “freedom.” Rather, like Arthur, they were all-but forced into becoming “extra waiters” by the lack of more reliable alternatives. The move from essentially unrelated occupations was made possible, in part, by the lack of required training or qualifications to assume the new role. A former translator, having lost his job, “became an extra waiter at the Grand Hotel” by working “part-time” in the evenings (he, too, usually earned more in tips than in his regular wages, as his wife claimed in an item in a newspaper).⁵⁴ Arthur Henry Timmins, on the other hand, had moved from regular waiting work into work as an “extra waiter.” Offered a temporary job serving at a charity ball, he “was glad to get the job.” He had spent some time out of work, eating up his “small amount of savings,” owing to an illness “and the need for a rest.” In these circumstances, “pending a steady job, anything was handy.” He was unable to find anything more stable: “It was the slack season in October; the majority of people had not yet returned to town, and until they did a permanent post was not to be had.”⁵⁵

53 *The New Survey*, 208.

54 S.M., “Rice and Curry: Food for Two at Six Shillings a Week,” *The Manchester Guardian*, October 21, 1932, 6.

55 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 246.

London's waiters had varying opportunities to find work. There was a formal, state-run labor exchange, established "to deal exclusively with catering workers," recruiting workers for "no fewer than 188,000 jobs" from 1930 to 1936.⁵⁶ There were also "private employment agencies" which matched workers to employers, some of which charged both "prospective employer" and "employee" for the privilege.⁵⁷ Arthur described one efficient, though undiscerning, agency on the south coast of England which he approached having been encouraged to "try for a job as temporary waiter during the holidays" by his brother (this was his first route into the profession). Lying to the agent that he had experience as a waiter, he was immediately offered work in a hotel alongside "another man, and after getting our introduction cards we set out for the hotel carrying our bags, for we were to start the next morning at seven, and the manager wanted us to stay there overnight." Temporary jobs were not always advertised through formal channels: looking for work in London, Arthur described both "tramping round the various agencies" and "waiting at hotel back-doors." Once, he wrote, he was close to starvation when "[a]n overheard whisper told me that a banquet was being held in a certain hotel in the West End, so I got my bag," heading "round to the back door of the hotel on the slim chance of being engaged." Although no staff seemed immediately to be required, he was told that, depending on guest numbers, "they might need another man—maybe two. This one was due to start at seven, and it was now nearly a quarter to, so I would soon know if I was going to eat the next day."⁵⁸ Personal contacts and rumors—not the established labor exchange—smoothed the way into much-needed, if insecure, employment.

With few jobs available, these improvised ways of establishing temporary labor agreements could weaken any emergent feelings of solidarity amongst service workers. Resentments amongst would-be "extra waiters" directed at fellow workers were the predictable result. Arthur was not alone as he waited to find out about his chances of work at this banquet: "I HATED the old man. I feared that he might know somebody, pull some trick, use some slight influence to get the job that I wanted so badly."⁵⁹ Fortunately, there was space for them both to work and, after speaking to the man, Arthur, self-conscious about his prior attitude, remembered that he "felt secretly ashamed of my former feelings towards him. It was not he whom I disliked;

56 Reynolds Industrial Correspondent, "Waiters Who Pay to Work," 12.

57 *The New Survey*, 209.

58 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 83–84, 185, 203.

59 "HATED" is capitalized in the text as this is the beginning of a new chapter, not for emphasis.

it was the system that made him compete with me for a few shillings on which to live.”⁶⁰

Other workers, fighting over the few “extra waiter” jobs available, argued that recruitment should favor certain classes of worker—men, and those born in Britain—over others. Arthur was far from the first waiter critical of the prominence of Italian waiters in London restaurants. In 1910, a Loyal British Waiters Society had been founded, seeking “displacement of the foreigner and re-instatement of the Britisher.”⁶¹ Such xenophobic complaints were sharpened in the 1930s amid the climate of mass unemployment. A letter to the *Daily Telegraph* in 1936—tellingly, its author identified herself as “ENGLISHWOMAN”—suggested that, with the upcoming Coronation, “London hotel, restaurant and night-club managers” who needed “extra waiters” to attend to the people celebrating should not employ “foreign waiters”: “Surely in seven months there is time to train some of the British unemployed to do this work.”⁶²

This competition for jobs, in a time of considerable unemployment, also sowed divisions among British workers along gendered lines—especially in slower periods of the year, and in less dynamic local labor markets outside London. “May I be allowed to raise a protest against the increasing employment of waitresses instead of waiters at the various functions in Cheltenham?” asked an unemployed waiter from the town in a letter to the local press in 1938, continuing: “Unemployed waiters like myself rely on these extra banquets, etc., to help us through the winter, until the summer season begins, when of course there is more work for us.” He felt aggrieved that these women were “given work at lower wages which we cannot accept.”⁶³ However, the forums in local newspapers debating these issues were not monopolized by patriarchal arguments. A “Casual Waitress” responded, saying “if an employer requires waiters for any work he asks for waiters, and waitresses do not push themselves in and ask for less money.”⁶⁴ Just as Arthur fundamentally opposed “the system” rather than other workers, others showed greater solidarity than the initial letter writer. An “Extra Waiter” responded to the discussion, asking, “Why cannot we get together for our common good?”⁶⁵

60 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 203–4.

61 Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, 102.

62 Englishwoman, “Shortage of Waiters,” *Daily Telegraph*, October 31, 1936, 11.

63 “Letters to the Editor,” *Gloucestershire Echo*, October 29, 1938, 4.

64 “Letters to the Editor,” *Gloucestershire Echo*, November 2, 1938, 4.

65 “Letters to the Editor,” *Gloucestershire Echo*, November 8, 1938, 4.

"Extra waiters" were not all greedily individualistic restaurant staff seeking out high tips without considering their peers—they did not invariably fit in an "occupational world of chance and quick-wittedness" which "was in many ways absolutely opposed to collectivist politics."⁶⁶ Instead, the responses to the insecurity that plagued their lives varied considerably amongst workers. Serving as a temporary waiter at a raucous ball, when Arthur found a young waitress crying, having under-charged her customers—and, therefore, being personally liable to repay "a pound," which amounted to her "wages for two weeks"—he helped her find this money: some of the guests, "using champagne bottles as bats," were hitting "pound notes screwed into balls" around the room, and Arthur managed to discreetly send one of the notes towards the waitress to make good on her obligation.⁶⁷

Collective labor organization was certainly one route to improved conditions for waiters. There were sporadic cases of "extra waiters" successfully obtaining an increase in pay by withdrawing their labor.⁶⁸ But these instances were rare in an industry with few unionized workers—under 5%, according to one contemporary estimate.⁶⁹ More striking, revealed when searching through press reports, are the *efforts* to encourage waiters to organize—generally tinged with an awareness of how far they had to go. The Secretary of the London Trades Council, referencing "workers in the hotel and catering trades who are bullied and even beaten like slaves" and "employers who protested that they could not pay decent wages because there were workers who were prepared to work for nothing for their competitors and depend on tips," suggested: "You tolerate these abuses, when, with a powerful union behind you, you could demand better wages and more human conditions."⁷⁰

Why were such efforts not more successful? It is possible that waiters themselves were not greatly interested in unionization. Ross McKibbin has written of industries where "the patterns of employment were so fragmented and localized" that while "men could unite against masters, equally they could unite with them."⁷¹ As we will see, however, there was relatively little sympathy in restaurants for head waiters, who were usually treated as useful conduits for jobs and nothing more. There may also have been caution amongst the major unions. Brenda Assael, discussing the period before World

66 Ross McKibbin, "Why Was There No Marxism in Great Britain?" *The English Historical Review* 99, no. 391 (1984): 300; Assael, *The London Restaurant*, 83, fn. 3.

67 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 246, 248–49.

68 "Waiters' Lightning Strike: Curious Situation," *Daily Telegraph*, January 3, 1920, 4.

69 Ministry of Labour, *Report on an Enquiry into Remuneration*, xxv.

70 "Waiters' Bullied & Beaten," *Daily Herald*, July 3, 1936, 13.

71 McKibbin, "Why Was There No Marxism in Great Britain?" 302.

War One, suggests that the “demand of organizations representing waiters for both a living wage and, simultaneously, the right to retain their individual tips is but just one example of the awkward fit between the working lives of restaurant servers and the conventional strategies and discourses of trade unionism.”⁷² There is no doubt that restaurants could be tricky places in which to unionize. According to a radical newspaper, “the nature of the work has made the task of securing organisation a difficult one.” This report blamed employers: “In some of the London firms, in particular, possession of a Trade Union card results in dismissal, while special methods are used to track down employees carrying out Trade Union propaganda.”⁷³ In this climate, resistance to the indignities of restaurant work tended to be less overt.

Remuneration

Life as an “extra waiter” could make for an impecunious existence. This was partly because tips were often forbidden at the events where “extra waiters” were contracted to serve—and, as we have seen, tips often made up a sizeable, sometimes predominant, portion of a waiter’s income. One waiter lacking “a full-time job” explained to a newspaper that having “signed on to wait at a lunch at a big provincial centre,” he found out how customers were being instructed: “Service included. No gratuities.” Another waiter at this event who was receiving unemployment benefits—which were stopped upon resuming work—found that on reporting that he had found a temporary job he was actually left “worse off through going to work” than if he had not attended the function at all and had continued to claim payments from the state.⁷⁴

Still, crafty “extra waiters” sought to evade these restrictions, with varying levels of success: “They sometimes receive tips, induced from diners by the formula, ‘I am leaving you now, sir,’” the study of London industries explained.⁷⁵ Some “extra waiters” consequently managed, through stealth and obsequiousness, to earn a little extra for themselves. While working at a banquet, Arthur Henry Timmins provided “the host at my table” with sterling service, “with extra oysters, best cuts of joints, and much refilling of his glass.” Discreetly, “very wary of that Head Waiter,” Arthur indicated “an empty matchbox”—and fortunately the customer obliged, placing inside

72 Assael, *The London Restaurant*, 83–84.

73 Reynolds Industrial Correspondent, “Waiters Who Pay to Work,” 12.

74 Brian Murtough, “These Facts Will ... Shock You,” *Daily Mirror*, February 4, 1939, 9.

75 *The New Survey*, 231.

it a tip: "It was not his first attendance at a banquet."⁷⁶ While Arthur was not the first "extra waiter" to benefit from this customer's sympathy, not all "extra waiters" managed to do so. These covert requests carried risks, presumably including dismissal. The London study also indicated that resistance to these schemes came from fellow workers: "the permanent staff realise that such a practice will diminish their own takings and may combine to block it."⁷⁷

Another strategy was to work illegally as an "extra waiter" whilst claiming unemployment allowances. In a case that came before Westminster Police Court, a group of "casual waiters at a Strand hotel" were accused of

fraudulently making false representations for the purpose of obtaining unemployment benefits. Mr. J.C. Pratt, prosecuting for the Ministry of Labour, said that for many months, with a few breaks, the defendants had attended the Westminster Employment Exchange, drawing and signing for a full week's pay of £1 4s. a week. Inquiries made showed that on occasional days, when they were employed at the hotel and received 6s. 6d. or 7s. and probable tips, they made no disclosure of the fact.

In the end, "Each defendant was fined 40s. and ordered to repay money improperly obtained, with the alternative of 21 days' imprisonment."⁷⁸ Other waiters might not, of course, have been caught. But this approach would have shaped an unpredictable, worrisome, way of existence and did not, for these men, ultimately succeed.

"Extra waiters" were not invariably financially fortunate, then: as the major survey of London industries concluded, "the extent of their income cannot be accurately estimated, and it seems rather a precarious form of livelihood."⁷⁹ The payment in kind waiters received was also usually woefully inadequate. At the charity ball where Arthur worked, whereas the customers ate well, the waiters fared far worse at lunch: "our meal consisted of a piece of doubtful-looking beef and a spoonful of half-cold potatoes, covered with a thick, gluey brown fluid."⁸⁰ As the survey of working conditions in London suggested coyly, "in the majority of cases it may fairly be said that complaints of the quality of the food supplied or of the conditions under which it is

⁷⁶ Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 206.

⁷⁷ *The New Survey*, 231.

⁷⁸ "Hotel Waiters 'On the Dole,'" *The Times*, March 20, 1925, 11.

⁷⁹ *The New Survey*, 231.

⁸⁰ Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 246.

eaten are probably not without foundation.”⁸¹ Arthur concluded, after this ball, that having “been standing for nineteen hours” he “had been paid just a halfpenny an hour”—“and for this I had had to be ingratiating to any kind of drunk and put up with every variety of tipsy insult or abuse that came my way.”⁸² While waiters learned ways of making such indignities more bearable, in a customer-oriented industry without much formal regulation, the precarious conditions were felt not only in the form of low pay but in the threat of losing a job without any notice—a threat that waiters managed by begrudgingly adopting a smooth, unruffled, and servile character.

Retention

The indignities of service were compounded by the challenges waiters faced in the attempt to turn occasional casual work into something regular. A proportion of “extra waiters” were able to make the system work for them just as, in his own way, Arthur’s father had gained a measure of security onboard ships: “some of them, in fact, do enjoy a degree of semi-permanent employment [...] if they are well known, and they can earn quite good money during the winter months.”⁸³ As this quotation from the survey of London industries suggests, though, much depended on the generosity of those employing “extra waiters.” Arthur explained that doing well out of the system “required a personal knowledge of head waiters, for it is not *what* you know but *whom* you know that counts in this particular form of industry.”⁸⁴

Some head waiters, no doubt sympathetic to their friends, were vindictive towards others, sanctioning arbitrary dismissals. At the banquet Arthur worked at, “[t]he Head Waiter accused the old man of stealing a leg of chicken.” Given the need that drove people into this work and its poor remuneration, the choice of the “extra waiter” to take food from a customer’s plate was understandable. But when the starving waiter protested that this was spare, uneaten food that “would only have been thrown away,” he was told: “That’s got nothing to do with you. Get your money and get out. Don’t dare to come here again for a job!”⁸⁵

81 *The New Survey*, 219.

82 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 250–51.

83 *The New Survey*, 231.

84 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 190–91.

85 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 206–7.

The temporary nature of this employment could, though, help insulate "extra waiters" from customer complaints. At the charity ball where Arthur worked, one "young girl thought it screamingly funny to hold her thumb over the top of a bottle of champagne, shake it, and spray every one within reach." When Arthur "remonstrated with her," she asked the head waiter to fire Arthur, "and was quite annoyed when he pointed out that I was only engaged for that one night."⁸⁶ In this way, insecurity helped "extra waiters" cope with the strains of dealing with customers. It offered them a reason to act more defiantly than they might otherwise have felt able to do.

These snapshots of the life of various "extra waiters" illustrate the contingency of their work. "extra waiters" *could* earn a good living, work with permanency, and benefit from the flexibility that the trade offered. But this was all too easily frustrated by harsh economic circumstances or the actions of their employers. These varied experiences fed into cultural portrayals of the "extra waiter." The autobiography of Arthur Henry Timmins caused notable ripples.

Popular Responses

Did Arthur Henry Timmins provide a fair account of the restaurant industry? Before his autobiography was published, parts appeared in the *New Statesman and Nation*, a left-wing magazine. The magazine's readers diverged in their opinions over the accuracy of Arthur's depiction of the charity ball. One correspondent from the management of a "Wine Restaurant" complained about what he described as a "biased" article that was overly selective, emphasizing the negative aspects over the favorable. Waiters, he suggested, were not compelled to take up this work:

At the Labour Exchange a waiter good enough to be engaged for a Charity Ball can get any waiting job with the greatest of ease, and if he does not wish to earn the minimum of a pound a day including food and insurance, he can quite easily get a job that will tax his strength less. After all, although the hours were long, he had at least a comparative rest from 4 o'clock until about 9.30 at night.

This nonchalant conception of the choice to work (or not) as an "extra waiter," founded on a liberal assumption about the labor market's capacity to favor

86 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 250.

those with the greatest skills, came from the management of a restaurant that likely benefitted from employing such workers when demand increased, and dispensing with them as readily. (It did not, however, consider the constraints on the ability of “extra waiters” to find work when economic conditions were gloomier.) The author of the letter, trying to establish the benefits for waiters, pointed to another omission from Arthur’s account: there was no discussion of “what sort of a meal he got in the evening” after the customers had eaten; they would, he believed, “probably leave sufficient over for the staff to have something quite good to eat.”⁸⁷

Such attitudes co-existed with a more egalitarian plea to fully recognize the humanity of “extra waiters.” Responding to this letter, a reader of the *New Statesman* from Hampstead questioned the last point: “Mr. Layton says that there is ‘probably’ sufficient food left over for the staff to have ‘something quite good to eat.’ Would Mr. Layton himself be content to rely on a ‘probable’ sufficiency for his meals, and is ‘quite good’ his standard for the quality of his own meals?”⁸⁸ This demand that the basic securities in the life of waiters should mirror those of their employers (and customers) echoed Arthur’s wishes, showing that some customers agreed with the man who would soon be named as the “Waiter-author.”⁸⁹

Later in 1937, Arthur’s book *Coming, Sir!* was published to acclaim in Britain and across its Empire; the following year, it was published in the United States of America. There was some surprise about a waiter writing such a book. One reviewer wrote:

I find myself unable to understand how, if the author wrote it unaided, he has spent so much of his life tossed up or down on the precarious chances of employment as a waiter when the style and craftsmanship of this book plainly indicate an unusual gift for authorship.⁹⁰

Other reviewers picked up on the autobiography’s comments about “extra waiters.” The book tapped into a trans-Atlantic unease about the leisured classes dining out on the backs of poorly paid, insecurely employed waiters. It was a book, one American reviewer wrote, that offered fresh insights into different worlds not often seen in the same frame:

87 “The Working Conditions of Waiters,” *The New Statesman and Nation*, January 23, 1937, 116.

88 “Working Conditions of Waiters,” *The New Statesman and Nation*, January 30, 1937, 154–55.

89 “‘Coming, Sir’—To Fame: Waiter-Author Has Become Best Seller,” *Reynolds News*, October 17, 1937, 11.

90 Caxton, “Books,” *Northern Advocate*, October 28, 1939, 13. This was a later review in a New Zealand newspaper of a cheaper edition of the book.

One moment he recalls the dowager and her skyward-nosed Pekingese; the next, a pained old man, extra waiter at the society banquet, hiding a chicken leg to take home to his wife. They are most commendable, these pictures, plebeian and patrician alike snapped well behind the subject's pose.⁹¹

Arthur's book—and its coverage of the "extra waiter"—gave a picture of "poverty amidst plenty," chiming with prevailing anxieties about capitalism in the 1930s, employing the increasingly influential "documentary" mode.⁹² The 1930s, after all, was also the decade of George Orwell's account of working in kitchens, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), which "opened the celebrated city of hotels and restaurants to a leftist critique of privilege and power."⁹³ The *New Statesman's* review of Arthur's autobiography, outraged, quoted the passage about how "an extra waiter stood an extra chance of starving to death" in order to illustrate the "chances on which a waiter's livelihood depends."⁹⁴ But the book was also read as something simpler than political agitprop: as a form of advice to customers and employers. "This waiter has several tips for you, too," one review punned, continuing: "Please don't cancel luncheons and dinners. It puts men out of work. The death of George V. lost thousands of temporary jobs for impoverished waiters."⁹⁵ Arthur's book starkly illustrated the consequences of consumer choices for the waiters rushing food back and forth from kitchen to table. And by giving voice to an anonymous working waiter, it helped humanize these choices. "NOT one of the many people served yesterday at a West End restaurant by an ordinary looking waiter in evening dress knew they were giving orders to the author of the latest best seller, with royalties pouring in from the sales of his first book," explained an article shortly after its publication.⁹⁶

91 Virginia Jones, "Book Briefs," *Paducah Sun-Democrat*, February 6, 1938, 16.

92 Marlowe, *Coming, Sir!*, 263; Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise our Talents: The Democratization of Writing in Britain* (London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 157.

93 Christoph Ribbat, "Waiters, Writers, and Power: From Dining Room Commanders to the Emotional Proletariat," in *Food, Power, & Agency*, ed. Jürgen Martschukat and Bryant Simon (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 63–64.

94 G.W. Stonier, "Current Literature: Books in General," *The New Statesman and Nation*, September 11, 1937, 376.

95 Lyn Durham, "Book Reviews," *Sunday Sun*, September 5, 1937, 4.

96 "Coming, Sir!—To Fame," 11.

Conclusion

The seasonal peaks and troughs of the restaurant industry according to the gravitation of well-off customers backwards and forwards, to and from London, easily engendered casualization and a mass of “extra waiters.” Britain’s economic challenges in the 1920s and 1930s further disincentivized the stable employment of large numbers of workers, hindering the creation of a large, permanent waiting staff. The death of the King in 1936 dealt a temporary blow to the industry. Yet the “extra waiters” encountered in this chapter were not universally critical of this form of labor, and some of the explanations for its endurance must also come “from below”—from those waiters who valued the “freedom” of moving between jobs readily. While we might assume that informal labor increasingly assumed a low status into the mid-twentieth century, rated below the constancy of regular hours and pay in formal labor relationships, this chapter has uncovered a group of restaurant workers *attracted* to informal work for the opportunities it offered. It has also pointed to how, in the context of inter-war mass unemployment, arguments over who should take up these opportunities often favored a relatively privileged portion of the labor force: non-migrant men.

For “extra waiters,” insecurity was not solely defined by the wage and its frequency. The reliance of waiters on tips for income, often worth far more than their wages, lent any form of waiting an element of insecurity—and this was heightened by practices discouraging tipping at exactly the social events where “extra waiters” were employed. More significantly, though, focusing on waiters suggests that insecurity was not wholly financial. It was also a matter of the value of the meals waiters were offered as part of their compensation. And it was also something that waiters *felt* in their interactions with customers—where the provisional nature of their employment could offer them a shield, just as easily as it sowed concerns about their retention.

Notably, the responses to this insecurity were not only through the formal channels of labor organization. Though many waiters seem to have been distant from the trade unions offering them their support, they were evidently not content with the conditions of their labor. But it is striking that in contesting their material circumstances and trying to earn a little more money than their restaurant employers offered, they did so largely as individuals rather than as members of groups.⁹⁷ This analysis therefore fits with the shift in British labor history away from studying “protests and

97 See, similarly, Todd, “Domestic Service,” 199.

events that can easily be identified and categorized"—for instance, the drive towards successful labor organization—towards adopting a "view of constant negotiations, frictions and tensions" in "a more holistic picture of everyday lives and conflicts." It offers an example of the history of "everyday resistance in urban and industrial settings" that, as Katrina Navickas argues, had been neglected for too long.⁹⁸

At some point, the "extra waiter" essentially disappeared as a descriptive term in Britain, but the practice continues, with hundreds of casual jobs for waiters routinely available.⁹⁹ Employers in present-day Britain using so-called "zero hours contracts" are advised that workers "are on call to work when you need them" and that "you do not have to give them work"—but the same guidance also suggests the supposed benefits to workers seeking flexibility: "they do not have to do work when asked," and "[y]ou cannot do anything to stop a zero-hours worker from getting work elsewhere."¹⁰⁰

This story of apparent continuity in informal restaurant labor is belied by the life of Arthur Henry Timmins. As a waiter, he was remarkably self-aware about his prejudices, and canny in negotiating the conventions of the dining room in order to carve out a little extra opportunity for himself. His testimony reminds us that the institution of the "extra waiter" was resented and reluctantly accepted as much as it was celebrated. In publishing his experiences, he was able to prompt some readers—and restaurant-goers—to think more carefully about the working conditions of those who served them food. And as a successful writer, even just momentarily, Arthur Henry Timmins was able to glimpse a different sort of life for himself, free of the hunger and indignities that had marked his life in service to the customers of London restaurants. Fame brought Arthur immediate financial rewards: arriving back in America after his book's publication, he was "said to have 5,000 dollars in the bank."¹⁰¹ But any financial security resulting from his book's publication seemingly did not last. He settled permanently in the United States and married an American actress. One summer after World War Two he joined his wife in Rhode Island, where she was performing, and

98 Katrina Navickas, "What Happened to Class? New Histories of Labour and Collective Action in Britain," *Social History* 36, no. 2 (2011): 197, 202.

99 There were 610 search results for "zero hours contracts waiter" in the United Kingdom in an enquiry on a jobs portal ("Indeed") on July 21, 2023.

100 "Contract Types and Employment Responsibilities: Zero-hours Contracts," United Kingdom Government, <https://www.gov.uk/contract-types-and-employer-responsibilities/zero-hour-contracts>.

101 "No Thumb in Your Soup!," *The Sunday Sun and Guardian Magazine* [Sydney], May 27, 1938, 5.

“dropped in at the Theater supper club after the *Dream Girl* performance one evening, found there was a shortage of waiters, told Manager Edward Gould that he was one, and [was] hired then and there for the summer.”¹⁰²

About the Author

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¹⁰² “Literary Waiter Has Served His Way Around the World; Likes South County,” *The Summer Beacon*, July 28, 1947, 2.

7. Women's "Return" to the Household? Struggles over the Regulation of Industrial Homework in Interwar Austria

Elisabeth Luif

Abstract: This chapter examines struggles over regulating industrial homework in interwar Austria, a sector of wage labor relevant mostly to urban working-class women in clothes and textile production. Between 1918 and 1922, the government introduced protective provisions, a mechanism to set minimum wages, and compulsory social insurance. However, with a political shift towards conservative forces and rising pressure on (home)workers during the economic crisis, the implementation of these regulations largely failed. Employer organizations and state actors embedded their economic interests within a political discourse that confined women's role to (unpaid) household labor. Despite homeworkers' crucial economic contribution to the livelihoods of whole families, their characterization as "real" workers remained contested, helping to justify a renewed process of informalization.

Keywords: industrial homework, interwar Austria, women's wage labor, regulation of labor relations, gendered notions of work

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Our guiding star must therefore be to restore homework to its deepest literal sense, to let homework again become the domestic work of the wife and mother, while the husband and father earns the just family wage.¹

This is how Christian trade unionist Leo Hintze articulated his central vision on homework at a conference of the Austrofascist Textile Workers' Trade Union in October 1936. Yet he acknowledged that homework was on the rise. Instead of engaging exclusively in (unpaid) household and childcare duties, many women were taking up production outsourced from companies into private households under exploitative working conditions to supplement family incomes during the economic crisis. He demanded that homework should be better protected and restricted to women, but that in the long term it should be completely abolished from a corporatist society.²

Hintze's speech attests to the prevalent position of men within the Christian labor movement,³ which was part of a broader conservative milieu that became increasingly dominant in Austria during the interwar years. Its representative body in parliament, the Christian Social Party, dominated all governments from 1920 and played the central role in the establishment of the Austrofascist dictatorship (1933–38). Functionaries of the Christian labor movement regularly criticized the increase of women's wage labor, mostly in blue-collar professions, and demanded both legal restrictions on female employment in factories and the introduction of a male breadwinner wage.⁴ While they aimed at pushing women out of the labor market for practical reasons—to eliminate competition for male workers—they also followed a larger vision widely shared within the conservative milieu: to establish a patriarchal, male breadwinner/female caregiver model.⁵

This chapter takes as a starting point the contradiction between the ideological goals of conservative actors—to confine women to unpaid

1 Leo Hintze, *Heimarbeit: Ein Wort zur Arbeiterfrage*, Sozialpolitischer Dienst 1 (Vienna: Reka-Verlag, 1936), 42.

2 Hintze, *Heimarbeit*, 35–42.

3 Female Christian trade unionists, such as Grete Rehor, took a different position and defended women's wage labor but remained marginalized in their own organizations. Paul Pasteur, *Unter dem Kruckenkreuz: Gewerkschafter und Gewerkschafterinnen in Österreich 1934–1938* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2008), 165–66.

4 See, for example, Leopold Kunschak, "Zur Frauenfrage," *Neue Ordnung* 13, no. 3/4 (1937): 51–57, 75–81.

5 Georg-Hans Schmit, "Vom Untergang der Demokratie bis zum Beginn der 2. Republik: Die christliche Arbeiterbewegung in den Jahren 1933–1946" (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 2012), 116–19.

household and childcare activities—and the actual persistence of female wage labor in factories and at home. Why did women increasingly continue to engage in homework, when those in power aimed at abolishing this type of work? Leo Hintze, together with many other contemporary actors, blamed the economic crisis. He saw the worsening material situation of working-class families as the main reason why women engaged in wage labor.

In this chapter, I argue that while the economic crisis did play a crucial role, this was only part of the story. The fact that homework increased during the interwar period, while at the same time working and wage conditions worsened, had as much to do with the political strategies of state actors and employer organizations, who actively sabotaged the implementation of existing legal regulations for homework and aimed at taking back the recent formalization of this type of wage labor. To that end, they adopted the prevalent discourse that women's main role was motherhood and housewifery in order to devalue homework, reducing it to a mere hobby not in need of regulation. This served as a justification to stall the implementation of homework legislation, resulting not in homeworkers' withdrawal from wage labor but in their further precarization.

This chapter also aims to expand our understanding of labor regulation by introducing to the discussion a marginalized group of workers whose inclusion in the regulated labor market remained contested.⁶ So far, homework in interwar Austria has only been dealt with very generally in overviews on female wage labor.⁷ There are some studies that have analyzed homework in other national and international contexts to show how the introduction of regulatory frameworks and the creation of modern welfare states between the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries was shaped by gendered notions of work, bearing many similarities to the Austrian case.⁸

6 Jessica Richter has similarly discussed struggles over the legal regulation of domestic work, another marginalized sector dominated by women: Jessica Richter, *Die Produktion besonderer Arbeitskräfte: Auseinandersetzungen um den häuslichen Dienst in Österreich (1880–1938)* (Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2024), 36–132.

7 Edith Rigler, *Frauenleitbild und Frauenarbeit in Österreich vom ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1976), 129–31; Brigitte Ennsmann, "Frauenpolitik und Frauenarbeit im Austrofaschismus" (Diploma thesis, University of Vienna, 1993), 119–20.

8 For an overview on debates in Western Europe, the United States and within the International Labor Organization, see Elisabeth Prügl, *The Global Construction of Gender: Home-Based Work in the Political Economy of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 25–55; for a comprehensive analysis of homework (de-)regulation in the US from the 1870s to the 1980s, see Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

First, I look at the transformation of rural home industries into urban industrial homework during the nineteenth century and trace the reform debates that resulted in the establishment of a regulatory framework for homework between 1918 and 1922. Then, I explore the struggles over the implementation of these regulations, taking into account the changing situation for homeworkers over time. In each section, I alternate the focus between groups of actors involved in these debates. Following the developments chronologically, I explore the movement of mostly working-class women towards homework with the onset of the economic crisis in the mid-1920s. The failure to implement protective provisions for homeworkers reflected the weakening position of the Social Democratic Party, which had been a central actor in pushing through the regulations only a few years earlier. I proceed to discuss employers' strategies and state actors' efforts to hinder the implementation of health and unemployment insurance. These went hand in hand with the devaluation of homework, reducing it to the status of a leisure activity, which then justified women's exclusion from social benefits. In the following part, I focus on the drastic deterioration of wages in homework as the economic crisis peaked. Here, I discuss the prevalent pessimism among female labor inspectors and attempt to explain why homeworkers often refused to cooperate with the inspectors. Finally, I examine government policies during the Austrofascist period, which resulted in a formal deregulation of homework. Although the economic situation had somewhat stabilized, a new, more insecure status quo had been established for homework.

Towards a Regulatory Framework for Homework

Homework in Austria (and other European countries) first developed during the eighteenth century into a system of protoindustrial, rural home industries engaged in textile production. Usually, whole families took on this type of wage labor together with agricultural subsistence production.⁹ The spread of industrial-capitalist labor relations during the nineteenth century significantly transformed the character of homework. The developments in Austria resembled those in countries such as France, Germany, Great

9 Andrea Komlosy, "Textiles Verlagswesen, Hausindustrie und Heimarbeit. Prototypen des informellen Sektors im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert," in *Ungeregelt und unterbezahlt: Der informelle Sektor in der Weltwirtschaft*, ed. Andrea Komlosy et al. (Frankfurt am Main/Vienna: Brandes & Apse/Südwind, 1997), 65–75.

Britain, Greece, Sweden, Russia, or the United States.¹⁰ While production within rural home industries declined sharply in sectors where mechanized production had taken hold, at the same time it entered cities (mainly Vienna) as work outsourced from companies to private households, often via a system of subcontractors that passed on work to individual workers. In a symbiotic relation with the factory system and connected to the emerging apparel trade, handmade textile and clothes production remained dominant, although sewing machines came to be used in homework as well.¹¹

The transformation of homework was connected to the assertion of a new gendered division of labor. According to the ideal of the male breadwinner/female caregiver model, work became defined as male wage labor, while women were assigned to unpaid household and childcare activities inside the home, rendering their labor invisible. However, many women, mostly from working-class households, continued to engage in wage labor, and even entered new jobs in factories and offices in growing numbers. At the end of the nineteenth century, the share of women in wage labor in Austria was over 40%.¹² Still, the notion that wage labor was a male activity continued to devalue women's work outside the home as well, resulting in lower wages for female workers.¹³

For homework, the ideological separation of home and work led to the increasing feminization and precarity of this type of wage labor. Workers lost access to subsistence production; they worked long hours for low wages, and for employers they were a cheaper and readily available alternative to factory workers. Homework became one of the most common forms of wage labor for married, working-class women with small children. Their

10 For an overview on European developments, see Deborah Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work: 1700 to the Present* (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), 148–55, 214–22; studies dealing with specific country cases include: Eileen Boris, *Home to Work*, 11–14; Malin Nilsson, "Taking Work Home: Labour Dynamics of Women Industrial Homeworkers in Sweden during the Second Industrial Revolution" (PhD diss., University of Gothenburg, 2015); Leda Papastefanaki, "Sewing at Home in Greece, 1870s to 1930s. A Global History Perspective," in *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers (1800–2021)*, ed. Malin Nilsson et al. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022), 74–95.

11 For an overview on homework in Austria from the late nineteenth century to World War One, see Rigler, *Frauenleitbild und Frauenarbeit*, 54–66.

12 The share of women in wage labor in Austria at the time was slightly higher compared to countries like Germany, France, or Great Britain, but it converged with the development of industrial production and decline of agriculture. Rigler, *Frauenleitbild und Frauenarbeit*, 54–55; Josef Ehmer, "Innen macht alles die Frau, draußen die grobe Arbeit macht der Mann." *Frauenenerwerbsarbeit in der industriellen Gesellschaft*, in *Frauen-Arbeitswelten. Zur historischen Genese gegenwärtiger Probleme*, ed. Birgit Bolognese-Leuchtenmüller and Michael Mitterauer (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1993), 82–86.

13 Prügl, *Global Construction of Gender*, 27–28.

attachment to the household and responsibility for childcare made them less flexible on the labor market and forced them to accept the precarious conditions that prevailed in home-based production.¹⁴

With the growing inclusion of large parts of the population in commodified labor relations, debates on the social question intensified from the late nineteenth century onwards. The problematic situation of homeworkers was discussed as well. Small-business owners criticized homework as illegitimate competition and demanded a general prohibition. In contrast, liberal middle-class reformers saw homework as suitable for married women if conditions were improved.¹⁵ The social democratic labor movement opposed homework due to its adverse effects on factory work conditions and aimed at introducing regulations so that it would lose its advantages for employers and gradually disappear.¹⁶ Despite the intense public debates, homeworkers remained excluded from the first labor legislation of the late nineteenth century.

From 1898, homework was fiercely debated in the *Reichsrat*, the monarchy's legislative body. Between 1905 and 1913, five draft laws were discussed.¹⁷ The debates in Austria were connected to international developments, where homework legislation and wage boards were being introduced at the time.¹⁸ Halted by World War One, the parliamentary discussions were taken up again in spring 1917 by the War and Transition Economy Board, an employer-employee committee established to promote post-war recovery. Its social democratic members proposed a law that would introduce protective provisions, and tripartite Homework Commissions authorized setting minimum wages for all branches of homework. The ensuing discussions reflected a broad consensus that homework urgently needed regulation.

14 An excellent study describing the choices of working-class women set against the background of a new gendered division of labor in Vienna around 1900 is Susan Zimmermann, "Frauenerwerbsarbeit und Haushalt im Wien der Jahrhundertwende," in *Archiv. Jahrbuch des Vereins für die Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* (Vienna: Verein für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung, 1990), 92–122; for similar developments in Western Europe and the US, see Eileen Boris, "Sexual Divisions, Gender Constructions: The Historical Meaning of Homework in Western Europe and the United States," in *Homeworkers in Global Perspective: Invisible No More*, ed. Eileen Boris and Elisabeth Prügl (New York/London: Routledge, 1996), 19–22.

15 For the related demands by female middle-class reformers in Germany, see Eva Schöck-Quinteros, "Heimarbeiterschutz für 'die Mütter des arbeitenden Volkes': Deutschland 1896–1914," *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 9, no. 2 (1998): 183–215.

16 Rigler, *Frauenleitbild und Frauenarbeit*, 65–66.

17 Gesetzentwurf betreffend Heimarbeit, July 18, 1917, Gz. 26.036/18, box 385, folder SA 4, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Archiv der Republik, Arbeit und Soziales, Bundesministerium für soziale Verwaltung, Sozialpolitik (hereafter abbreviated as: AdR BMfsV SP).

18 Wage boards were first introduced in Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, and Germany. Prügl, *Global Construction of Gender*, 26.

Once the war was over, disadvantaged social groups in need of protection (disabled soldiers, widows, married women, bankrupt small business owners) would, so the expectation went, take up homework in large numbers.¹⁹

In December 1918, only one month after the foundation of the Austrian republic, the new law was passed in parliament.²⁰ Moreover, in 1921/22 homeworkers were included in legislation on compulsory health and unemployment insurance.²¹ While homework did not reach the status of factory work, the new laws introduced protective, wage, and social insurance legislation for the first time. The regulation of homework happened as part of a wider sociopolitical transformation and the extension of political rights during the early years of the republic. These included the introduction of equal suffrage for men and women, institutionalized workers' representative bodies, the 8-hour day, paid vacations, and regulations for child labor and domestic work.

These developments reflected the strong position of the Social Democratic Party, which could push through its central demands in a coalition government. Against the background of revolutionary upheavals in many parts of Europe, the conservative Christian Social Party, afraid of even more radical changes, preferred to cooperate with the more moderate parts of the labor movement. From 1920, however, the political balance of power swung in favor of conservative forces and (fragmented) employer organizations. The Christian Social Party dominated all subsequent governments and set out to gradually dismantle labor and social insurance regulations, but it was only able to introduce drastic cutbacks after it had abolished democracy in 1933/34.²² Although the legislation on homework remained mostly intact on a formal level until 1938, its implementation proved difficult from the very beginning.

Increase of Female Homeworkers during the 1920s: Social Democracy on the Defensive

To assess the situation of homeworkers during the 1920s, I explore two main sources. The first are the yearly reports by the labor inspectorate,²³ which

19 Gesetzentwurf betreffend Heimarbeit, July 18, 1917, Gz. 26.036/18, box 385, folder SA 4, AdR BMfsV SP.

20 StGBL. 140/1918, December 19, 1918.

21 BGBl. 581/1921, October 21, 1921, §§ 1, 2, 4, 20–32; BGBl. 778/1922, October 11, 1922, § 1, section 5.

22 Emmerich Tálos, "Sozialpolitik in der Ersten Republik," in *Handbuch des politischen Systems Österreichs: Erste Republik 1918–1938*, ed. Emmerich Tálos (Vienna: Manz, 1995), 570–84.

23 *Bericht der Gewerbe-Inspektoren über ihre Amtstätigkeit* (Vienna: Verlag des Zentral-Gewerbe-Inspektorates, 1919–1921, 1924–1926); *Die Amtstätigkeit der Gewerbe-Inspektorate* (Vienna: Verlag

had been introduced in 1883 to supervise the adherence to legal regulations in commercial enterprises.²⁴ Its duties and organizational structure were significantly expanded with the new labor legislation after 1918.²⁵ Initially, all labor inspectors were male; in 1906 the first female assistant was employed. In 1919, there were five female inspectors who were responsible for supervising the conditions of women, children, and homeworkers, mostly in urban, industrial regions of Austria.²⁶

Jean H. Quataert reminds us that although these reports have enriched our understanding of working-class lives in the past, they are not neutral descriptions but reflect the middle-class values and active role of labor inspectors in shaping the gendered relations of industrial capitalism.²⁷ This assessment is also valid for interwar Austria, where the reports on homework are connected to the reform discourse of the late nineteenth century. In the early years of the republic, the inspectors were supervising the new homework laws and growing increasingly concerned about problems of implementation.

The second source, an explicitly political assessment, is the study “How do Viennese Homeworkers Live” published in 1928 by Käthe Leichter.²⁸ It is based on 1,000 questionnaires filled out by homeworkers and gives an indispensable insight into the structure and conditions of homework during the 1920s. Leichter was a social scientist, social democratic trade union activist, and head of the women’s department at the Viennese Chamber of Labor.²⁹ In this capacity she conducted numerous studies on women’s wage labor in interwar Austria.³⁰

des Zentral-Gewerbe-Inspektorates, 1927–1937), https://anno.onb.ac.at/info/bga_info.html (hereafter abbreviated as: LI report).

24 RGBL. 117/1883, June 17, 1883.

25 See the review article on the 50-year anniversary of the labor inspectorate, LI report 1932, 14–17.

26 Mathilde Wilda, “Die weibliche Gewerbeinspektorin,” in *Handbuch der Frauenarbeit in Österreich*, ed. Arbeiterkammer Wien (Vienna: Carl Ueberreuter, 1930), 506–8.

27 Jean H. Quataert, “A Source Analysis in German Women’s History: Factory Inspectors’ Reports and the Shaping of Working-Class Lives, 1878–1914,” *Central European History* 16, no. 2 (1983): 99–121.

28 Käthe Leichter, *Wie leben die Wiener Heimarbeiter? Eine Erhebung über die Arbeits- und Lebensverhältnisse von tausend Wiener Heimarbeitern* (Vienna: Verlag Arbeit und Wirtschaft, 1928).

29 The Chambers of Labor were introduced in 1920 as institutionalized representative bodies of all Austrian employees, thereby complementing the Chambers of Commerce, which represented employers.

30 For more information on Leichter’s work and life, see Gabriella Hauch, “Käthe Leichter,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Francisca de Haan et al. (Budapest/New York: CEU Press, 2006), 286–89.

The first post-war report by the labor inspectorate from 1919 refers to homework in only one short paragraph.³¹ This reflects the fact that—contrary to the expectations of the lawmakers—homework did not increase dramatically in the immediate post-war period. With the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy, the economy of the newly founded Austrian state struggled and political upheavals seemed likely, resulting in a general economic recession.³² A short-lived inflationary boom period from 1920 accelerated the entrance of (working-class) women into the formalized labor market.³³ At the same time, it caused an upsurge in homework, mostly by women from impoverished middle-class households. They took up the production of handmade embroidery and knitwear, as international demand for such products increased. In 1921, the labor inspectorate estimated that there were more than 20,000 homeworkers in Vienna alone.³⁴

The government decided to solve its inflation and budget problems by taking on international loans and implementing austerity policies. The currency stabilized; the economy did not. From 1923, a stabilization crisis set in.³⁵ While the official unemployment rate had been at only 1.4% in 1921, between 1923 and 1929 it remained over 8%.³⁶ For homework, both the labor inspectorate and Leichter reported two interconnected consequences: on the one hand, more and more women—now increasingly laid-off factory workers—attempted to find employment in homework. At the same time, due to the economic recession, employment opportunities no longer kept up with the influx of workers. As workers competed for jobs, wages decreased.³⁷

Leichter's survey showed that nearly 95% of homeworkers in Vienna were women, and the majority were between 30 and 50 years old. They engaged mostly in textile production (clothes, linen, knitwear, embroidery), but also in other sectors such as gluing paper bags, cracking nuts, and producing rubber jackets, shoes, hair nets, hats, toys, or metal products. The typical homeworker

31 LI report 1919, 288.

32 Peter Berger, *Kurze Geschichte Österreichs im 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Facultas, 2008), 60–61.

33 Berger, *Kurze Geschichte Österreichs*, 64–66; Käthe Leichter, "Die Entwicklung der Frauenarbeit nach dem Krieg," in *Handbuch der Frauenarbeit in Österreich*, ed. Arbeiterkammer Wien (Vienna: Carl Ueberreuter, 1930), 28–32.

34 LI reports 1920, LXXXII; 1921, LXXXII–LXXXIII; see also Elsa Rotter, "Die Heimarbeiterin," in *Frauenbewegung, Frauenbildung und Frauenarbeit in Österreich*, ed. Bund österreichischer Frauenvereine (Vienna: Selbstverlag des Bundes österreichischer Frauenvereine, 1930), 251–54.

35 Berger, *Kurze Geschichte Österreichs*, 76–97.

36 Dieter Stiefel, *Arbeitslosigkeit: Soziale, politische und wirtschaftliche Auswirkungen am Beispiel Österreichs 1918–1938* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1979), 29.

37 LI reports 1924, 171; 1925, XLV; 1926, LII–LIV; 1927, LX; Leichter, *Wie leben die Wiener Heimarbeiter?* 4.

was the middle-aged wife and mother who had to fulfil her household and childcare duties in addition to performing home-based production.³⁸

Leichter linked the strong overrepresentation of women in homework to women's already more precarious position in the labor market. With the onset of the economic recession, they had been the first to be pushed out of formal employment³⁹ and forced into taking on informal home-based production, becoming an almost inexhaustible but poorly organized reservoir of labor supply for homework.⁴⁰ For employers, on the contrary, the switch to homeworking brought many advantages: wages were lower, expenses for social insurance contributions could be easily avoided, and costs for work-facilities could be omitted. In a time of uncertain economic development and increased (international) competition, the entrepreneurial risks could be passed on to (female) workers.⁴¹

Leichter's study demonstrates the great economic importance of homework not only for the workers themselves but for their families, too: for 97% of homeworkers this was their only profession and source of income, and nearly 43% were the only earners in their households.⁴² Against this backdrop, the working conditions of and wages earned in home-based production appear particularly problematic: the majority worked 9–14 hours per day; some even reported workdays of over 16 hours, usually under bad, crowded living conditions. Due to seasonal fluctuations, intensive periods of work alternated with times of unemployment without any income.⁴³

Leichter identified the central problem of homework in the low wages. For 60% of homeworkers, weekly wages were below 20 Schilling (S). In comparison, female textile factory workers usually earned S 20–40, which was still only half the wage of male textile workers. These wage differences become even greater when considering that homeworkers did not earn their income in the statutory 48-hour week; working hours of 60–70 hours were common, often performed with the assistance of family members, and included further expenses for electricity, heating, travel for pick-up and delivery, and materials.⁴⁴

38 Leichter, *Wie leben die Wiener Heimarbeiter?* 10–13, 130–33.

39 In a later study, she added that the economic fluctuations of the interwar years partially brought women into newly mechanized production to replace more expensive male workers. Leichter, "Die Entwicklung der Frauenarbeit nach dem Krieg," 32–34.

40 Leichter, *Wie leben die Wiener Heimarbeiter?* 8, 134.

41 Leichter, *Wie leben die Wiener Heimarbeiter?* 4.

42 Leichter, *Wie leben die Wiener Heimarbeiter?* 11, 39–40.

43 Leichter, *Wie leben die Wiener Heimarbeiter?* 17, 35–37, 43–46.

44 Leichter, *Wie leben die Wiener Heimarbeiter?* 25–27.

Leichter then went on to discuss problems with the implementation of protective provisions, referring to the regulations of the 1918 homework law: employers had to keep lists of all homeworkers and subcontractors and make them accessible to the labor inspectorate. They had to display the working and wage conditions in their shops and hand out delivery books with detailed records of work orders to employees.⁴⁵ Nearly half of the homeworkers in Leichter's survey did not have delivery books; for 82% of them, working and wage conditions were not properly displayed in the facilities of their employer.⁴⁶ This problem was also frequently brought up by the labor inspectorate. Next to the insufficient number of inspectors, missing lists and delivery books were the major hindrance to effective controls.⁴⁷

Leichter concluded that the unfavorable, uncontrolled conditions in homework not only affected homeworkers themselves but also endangered the livelihoods and struggles of the working class as a whole. She adjusted the earlier social democratic position to fit the current economic situation: while it was still the long-term goal to abolish homework, under the current economic conditions this would not be possible. Therefore, the legal regulations had to be improved, and most importantly those already existing had to be properly enforced.⁴⁸ With the shift of political power in favor of the Christian Social Party after the early 1920s, this proved difficult. Already in October 1926, the Social Democratic Party had unsuccessfully proposed amending the homework law, suggesting the extension of controls, the introduction of homeworkers' representation bodies, and stricter penalties for employers' violations.⁴⁹

Stalling the Implementation of Health and Unemployment Insurance: Political Strategies by Employers

As mentioned earlier, homeworkers had been included in the compulsory health insurance bill of 1921.⁵⁰ Concrete regulations for its implementation

45 StGBL. 140/1918, §§ 5–6, 9.

46 Leichter, *Wie leben die Wiener Heimarbeiter?* 31.

47 LI reports 1920, LXXX–LXXXI; 1921, V.

48 Leichter, *Wie leben die Wiener Heimarbeiter?* 4, 134–36.

49 Antrag der Abgeordneten Smitka und Genossen auf eine Novelle zum Gesetze über die Regelung der Arbeits- und Lohnverhältnisse in der Heimarbeit, October 20, 1926, Beiblatt zur Staatskorrespondenz CCXXX, 161. Sitzung, 293/A, folder TS 1111, Tagblatt-Archiv, Rathausbibliothek Vienna.

50 BGBl. 581/1921, §§ 1, 2, 4, 20–32.

were issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs one year later.⁵¹ At this time, the control of the Ministry had already been handed over from the Social Democratic to the Christian Social Party. The intense debates that took place during that time give an insight into the diverging interests of employee and employer organizations.⁵²

While the employees' representatives—mostly social democratic trade union and party functionaries—attempted to widen the extent of health insurance, the employer side resisted any regulation. The latter usually argued in the supposed interest of homeworkers themselves: if costs of labor were too high due to “misguided social laws,”⁵³ companies could not remain competitive, and homeworkers would become unemployed. When further delays did not seem possible during the negotiations, employers attempted to reduce the coverage of compulsory health insurance. They pushed for a barrier that would exclude workers who did not engage in homework professionally (*berufsmäßig*), but only as a source of supplementary income. The Chamber of Commerce Vorarlberg, for example, requested the introduction of a minimum income threshold for compulsory health insurance with this argument:

In Vorarlberg, most homeworkers are members of other professions, they are mainly employed in agriculture, or they are wives or family members of blue- and white-collar workers who perform homework as a sideline to their household duties or other professional activities in otherwise work-free time.⁵⁴

The concrete implementation guidelines for health insurance in 1922 were a compromise, as the employer organizations were successful in introducing a minimum income threshold that was set at S 3.50 per week from the mid-1920s. In the following years, requests to increase the income threshold

51 BGBl. 6/1923, December 27, 1922.

52 See the notes from meetings at the Ministry of Social Affairs in January and December 1922: Krankenversicherungspflicht der Heimarbeiter, March 7, 1922, Gz. 22.241/22; Sitzung über die Krankenversicherung der Heimarbeiter, December 29, 1922, Gz. 42.872/22; both: box 1272, folder SA 51, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Archiv der Republik, Arbeit und Soziales, Bundesministerium für soziale Verwaltung, Sozialversicherung (hereafter abbreviated as: AdR BMfsV SV).

53 Kammer für Handel, Gewerbe und Industrie Vorarlberg an BMfsV betreffend Verordnungsentwurf über die Krankenversicherung von in der Heimarbeit Beschäftigten, November 27, 1922, Gz. 42.872/22, box 1272, folder SA 51, AdR BMfsV SV.

54 Kammer für Handel, Gewerbe und Industrie Vorarlberg an BMfsV betreffend Verordnungsentwurf über die Krankenversicherung von in der Heimarbeit Beschäftigten, November 27, 1922, Gz. 42.872/22, box 1272, folder SA 51, AdR BMfsV SV.

continued to arrive at the Ministry of Social Affairs. Employer organizations and provincial governments argued that women took on homework only during their free time "in order not to indulge in idleness,"⁵⁵ or insisted that most already had access to health insurance via their husbands.⁵⁶

While it is not surprising that employers aimed to keep their production costs low, it is worth taking a closer look at the reinterpretation of the double-burden of women's work—unpaid household and paid wage labor—as a life of ample leisure time in which women engaged in homework as a mere pastime. This argument connected to the ideal of the male-breadwinner family model which had devaluated and made invisible women's work at home, and here served as a practical justification for the exclusion of homeworkers from health insurance. Compared to the results of Leichter's study concerning the crucial economic contribution of homework to secure the livelihoods of whole families—as noted above, nearly 43% of Viennese homeworkers were the only earners in their households—it becomes obvious how little these arguments corresponded with the homeworkers' actual situation.

The practical implementation of health insurance regulations for homeworkers proved difficult for several reasons. First, this was not the top priority of the state. For public administration bodies it remained unclear how they could achieve results in practice because there were no explicit guidelines to determine which of the different insurance bodies were responsible,⁵⁷ and effective controls failed due to the low number of labor inspectors. Second, employers used different strategies to evade health insurance registration, for example by forcing their workers into self-employment, or simply by ignoring the law.⁵⁸ Third, due to their precarious position, homeworkers seldom claimed their rights.

A similar process can be observed for unemployment insurance. Unemployment insurance for workers in general was first introduced in 1920, and in 1922 homeworkers were explicitly included.⁵⁹ As the Ministry of Social Affairs did not publish any implementation guidelines, the handling of

55 Gewerbe-Inspektorat für Vorarlberg an BMfsV betreffend Krankenversicherung der Heimarbeiter, Bregenz, November 23, 1928, Gz. 84.887/28, box 1272, folder SA 51, AdR BMfsV SV.

56 Landesregierung Vorarlberg an BMfsV betreffend Krankenversicherung von Heimarbeitern, May 25, 1926 and January 12, 1927, Gz. 3.626/27, box 1272, folder SA 51, AdR BMfsV SV.

57 LI reports 1920, LXXXI; 1921, LXXXIV; Verordnung betreffend die Krankenversicherung von in der Heimarbeit Beschäftigten, June 27, 1923, Gz. 27.528/23, box 1272, folder SA 51, AdR BMfsV SV.

58 LI reports 1924, 175; 1932, 89–90.

59 StGBL. 153/1920, March 24, 1920; BGBl. 778/1922, § 1, section 5.

unemployment insurance became subject to the differing legal opinions of local authorities, which caused a chaotic situation. While some unemployment offices had registered differing income thresholds (between S 10–15 per week),⁶⁰ the Upper Austrian regional government had informed its subordinate authorities that currently no unemployment insurance for homeworkers was in place.⁶¹ In Lower Austria the health insurance bodies, which were responsible for collecting unemployment insurance contributions, did not do so. But the unemployment offices believed that homeworkers were entitled to benefits and so initiated recourse claims against employers.⁶² In July 1931, the Ministry of Social Affairs finally issued a regulation which set the income threshold at S 14 per week, but in order to receive benefits workers had to prove that their family members did not earn any income.⁶³

Obviously, the immediate interests of the Ministry of Social Affairs and employers were in direct opposition to the expansion of unemployment insurance to homeworkers. Since the late 1920s, the state had increasingly attempted to cut back on social expenses. Employer organizations feared that workers would not take up employment on any terms if they had unemployment benefits to fall back on. The labor inspectorate noted in 1933:

It is fatal for the situation of most homeworkers that they have no other source of income, such as for example the yield from their own farm, and therefore are forced to accept work on any terms.⁶⁴

Again, the conflicts over the implementation of unemployment insurance were not only formulated as direct economic interests but mediated through the character of homework. During the nine years it took the Ministry of Social Affairs to clarify the issue of implementation, employer organizations complained regularly, and demanded the abolishment of unemployment insurance altogether.⁶⁵ The matter, they argued, was too

60 Arbeitslosenversicherung der Heimarbeiter, August 6, 1931, Gz. 71.222/31, box 410, folder SA 13/4/H 1931, AdR BMfSV SP.

61 OÖ Landesregierung an Bezirkskrankenkasse Linz bezüglich Arbeitslosenversicherung der Heimarbeiter, August 1, 1924, Gz. 81.280/31, box 410, folder SA 13/4/H 1931, AdR BMfSV SP.

62 LI report 1924, 176; Hauptverband der Industrie Österreichs an BMfSV betreffend Arbeitslosen- und Krankenversicherungspflicht der Heimarbeiter, May 30, 1930, Gz. 81.280/31, box 410, folder SA 13/4/H 1931, AdR BMfSV SP.

63 Arbeitslosenversicherung der Heimarbeiter, August 6, 1931, Gz. 71.222/31, box 410, folder SA 13/4/H 1931, AdR BMfSV SP.

64 LI report 1933, 92.

65 On the general resistance of employer organizations to unemployment insurance during the 1930s, see Gerhard Senft, *Im Vorfeld der Katastrophe: Die Wirtschaftspolitik des Ständestaates*.

complex to be implemented in practice; it could open the door for abuse, and homeworkers would neither want nor need unemployment benefits.⁶⁶ One example employers brought forward was the house weavers in Waldviertel, a rural region north-west of Vienna, who supposedly had small plots of land and could therefore secure a subsistence living without unemployment benefits.⁶⁷ The image of the worker who took up home-based production only as a supplementary income to (unpaid) subsistence agriculture or household work was connected to a widespread discourse of homework as part of a traditional rural lifestyle that was endangered by capitalism and modern factory work.⁶⁸

This view was contested, however, and the Christian Textile Workers' Union disagreed that the house weavers could survive on agricultural subsistence: "In hardly any other workers' dwelling one can find as much sorrow, hunger, and grief as in the dilapidated huts of the Waldviertel house weavers."⁶⁹ In a handwritten letter from 1930, a group of Waldviertel house weavers themselves turned to the authorities to stress how important unemployment insurance was for them. They lived in one of the poorest villages of the district: their income was between S 4 and 15 per week. They saw it as a great injustice that they were treated differently to factory workers.⁷⁰

Studies from France and Germany have shown how similar narratives on traditional home-weaving had become popular since the late nineteenth century, and how little they had to do with the actual conditions of earlier home industrial production. Such narratives stressed the role of artisanal production by the male household head, who found pride in his work and resisted mechanization. The equally important work of wives and daughters became reinterpreted as merely supplementary. The supposed existence of a harmonious, patriarchal past became a way to legitimize the devaluation of

Österreich 1934–1938 (Vienna: Braumüller Universitätsverlag, 2014), 279–81.

66 Hauptverband der Industrie Österreichs an BMfSV betreffend Arbeitslosen- und Krankenversicherungspflicht der Heimarbeiter, January 2, 1928, May 12, 1928, February 1, 1929, Gz. 81.280/31, box 410, folder SA 13/4/H 1931, AdR BMfSV SP.

67 Verordnung über die Regelung der Arbeitslosenversicherung der Heimarbeiter, November 15, 1930, Gz. 71.222/31, box 410, folder SA 13/4/H 1931, AdR BMfSV SP.

68 Boris, "Sexual Divisions, Gender Constructions," 25.

69 "Die Lage der Heimweber im Waldviertel," *Fachblatt des Zentralverbandes der christlichen Textil-, Heim- und Bekleidungsarbeiter* 19, no. 8 (1923): 5.

70 Heimarbeiter aus Gmünd an Bezirkskrankenkasse Gmünd betreffend Arbeitslosenversicherung der Heimarbeiter, September 18, 1930, Gz. 81.280/31, box 410, folder SA 13/4/H 1931, AdR BMfSV SP.

female (home)work in the present.⁷¹ In a similar manner, Austrian employer organizations drew upon such images to exclude homeworkers from social benefits.

Falling Wages at the Height of the Economic Crisis: Pessimism among Labor Inspectors

From 1929, the economic crisis intensified drastically in connection with global developments. Industrial production, foreign trade, and domestic demand collapsed, resulting in skyrocketing unemployment. The official unemployment rate reached its peak in 1933 at 26% and remained at over 20% until 1938.⁷² During these years, the reports issued by the labor inspectorate became more drastic, describing the sad and bleak conditions of home-based production and the “terrible hardship” homeworkers lived in. Wages were at an all-time low and often could not even cover workers’ subsistence costs. Protective laws were constantly breached, and workers were not registered with social insurance.⁷³ Still, the inspectors noticed a further influx of workers, who competed for work and undercut each other’s wages.

According to official figures, the number of homeworkers has decreased, but in reality, as a result of the rising unemployment, their numbers have increased to an almost unimaginable extent due to the influx from working- and former middle-classes.⁷⁴

In contrast to the impressions gained by the labor inspectorate, the data collected from the company and population censuses during these years actually showed a slight decrease in the number of homeworkers in Austria,

71 Jean H. Quataert, “Social Insurance and the Family Work of Oberlausitz Homeweavers in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in *German Women in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History*, ed. John C. Fout (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984), 274–75; Tessie P. Liu, “What Price a Weaver’s Dignity? Gender Inequality and the Survival of Home-Based Production in Industrial France,” in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, ed. Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 57–76.

72 Gerhard Senft, “Anpassung durch Kontraktion: Österreichs Wirtschaft in den dreißiger Jahren,” in *Austrofaschismus: Politik – Ökonomie – Kultur 1933–1938*, ed. Emmerich Tálos and Wolfgang Neugebauer (Vienna: LIT, 2014), 182–84.

73 LI reports 1929, LVII–LVIII; 1930, 32; 1931, 84–85; 1932, 87; 1933, 92; 1934, 98.

74 LI report 1932, 87.

from 18,727 (1930) to 17,023 (1934).⁷⁵ Homeworkers made up between 1–2% of the total workforce.⁷⁶ Similar to other European countries,⁷⁷ the significance of homework had declined when compared to its importance before World War One: in 1902, nearly 14% of all commercial workers in Austria had been homeworkers.⁷⁸ Still, homework continued to play a relevant role mostly in two industries, textile and clothing production, in which around 80% of all homeworkers were employed, and in these two industries made up 8–10% of the total workforce.⁷⁹ Regarding regional distribution, homework was concentrated in Vienna, with 67.7% of all homeworkers, demonstrating the dominance of urban industrial homework.⁸⁰

Why, then, did labor inspectors notice such a drastic increase in the number of homeworkers? I suggest reading their scandalized words also as a political strategy to alert both the authorities and the public to the problematic situation in homework. However, it is also likely that employers and/or homeworkers did not declare their occupation in the census, and that their real number was indeed higher. The labor inspectors frequently noticed the phenomenon of homeworkers not wanting to disclose details of their work or working conditions. Many homeworkers (legitimately) feared that causing problems for the employer would endanger their jobs. Others did not want to be registered for health insurance, in order to save

75 Bundesamt für Statistik, ed., *Gewerbliche Betriebszählung in der Republik Österreich vom 14. Juni 1930. Gesamtergebnisse für Österreich* (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Staatsdruckerei, 1932), 27 (hereafter abbreviated as: Company Census 1930); Bundesamt für Statistik, ed., *Statistik des Bundesstaates Österreich. Die Ergebnisse der österreichischen Volkszählung vom 22. März 1934*, vol. 1 (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Staatsdruckerei, 1935), 244 (hereafter abbreviated as: Population Census 1934).

76 The census data comes to 2.3% (1930) and 1.1% (1934). This does not mean, though, that the extent of homework halved in relation to overall wage labor, but it can be explained by different methods of calculating the total workforce. Population Census 1934, 244.

77 Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work*, 215–16.

78 These numbers refer to the company census for the Austrian part of the Habsburg monarchy and therefore include important regions for homework not part of postwar Austria. Still, the numbers for Vienna alone show a significant decrease from 30,605 (1902) to 12,685 (1930) homeworkers. Susan Zimmermann, "Geschützte und ungeschützte Arbeitsverhältnisse von der Hochindustrialisierung bis zur Weltwirtschaftskrise: Österreich und Ungarn im Vergleich," in *Ungeregt und unterbezahlt: Der informelle Sektor in der Weltwirtschaft*, ed. Andrea Komlosy et al. (Frankfurt am Main/Vienna: Brandes & Apsel/Südwind, 1997), 102; Rigler, *Frauenleitbild und Frauenarbeit*, 63; Company Census 1930, 45.

79 78.6% (1930) and 80.6% (1934) of all homeworkers worked in clothing and textile production and they made up 10.2% (1930) and 8.2% (1934) of the total workforce in these industries. Company Census 1930, 27; Population Census 1934, 246–47.

80 Here I rely only on the data for the year 1930, but it is unlikely that there was a major shift until 1934. Company Census 1930, 45.

on insurance contributions.⁸¹ Some interpretations of these behaviors show that labor inspectors were puzzled, even offended, that homeworkers did not want their help:

Every official intervention, no matter how cautious, is taken as hostility on the part of the homeworkers, since everyone still employed tries to keep their employment relationship [...] a secret, so as not to lose their last source of income. It is clear that any official activity in this area is particularly delicate and thankless, and that no support from the homeworkers can be expected.⁸²

Sometimes, homeworkers were presented as helpless and fully dependent on their employers,⁸³ for example when describing how homeworkers begged labor inspectors to refrain from intervening,⁸⁴ or whenever they tried to cover up their employers' transgressions.⁸⁵

Efi Avdela has argued, using the example of interwar Greece, that such interpretations must be read based on the often-paternalistic attitude of labor inspectors towards workers. She suggests also understanding workers' refusal to cooperate with labor inspectors as pragmatic choices or strategies for maintaining a distinct identity and for expressing resistance.⁸⁶ Seen from this perspective, the homeworkers' negative attitude towards the labor inspectors can be explained by the fact that homeworkers were fully aware of the labor inspectors' limited powers to help them, or that they decided that formalization of their jobs was not in their best interest amid a highly volatile economic situation.

Furthermore, the depiction of homeworkers as powerless reflects on how the labor inspectors perceived their own situation. In the face of the continuously worsening economic reality, they became increasingly pessimistic about their power to intervene. In 1931, the labor inspectorate itself became affected by the state's austerity policies when a freeze on new personnel was introduced.⁸⁷ In a 1932 article reflecting on her professional activities,

81 LI reports 1929, LVIII; 1930, 63, 125; 1931, 85; 1932, 87; 1933, 93.

82 LI report 1931, 85.

83 On the depiction of homeworkers as helpless, also see Prügl, *Global Construction of Gender*, 37–39.

84 LI report 1930, 33.

85 LI report 1931, 85.

86 Efi Avdela, "Contested Meanings: Protection and Resistance in Labour Inspectors' Reports in Twentieth-Century Greece," *Gender & History* 9, no. 2 (1997): 323–25.

87 LI reports 1932, 7–12, 17, 26; 1933, 13, 20.

labor inspector Mathilde Wilda⁸⁸ remembered an atmosphere of optimism in the time after 1918, whereas in more recent years a "gradually creeping, then rapidly increasing hopelessness" had taken hold.⁸⁹

In 1936, labor inspector Hedwig Lemberger⁹⁰ approached the issue of homeworkers' bad situation and low wages from a more theoretical standpoint.⁹¹ She discussed why the rules on (and payment of) statutory minimum wages were being frequently broken by employers and why the existing legal regulations could not keep transgressions in check. She explained that the problem had already begun with the setting of minimum wages by the Homework Commissions in the already mentioned law of 1918. The commissions consisted of an equal number of employer and employee representatives, as well as impartial experts nominated by the Ministry of Social Affairs, and had been set up for several production branches.⁹² Lemberger herself became an impartial member of several of these commissions.⁹³

Lemberger argued that while the commission members had good intentions, the set wages were unrealistically high and not up to date with the current economic situation. Although she granted that statutory wages provided an important legal framework for interventions against overly unfair practices, even those employers who wanted to, could not afford them.⁹⁴ Homeworkers and labor inspectors could also turn to arbitration bodies and courts to sue for violations of the minimum wage, but this mechanism was, according to Lemberger, practically meaningless. Homeworkers would rarely claim back payments because they depended on the income from their work.⁹⁵

88 Mathilde Wilda was appointed as first female assistant to the labor inspectorate in Brünn/Brno in 1909 and was later transferred to Graz. In her writings, she assumed a sympathetic position to the social democratic labor movement. *Neues Frauenleben* 21, no. 9 (1909): 235; "Sozialpolitik und Arbeiterversicherung: Neueinteilung im Grazer Gewerbeinspektorat," *Arbeiterwille. Organ des arbeitenden Volkes für Steiermark und Kärnten*, January 9, 1920, 11.

89 Mathilde Wilda, "Die Eingliederung und Arbeit der weiblichen Beamten im Rahmen der Gewerbe-Inspektion," LI report 1932, 154.

90 Hedwig Lemberger (*1873) was related to the liberal women's movement, had published extensively on homework, and was appointed as labor inspector in 1917. "Hedwig Lemberger," *Frauen in Bewegung 1848–1938*, <https://fraueninbewegung.onb.ac.at/node/1731>; "Eine Gewerbeinspektions-Assistentin," *Pilsner Tagblatt*, November 17, 1917, 4.

91 Hedwig Lemberger, "Die Heimarbeit als Lohnproblem," LI report 1936, 93–94.

92 StGBI. 140/1918, §§ 16–43.

93 See, for example, Heimarbeitsgesetz, Errichtung der Zentralheimarbeitskommission für die Wäschewarenherzeugung, July 24, 1919, Gz. 19.663/19, box 616, folder SA 40, AdR BMfsV SP.

94 Hedwig Lemberger, "Die Heimarbeit als Lohnproblem," 95–97.

95 Lemberger, "Die Heimarbeit als Lohnproblem," 97.

Lemberger continued that even if control activities by the authorities were more comprehensive, the situation of workers would not improve. While such a strategy could help to exclude unscrupulous employers from the market in normal economic times, in the current situation it would have the opposite effect. Employers would either shut down, switch to factory work, or relocate their production to other countries, again resulting in less jobs for homeworkers.⁹⁶ Therefore, in these difficult economic times, the existing regulations could not provide sufficient protection for homeworkers. Such a “rigid system of wage regulation” would be difficult to apply to a “living economic organism with its complicated problems.” Lemberger appealed to both employer and employee representatives to work together and set “realistic” statutory wages in the Homework Commissions.⁹⁷

Indeed, during the 1930s, new statutes with reduced minimum wages were set by several Homework Commissions.⁹⁸ It is doubtful, though, whether this was due to willing cooperation between the parties involved. Employer representatives especially aimed to push through their interest in lowering production costs by regularly sabotaging the work of the commissions. Either employer organizations simply did not nominate any representatives, and thereby delayed the commissions’ establishment in the first place,⁹⁹ or employer representatives left (or threatened to leave) the commissions during negotiations and later refused to recognize agreements,¹⁰⁰ or employers unilaterally terminated the statutes.¹⁰¹ The association of clothes and linen producers in Vienna in 1935 even filed a lawsuit at the federal court in order to declare a statute invalid.¹⁰²

However, the fact that the minimum wages had been officially lowered did not mean that transgressions stopped or that there was no more decline in real wages. One example concerned handmade knitted and embroidered products in Vienna, where wages were among the lowest in homework.¹⁰³

96 Lemberger, “Die Heimarbeit als Lohnproblem,” 97–100.

97 Lemberger, “Die Heimarbeit als Lohnproblem,” 100.

98 LI reports 1934, 99; 1935, 95.

99 LI report 1924, 176.

100 LI report 1926, LIV; Verband der Österr. Textilindustrie, Ersuchen um Abweisung eines allfälligen Antrages auf Festsetzung von Mindestlöhnen für Werkstattarbeiter der Strick- und Wirkwarenerzeugung in fabrikmäßigen Betrieben, May 5, 1933, Gz. 19.513/33, box 615, folder Strick und Wirkwarenerzeugung, AdR BMfSV SP.

101 LI report 1934, 99.

102 Bundesgerichtshofbeschwerde der Vereinigung der Wäschewarenerzeuger und Konfektionäre in Wien gegen den Satzungsbeschluß der ZHK für die Kleidererzeugung in Wien. Gegenschrift, March 5, 1935, Gz. 22.799/35, box 616, AdR BMfSV SP.

103 Leichter, *Wie leben die Wiener Heimarbeiter?* 91, 101–2.

In these branches, the labor inspectorate reported regular hourly wages of between S 0.25 and 0.28 in 1931; in 1933 they were down to S 0.08 to 0.10, at a time when one kilo of bread (in 1933) cost about S 0.58.¹⁰⁴

The reduction of minimum wages was not, as Lemberger argued, a good-natured compromise that improved compliance; instead, it contributed to a further decrease in real wages. Although the economic crisis was a crucial factor in the deterioration of homework relations, it alone is not sufficient to explain the especially precarious position of homeworkers compared to other (female) workers. Like the developments in health and unemployment insurance, the interventions by employer organizations were intended to sabotage the existing legal framework and were central to the reduction of wages. Lemberger's interpretation that employers and (especially) workers must subordinate their interests to the demands of the market economy can be located within liberal economic thought. At the same time, it can be read as a way to rationalize her own relatively powerless situation as an actor both within the labor inspectorate and the Homework Commissions.

Formal Deregulation of Homework: Government Action during Austrofascism

In 1933/34, the Christian Social Party abolished democracy in Austria and set out to establish a patriarchal Christian Corporatist State. Alongside the banning of civil liberties and the leftist labor movement, the Austrofascist regime's self-declared goal was to reinforce the hierarchical, gendered division of society. Women should take over the role of mother and housewife, leaving politics and wage labor to men.¹⁰⁵ The regime quickly introduced several laws that negatively affected homeworkers due to their gender and class position.

Some regulations explicitly excluded women from politics and employment, while elections (together with equal suffrage for men and women) were abolished. The constitution of May 1934 introduced new gender inequalities before the law and women were largely excluded from any political representation within state structures.¹⁰⁶ A law concerning double-income earners

104 LI reports 1931, 86; 1933, 92–93; 1935, 95.

105 Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann, "Der 'Christliche Ständestaat' als Männerstaat? Frauen- und Geschlechterpolitik im Austrofascismus," in *Austrofascismus: Politik – Ökonomie – Kultur 1933–1938*, ed. Emmerich Tálos and Wolfgang Neugebauer (Vienna: LIT, 2014), 254–55.

106 Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann, "Hausfrauen und Mütter im Austrofascismus: Gender, Klasse und Religion als Achsen der Ungleichheit," in *Perspektivenwechsel: Geschlechterverhältnisse*

prohibited married women from employment in public service roles as a way to create more jobs for male breadwinners.¹⁰⁷ This contributed strongly to the prevalent discourse against female employment, though it directly affected comparatively few educated middle-class women.¹⁰⁸

On the level of labor rights, the Austrofascist regime maintained the direction of the conservative governments of the 1920s but intensified cutbacks in social insurance and attacked existing labor legislation.¹⁰⁹ These measures affected workers of both genders, but, due to their disadvantaged position, female workers were hit disproportionately hard. The social insurance reform of 1935, for example, introduced wide-ranging reductions in all branches—health, accidents, pensions, and unemployment insurance. Eligibility criteria, such as income thresholds and duration of employment, were tightened, and benefits reduced. As working-class women were overrepresented in unsteady and low-paid employment, it became more difficult for them to meet the criteria.¹¹⁰ Additionally, the reduction of monetary support for sickness, old age, or unemployment meant that private households had to compensate. This was a further burden on women, as they were usually the ones responsible for unpaid care work.¹¹¹

The social insurance reform of 1935 also directly affected homeworkers' health insurance. The minimum income threshold for compulsory insurance was increased from S 3.50 to S 10 per week and now began only from the second month of employment. Exemptions for workers who worked less than 24 hours per week or who were employed by several employers can be interpreted as introducing further loopholes to help employers avoid paying compulsory insurance.¹¹² The year-long interventions by employer organizations had finally paid off.

The labor inspectorate, whose personnel had remained largely unchanged under the new political conditions,¹¹³ was critical of this new regulation: alongside the existing problem that employers did not register their

im Austrofascismus, ed. Veronika Duma et al., *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 27, no. 3 (2016): 57–62.

107 BGBl. 545/1933, December 15, 1933.

108 Bandhauer-Schöffmann, "Der 'Christliche Ständestaat' als Männerstaat?" 273–76.

109 Emmerich Tálos, "Sozialpolitik im Austrofascismus," in *Austrofascismus: Politik – Ökonomie – Kultur 1933–1938*, ed. Emmerich Tálos and Wolfgang Neugebauer (Vienna: LIT, 2014), 222–30.

110 Ennsman, "Frauenpolitik und Frauenarbeit," 130–37.

111 Bandhauer-Schöffmann, "Der 'Christliche Ständestaat' als Männerstaat?" 254–55.

112 BGBl. 107/1935, March 30, 1935, § 142 section 2, § 143 sections 4 and 5; BGBl. 168/1935, May 11, 1935, article 97.

113 Four labor inspectors, three of them women, had retired or been suspended in 1933. It is not clear, but it is possible that this happened for political reasons. LI report 1933, 13.

homeworkers in the first place, following the reform most were now excluded formally as well.¹¹⁴ The Christian trade unionists, whose functionaries had taken over the newly established state-controlled labor organizations, argued similarly: in practice, this was tantamount to the complete abolishment of health insurance for homeworkers.¹¹⁵ The Christian trade unionists supported the Austrofascist regime, and under it they tried to push forward their own demands. Like the dominant regime actors, they envisioned a society where women would engage exclusively in unpaid household and care labor and therefore aimed at completely abolishing homework. But until then, they argued, the conditions in homework had to be improved to eliminate unfair competition for male workers on the formal labor market.¹¹⁶

However, the only government reaction to the demands of the Christian trade unionists was to issue two resolutions by the Ministry of Social Affairs in late 1936 and early 1937. The first informed regional authorities and employer organizations that they should give special attention to compliance with homework regulations.¹¹⁷ The second instructed public authorities to give preferential treatment to companies that produced goods in closed workshops over those that employed homeworkers when placing orders.¹¹⁸ As these resolutions did not include any consequences for non-compliance, it is probable that their impact remained limited.

While the Austrofascist regime in public regularly promoted its vision of a Corporatist State that would ensure a (modest) breadwinner wage for male workers and the possibility that women could devote themselves exclusively to unpaid household and care duties, its practical politics were largely informed by pragmatic considerations. The regime followed the idea that by reducing state expenses and lowering production costs for employers—at the expense of working-class households—the economy could be stabilized.¹¹⁹ The de-facto abolishment of homeworkers' health insurance was implemented according to this rationale. This also gives us insight into the balance of power between different regime groups: while employer organizations could push through a year-long demand of theirs,

114 LI report 1935, 95.

115 Hintze, *Heimarbeit*, 33–34.

116 Hintze, *Heimarbeit*, 40–44.

117 "Erlass über die Einhaltung der Schutzvorschriften des Heimarbeitergesetzes, November 9, 1936," *Amtliche Nachrichten des BMfsV* 18, no. 14 (1936): 359–60.

118 "Erlass über die Eindämmung von Überstundenarbeit und Heimarbeit bei öffentlichen Lieferungen und Arbeiten, May 22, 1937," *Amtliche Nachrichten des BMfsV* 19, no. 11 (1937): 324.

119 Senft, "Anpassung durch Kontraktion," 182–99.

the Christian trade unionists were unable to halt the dismantling of labor legislation in the interest of male workers.

After the drastic reports in the early 1930s, from mid-1930 onwards the labor inspectorate's tone changed slightly, noting that production had improved in some branches while wages remained low and legal violations continued.¹²⁰ This assessment is in line with a slight improvement of the general economic situation, which was connected less to Austrofascist regime policies than it was to the general recovery of the global economy. But while production and exports increased to some extent, unemployment remained high, and domestic consumption stagnated at around two-thirds of the 1929 level during the years 1933–38.¹²¹ This indicates that the step-by-step process of non-implementation and deregulation of the homework laws after the 1920s established a new, but worse, status-quo that did not improve when the economic situation turned.

Conclusion

While the significance of homework in interwar Austria decreased in comparison to the late nineteenth century, textile and clothes production at home remained a relevant employment opportunity for mostly working-class women in urban areas. With the onset of an economic recession from the mid-1920s, more women took up homework to compensate for the loss of income in the regulated sector, often becoming the sole breadwinners in their families. When the economic crisis peaked in the early 1930s, the precarious material situation of the working class made it increasingly difficult to resist deteriorating working conditions, and the further influx of workers depressed homework wages. The especially unfavorable conditions impacting homework cannot be explained by the economic crisis alone, though: they were as much the result of active political struggles over the legal regulation and character of homework.

Between 1918 and 1922, a special legal regulatory framework for homework was introduced for the first time. However, this was not the beginning of a continuing process of formalization but became contested as soon as it was implemented. During the 1920s, against the background of a political shift towards conservative forces, protective provisions, health and unemployment insurance, and statutory minimum wages became increasingly

120 LI reports 1935, 96–97; 1936, 82; 1937, 15–16.

121 Senft, "Anpassung durch Kontraktion," 188–95.

undermined in practice. Detractions and sabotage attempts by employer organizations and unclear guidelines issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs caused a chaotic situation that served political goals and economic interests: to keep down production costs and reduce state social expenditure. In this context, labor inspectors became increasingly pessimistic about their capacity to intervene. Homeworkers seldom claimed their rights, most likely because they were aware of their slim chances for success and the risk of losing their employment altogether.

The wish of the Christian trade unionists that women would "return" to the household to engage exclusively in unpaid house and childcare activities would not be realized during the 1930s. However, the dominant discourse that women should be housewives and mothers, not workers, was taken up, to question if homework was "real" work. Despite its crucial economic significance for many working-class households, homework became reinterpreted as an insignificant side job or a mere hobby. As in other European countries and the United States, gendered notions of work helped justify the non-implementation of homework regulations and made the situation of homeworkers more precarious.

In 1935, the Austrofascist regime even officially abolished health insurance for the vast majority of homeworkers by increasing income thresholds and introducing new loopholes in the law. The persistent efforts by state actors and employer organizations finally succeeded: less than two decades after their first introduction, the authoritarian government partially revoked the homework regulations also on a formal level. Amid a volatile economic situation and a shift of political power towards conservative forces, this case study is an early example of informalization processes in a newly regulated sector of wage work in interwar Europe.

About the Author

Elisabeth Luif is a historian, social scientist, and public history activist. Her research interests include transnational perspectives on twentieth-century Central and Southeastern Europe, interwar fascism, labor, and gender history. She is currently completing her dissertation on labor arbitration in 1930s Austria at Central European University (Vienna).

8. Distinguishing Between Workers, Establishing Hierarchies: Categorizing Farm and other Workers in Disputes over Unemployment Insurance in Austria, 1920–1938

Jessica Richter

Abstract: All over Europe, social insurance schemes were exclusive from the start. In Austria, for example, a large proportion of the workforce was exempt from unemployment insurance introduced in 1920. This chapter deals with the political and administrative struggles over unemployment benefits. On the one hand, I show how politicians and interest groups constructed farm labor as a special (instead of regular) kind of work to justify legal differences to commercial labor. On the other hand, I show how administrative authorities and the Supreme Administrative Court drew a line between farm and commercial workers and established hierarchies between them by re/producing relatively formalized and informal lines of work. In particular, I discuss their construction of “occupational affiliations” in workers’ life courses.

Keywords: unemployment insurance, agricultural labor, farm service, social rights, inequality, categorization

In 1936, Katharina P. was rejected by the labor office. She had applied for emergency assistance (*Notstandsaushilfe*) after her regular entitlement to unemployment support had expired. The labor office explained that

as she was predominantly an agricultural worker for whom the hurdles were particularly high, she did not meet the requirements. In any case, it was at the authorities' discretion which workers they awarded secondary relief. Katharina P. lodged an appeal against the decision with the Federal Ministry of Social Administration. She stated that, contrary to the labor office's assumption, she was a commercial (*gewerblich*) worker and had never worked in agriculture before. This resulted in a new investigation of the case.¹

This example is illustrative in several ways. Katharina P.'s encounter with the labor market authorities points to the legal differences between agricultural and commercial workers in Austria. In the interwar years, authorities and official statistics, as well as labor law and social security schemes, distinguished between commercial work, which included labor in industrial and other commercial businesses, and agricultural (*landwirtschaftlich*) and domestic/household (*hauswirtschaftlich*) work. These were the main official categories to which certain characteristics were assigned and for which different rights, obligations, and entitlements were defined. Farm workers were excluded from the unemployment insurance introduced in 1920. To some degree, such inequalities encompassed those who had worked on farms in the past.

From the start, each emerging European welfare state had targeted only a minority of its workforce. State bodies, institutions and legislation thus contributed to re-/establishing hierarchies between different, officially determined categories of workers, who accordingly benefited to a lesser or greater extent from formalization. Some workers were hardly integrated into new forms of labor administration, social security entitlements, and labor regulation. In relation to formalized labor, their livelihoods increasingly appeared to be a deviation from what state officials deemed "normal" work.²

While workers in industrial enterprises and some other commercial workers had been included in the health and accident insurance implemented in Austria in the late 1880s, this had hardly applied to agricultural and forestry workers—and not at all, for example, to domestic servants. For

1 Austrian State Archives, Archiv der Republik (Archives of the Republic, AdR), *Bundesministerium für Soziale Verwaltung* (Federal Ministry of Social Administration, BMFSV), *Sozialpolitik* (Social Policy), box 327, no. 123,250–6/36. The file does not specify Katharina P.'s former occupation(s). This research was funded in whole or in part by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF): 10.55776/P32140 and the Research Network for Interdisciplinary Regional Studies in the framework of the state of Lower Austria's RTI strategy.

2 Sigrig Wadauer, "Immer nur Arbeit? Überlegungen zur Historisierung von Arbeit und Lebensunterhalten," in *Semantiken von Arbeit: Diachrone und vergleichende Perspektiven*, ed. Jörn Leonhard and Willibald Steinmetz (Cologne: Böhlau, 2016), 234–35.

dependent, landless, non-family farm workers (laborers, servants, etc.)—on whom this chapter centers—this changed slightly in the First Republic. Parliamentary democracy was established after the end of World War One and with the downfall of the Habsburg Monarchy and lasted until the rise of the Austrofascist regime in 1933/34, which was forced to resign following the annexation of Austria by the National Socialist German Reich in 1938. The republic's early years saw an extension of social insurance schemes to cover many of those previously excluded.³

Yet farm workers continued to be at a disadvantage compared to commercial workers during the interwar years—regarding social insurances as much as new labor-related rights—thereby constituting a relatively informalized category of laborers. The eight-hour day of 1919⁴ was just one of the labor movement's achievements that remained out of reach. Farm workers, however, were a significant proportion of the gainfully employed population. Around 1880, 52% of the employed worked in agriculture and forestry; in 1923, despite the much lamented “rural exodus,” their share still amounted to just under 40%.⁵

Agricultural work was informal in the sense that contracts, rights, and entitlements were legally less defined than for other industries. However, it was not unregulated. In fact, farm work was simply organized differently. Politicians and other contemporaries explained this with reference to agriculture's specific characteristics and its embeddedness in the household economy. For administrative authorities, disparities between different kinds of workers were undisputable. From their perspective, Katharina P.'s story would have been straightforward: undoubtedly, a decision was only needed on whether she was primarily an agricultural worker. In her case, the labor office may have made a mistake, leading to the denial of eligibility.

However, as such decisions were not always that easy to make in practice, the story also hints at the difficulty of clearly differentiating between farm, commercial, and domestic workers. Given the many different forms of

3 Emmerich Tálos and Karl Wörster, *Soziale Sicherung im Sozialstaat Österreich. Entwicklungen – Herausforderungen – Strukturen* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1994), 17, 23–25. For Hungary, see Susan Zimmermann, *Divide, Provide and Rule: An Integrative History of Poverty Policy, Social Policy, and Social Reform in Hungary under the Habsburg Monarchy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), 90, 137–43.

4 Gesetz vom 17. Dezember 1919 über den achtstündigen Arbeitstag, *State Law Gazette* 1919, no. 581.

5 Roman Sandgruber, “Die Landwirtschaft in der Wirtschaft – Menschen, Maschinen, Märkte,” in *Geschichte der österreichischen Land- und Forstwirtschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. 1, *Politik. Gesellschaft. Wirtschaft*, ed. Ernst Bruckmüller et al. (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 2002), 264.

employment relationships, seemingly distinct economic sectors and their corresponding occupational categories actually overlapped in various ways. Depending on their categorization, workers were granted or denied social rights and entitlements. Inequality, particularly in unclear situations, led to disputes between workers and the labor market administrations; this has made the processes of workers' categorization and hierarchization accessible to historical analysis.

In this chapter, I investigate how politicians, interest organizations, and administrative authorities constructed and organized agricultural work as a distinct kind of gainful occupation in relation to commercial labor. In doing so, they justified its informal status and rationalized differences in its organization. Specifically, I concentrate on farm workers' exclusion from unemployment insurance—in the course of law-making processes as well as in conflicts over insurance claims.

My contribution highlights “that the boundaries of what constituted the ‘rural’ were constantly renegotiated.”⁶ It is based on research that examines the organization of farm work and other livelihoods in the context of the transformation of production and work since the second half of the nineteenth century. Skilled, continuous commercial wage labor outside the household increasingly set the standard for other modes of economic activity, such as agricultural or domestic work.⁷ Scientists, reformers, and politicians, as well as the administrative authorities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, attempted to “modernize,” i.e., to fit agriculture into the logic of commercial, and especially of industrial labor and production.⁸ At the same time, agriculture was identified as distinct from industry, following its own rhythms and particularities.⁹

6 Kiran Klaus Patel, “The Green Heart of Governance: Rural Europe during the Interwar Years in a Global Perspective,” in *Governing the Rural in Interwar Europe*, ed. Liesbeth van de Grift and Amalia Ribí-Forclaz (London: Routledge, 2018), 10.

7 Sigrid Wadauer, *Der Arbeit nachgehen? Auseinandersetzungen um Lebensunterhalt und Mobilität (Österreich, 1880–1938)* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2021); Sigrid Wadauer, “Immer nur Arbeit?” 234–35.

8 Juri Auderset, “Consigning the ‘Human Motor’ to the History of Agricultural Work: Reflections on the Fractured Trajectory of Scientific Management and the Rationalization of Labor,” *Commodity Frontiers*, no. 5 (2023): 1–9; Juri Auderset and Peter Moser, *Die Agrarfrage in der Industriegesellschaft: Wissenskulturen, Machtverhältnisse und natürliche Ressourcen in der agrarisch-industriellen Wissensgesellschaft (1850–1950)* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2018); Peter Moser and Tony Varley, “The State and Agricultural Modernisation in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in Europe,” in *Integration through Subordination. The Politics of Agricultural Modernisation in Industrial Europe*, ed. Peter Moser and Tony Varley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 16–17.

9 Amalia Ribí-Forclaz, “A New Target for International Social Reform: The International Labour Organization and Working and Living Conditions in Agriculture in the Inter-War Years,” *Contemporary European History* 20, no. 3 (2011), Special Issue: 307–29.

Some scholars have considered the ambivalent formalization of agricultural labor in relation to commercial work and its late integration into the emerging social insurance systems.¹⁰ While they have not addressed how work was categorized, a number of researchers have analyzed the historical re-/production of boundaries, for example between work and non-work.¹¹ Researchers have discussed occupational designation and categorization as a means to “tame the polysemy that is fundamental to the social universe”¹² and to consolidate and legitimize differences in terms of status and rights.¹³ However, an in-depth discussion of how agricultural and commercial workers were distinguished from each other is still lacking.

In the following, I initially focus on parliamentary debates and new legislation that contributed to re-/creating and stabilizing hierarchies and formal differences between farm and commercial workers. On the basis of Administrative Court decisions dealing with contested cases, I examine how authorities constructed occupational biographies and affiliations. In this context, benefit claimants were classified either as agricultural, domestic, or commercial workers, while authorities attempted to draw clear(er) boundaries between official categories of work.

Belonging to a Unique Type of Work

The expansion of social insurance at the beginning of the First Republic and its extension to include agricultural, forestry, and domestic workers was mired in controversy from the beginning. Local communities,

10 For Austria see Ernst Bruckmüller, “Soziale Sicherheit für Bauern und Landarbeiter,” in *Soziale Sicherheit im Nachziehverfahren: Die Einbeziehung der Bauern, Landarbeiter, Gewerbetreibenden und Hausgehilfen in das System der österreichischen Sozialversicherung*, ed. Ernst Bruckmüller et al. (Salzburg: Neugebauer, 1978); Gerhard Siegl and Guenther Steiner, *Ja, jetzt geht es mir gut.... Entwicklung der bäuerlichen Sozialversicherung in Österreich* (Vienna: Goldegg, 2010).

11 See, e.g., Isabelle Berrebi-Hoffmann et al., “Introduction: Categories of Gender and Work in Context. Ways Towards a Research Agenda,” in *Categories in Context. Gender and Work in France and Germany, 1900–Present*, ed. Isabelle Berrebi-Hoffmann et al. (New York: Berghahn, 2019).

12 Oliver Kühschelm, *Geflohen und geblieben: Jüdische Österreicher*innen in Uruguay* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2024), 95. Original quote in German, translation JR.

13 Raffaella Sarti et al., “Introduction. What is Work? Gender at the Crossroads of Home, Family, and Business from the Early Modern Era to the Present,” in *What is Work? Gender at the Crossroads of Home, Family, and Business from the Early Modern Era to the Present*, ed. Raffaella Sarti et al. (New York: Berghahn, 2018); Marlou Schrover and Deirdre Moloney, “Introduction: Making a Difference,” in *Gender, Migration and Categorisation. Making Distinctions between Migrants in Western Countries, 1945–2010*, ed. Marlou Schrover and Deirdre Moloney (Amsterdam: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 8–9.

agricultural organizations, and farmers often doubted the need for or usefulness of insurance. Employers rejected it for its costs and the perceived state interference in their own affairs. The same was true for local politicians, who mistrusted urban administrators.¹⁴ Compulsory national health insurance for farm and forestry workers was first legally introduced in 1921 but was boycotted by some communities and provincial governments. In the end, the first nationwide compulsory health insurance failed due to the Salzburg provincial government's successful constitutional complaint.¹⁵

The Agricultural Workers' Insurance Act,¹⁶ which was passed in 1928 and came into force in 1929, put health insurance on a stable platform on a nationwide basis. It also introduced accident insurance and old-age benefits for unemployed agricultural workers of 65 years and above.¹⁷ Conversely, farm workers and domestic aides¹⁸ remained excluded from unemployment insurance in the interwar years. Initially, agricultural workers could profit from benefits when these were first introduced in 1918 to support returning soldiers without a means of income.¹⁹ They were disqualified when unemployment benefits were transformed from a state welfare provision into an insurance scheme in 1920.²⁰

14 See Anette Schlimm, "Governing the Village: Rural Mayors and the Transformations of Self-Government in Europe," in *Living with the Land. Rural and Agricultural Actors in Twentieth-Century Europe – A Handbook*, ed. Liesbeth van de Grift et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023), 287.

15 Siegl and Steiner, *Ja, jetzt geht es mir gut...*, 105–16.

16 Bundesgesetz vom 18. Juli 1928, betreffend die Kranken-, Unfall- und Invalidenversicherung der Land- und Forstarbeiter (Landarbeiterversicherungsgesetz), *Federal Law Gazette* 1928, no. 235.

17 Certain agricultural employees of 60 years and above could receive these small old-age benefits if the applicant was eligible for unemployment support or emergency relief. See Agricultural Workers' Insurance Act, § 222 A. and B. (1). This, however, was a welfare benefit scheme but not a social insurance. Even for commercial workers, the old-age and invalidity insurances were not implemented. Under Nazi rule, old-age insurance and benefits co-existed since only recent cases were considered for insurance purposes. Non-persecuted farm workers were in principle also included in invalidity insurance, but in fact many were unable to claim it. Siegl and Steiner, *Ja, jetzt geht es mir gut...*, 170; Tálos and Wörister, *Soziale Sicherung*, 24–25, 31–32.

18 Legal changes in the interwar period were also reflected in the names: domestic servants became officially known as domestic aides (*Hausgehilfinnen*).

19 Austrian State Archives, AdR, BMfSV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 20, no. 2,069; German–Austrian State Office of Agriculture, November 28, 1918.

20 Gesetz vom 24. März 1920 über die Arbeitslosenversicherung, *State Law Gazette* 1920, no. 153; Bundesgesetz vom 19. Juli 1922, betreffend die Abänderung des Gesetzes vom 24. März 1920, St. G. Bl. Nr. 153, über die Arbeitslosenversicherung (V. Novelle zum Arbeitslosenversicherungsgesetz), *Federal Law Gazette* 1922, no. 534, § 1 (4) a).

Summing up, agricultural and forestry workers were late to be integrated into the emerging social insurance systems, and their inclusion remained inconsistent and incomplete. Their insurance was organized differently from that of commercial workers, as separate agricultural health insurance funds were established at the provincial level. This separation reduced the influence of the Social Democrats, which remained strong in the insurance institutions implemented for commercial laborers.²¹ Government representatives, agrarians, and administrative officials justified this, and the distinctions made between agricultural and commercial workers in general, by pointing to the alleged patriarchal relationship between farmers and workers.²² They particularly referred to servants living and working on family farms—the largest category of landless farm workers. Their labor relations, so they argued, were characterized by special features and could not be legally equated with commercial work. For example, the Minister for Social Administration Franz Pauer (1870–1936)²³ stated during the parliamentary debate on the extension of health insurance to, among others, farm workers and live-in domestic aides in 1921:

The necessary consideration of peculiar circumstances, such as in particular the close relationships established between employers and workers in agriculture, requires some deviations from the present institutions of health insurance.²⁴

In this debate, the Greater German MP Viktor Zeidler (1868–1942) took the same line. To explain why employers held the majority of seats on the

21 Ernst Langthaler, “Nahe und entfernte Verwandtschaft: Agrar-Korporativismus in Niederösterreich,” in *Niederösterreich im 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. 1, *Politik*, ed. Stefan Eminger and Ernst Langthaler (Vienna: Böhlau, 2008), 693. Workers’ and employers’ representatives had seats on the board of the health insurance funds.

22 For farmers’ political representatives, their understandings of and different “solutions” for the agrarian question see Wim van Meurs, “Representing Peasants and Farmers: Parties, Movements, and Leaders Across Europe,” in *Living with the Land*, ed. van de Grift et al., 251–80.

23 The Federal Government Schober I (Federal Chancellor: Johann Schober, 1874–1932), composed mainly of civil servants, was supported by the Christian Social Party (CSP) and the German-nationalist Greater German People’s Party (GdP). It lasted only seven months. Franz Pauer was an administrative official.

24 *Stenographische Protokolle über die Sitzungen des Nationalrates der Republik Österreich* (Stenographic Minutes of the Meetings of the National Council of the Republic of Austria, abbr. Minutes National Council), first legislative period, 60th meeting, October 21, 1921, 2191. The minutes are published online at “Stenographic Minutes of the First Republic,” ALEX Historische Rechts- und Gesetzestexte, Austrian National Library, https://alex.onb.ac.at/static_tables/spe.htm. Original quote in German, translation JR.

agricultural health insurance board he simply declared: “I would be extremely sorry if this basically cosy patriarchal relationship was to be eliminated by a complete egalitarianism [...].”²⁵ This patriarchal relationship was something that conservative Catholic and Greater German politicians, agrarians in parliament, or farmers’ representatives aimed to preserve—and it was also the point of reference for Austrofascist corporatism (*Berufsstände*).²⁶ But what they imagined and glorified as close personal relationships in the farm household, with all household members harmoniously living and working together and eating from one bowl,²⁷ Social Democrats had long criticized as a specific, personalized form of dependency and exploitation.²⁸

This dependency had even been stipulated by law. At the beginning of the 1920s, service laws (*Dienstbotenordnungen*) that had regulated agricultural and domestic service at the provincial level were gradually being repealed. Discontent with this legislation even among certain conservatives already dated back to the late days of the monarchy. It had been described as “ruins” that “extend to modern times.”²⁹ These “ruins” laid down far-reaching

25 Minutes National Council, first legislative period, 60th meeting, October 21, 1921: Viktor Zeidler, GdP, 2198. Original quote in German, translation JR.

26 The corporatist system was realized best in agriculture and forestry. It was based on *Berufsstände* (pl.; sing. *Berufsstand*), self-governing bodies of a professional field under public-law as well as bodies of political representation. They were highly controlled by the authoritarian state. The *Berufsstand* for agriculture and forestry was based on the *Bauernbund* (Farmers’ Association) and the *Landwirtschaftskammern* (regional Chambers of Agriculture), some of the main (employer-friendly) agricultural organizations. In contrast to class struggle, the *Berufsstand* should balance employer and employee interests. It was in charge, for example, of labor agreements. Employers, however, were given far greater weight. Cf. Ernst Hanisch, “Die Politik und die Landwirtschaft,” in *Geschichte der österreichischen Land- und Forstwirtschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. 1, ed. Bruckmüller et al., 55; Langthaler, “Nahe und entfernte Verwandtschaft,” 695–98.

27 Hanisch, “Die Politik und die Landwirtschaft,” 55, 129–30; Ernst Langthaler and Reinhard Sieder, “Die Dorfgrenzen sind nicht die Grenzen des Dorfes. Positionen, Probleme und Perspektiven der Forschung,” in *Über die Dörfer: Ländliche Lebenswelten in der Moderne*, ed. Ernst Langthaler and Reinhard Sieder (Vienna: Turia and Kant, 2000), 12–13.

28 Otto Bauer, *Sozialdemokratische Agrarpolitik: Erläuterung des Agrarprogramms der Deutschösterreichischen Sozialdemokratie* (Vienna: Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, 1926), 102–3; Stenographisches Protokoll des Landtages für das Erzherzogtum Österreich unter der Enns (*Stenographic Minutes of the Provincial Council for the Archduchy of Austria below the Enns*, abbr. Minutes Austria below the Enns), Xth legislative period, 12th meeting of the IInd Session, October 25, 1910: Karl Renner, Social Democratic Workers’ Party (SDAP), 274. The minutes are published online at “Stenographic Minutes of the Lower Austrian Provincial Parliament,” ALEX Historische Rechts- und Gesetzestexte, Austrian National Library, https://alex.onb.ac.at/static_tables/ltn.htm.

29 This statement refers to domestic servants in Vienna, see Minutes Austria below the Enns, Xth legislative period, 12th meeting of the IInd Session, October 25, 1910: Josef von Baechlé

supervisory and sanctioning competencies for employers, while they bound servants to obedience and loyalty. Servants usually lived with their employers and were placed under their supervision by law for the entire duration of their service.³⁰ Employers were expected or even legally required to provide board, lodging, and a wage as well as care, medical assistance, and remedies for their staff in case of sickness.³¹ Not all of them adequately met such obligations.³² By the mid-1920s, service legislation had been replaced by the Domestic Aides Act (1920)³³ at the federal level and by provincial laws regulating agricultural work contracts (*Landarbeiterordnungen*).

The historian Norbert Ortmayr describes these kinds of work arrangements as hierarchical patron-client relationships, which were essentially based on the exchange of protection for obedience: in return for their subordination, non-family servants could in principle hope for a certain degree of security—food, accommodation, care, and a livelihood even in times when work was scarce. During the interwar period, such arrangements began to break down, even at the legal level. But to the disadvantage of workers, agricultural work remained differently and insufficiently integrated into labor regulations, social insurance schemes, or labor market institutions.³⁴

Conservative and right-wing politicians, administrative authorities, and farmers continued to justify this by pointing to the unique properties

(1868–1933), CSP, 266. Original quote in German, translation JR.

30 Hugo Morgenstern, *Österreichisches Gesinderecht* (Vienna: Manzsche k. u. k. Hof-Verlags- und Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1912), 51.

31 See f.e. Gesetz vom 22. Jänner 1877, womit für das Erzherzogthum Oesterreich unter der Enns, mit Ausnahme der in dem Wiener Polizeirayon gelegenen Gemeinden, eine Dienstbotenordnung erlassen wird, Provincial Law and Decree Gazette for the Archduchy of Austria below the Enns 1877, no. 6, §§ 10, 12–14, 16, 18–22; Morgenstern, *Österreichisches Gesinderecht*, 59, 165–66.

32 Jessica Richter, *Die Produktion besonderer Arbeitskräfte: Auseinandersetzungen um den häuslichen Dienst in Österreich (1880–1938)* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2024), 47–48.

33 Gesetz vom 26. Februar 1920 über den Dienstvertrag der Hausgehilfen (*Hausgehilfengesetz*), State Law Gazette 1920, no. 101. In larger municipalities, the Domestic Aids Act was in effect from 1920 onward. In 1926 (after the introduction of corresponding labor legislation for agricultural workers in all federal states), the law was extended to small municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants. See Bundesgesetz vom 26. März 1926, betreffend die Änderung des Gesetzes vom 26. Februar 1920, St. G. Bl. Nr. 101, über den Dienstvertrag der Hausgehilfen (*Hausgehilfengesetz*), Federal Law Gazette 1926, no. 72, art. II.

34 Norbert Ortmayr, “Ländliches Gesinde in Oberösterreich 1918–1938,” in *Familienstruktur und Arbeitsorganisation in ländlichen Gesellschaften*, ed. Josef Ehmer and Michael Mitterauer (Vienna: Böhlau, 1986), 408–16. See also Ernst Langthaler, “Ein brachliegendes Feld: Forschungen zur Agrargeschichte Österreichs in den 1930er Jahren,” in *Das Dollfuß/Schuschnigg-Regime 1933–1938. Vermessung eines Forschungsfeldes*, ed. Florian Wenninger and Lucile Dreidemy (Vienna: Böhlau, 2013), 339–40.

of agricultural work.³⁵ For rural populations, it was a fact that farm work needed to adapt to climatic circumstances, i.e., the ever-changing weather and seasons and other natural conditions. It was also characterized by direct contact with animals and plants. These dependencies meant that the operating of machines was forced to conform largely to natural rhythms and conditions (instead of mastering them) and resulted in activities that could not be standardized or conceptualized according to clearly definable administrative categories or occupational profiles. One result was the constant variability of activities and necessities, as well as profound differences between regions or even individual farms. Every agricultural enterprise was special to some extent—even more so since resources, equipment, land, the composition of household members, livestock, etc. were also changeable.³⁶

For politicians, administrative authorities, and employers' representatives, these peculiarities provided an excuse to oppose the equalization of commercial and agricultural workers' rights and entitlements. They would argue that there was an ongoing need for legislation specifically tailored to agricultural work, while harmonization with commercial work should be avoided. In 1921, for example, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry wrote to the International Labor Organization that

it must under no circumstances be ignored that agriculture is a *res specialis* among all branches of the national economy. The individual character of its enterprises, their dependence on soil, climate and season, does not tolerate a standardization of work performance. What is good for industry can have the most detrimental consequences for agriculture.³⁷

Citing the specific attributes of agriculture, organizations representing politicians, administrators, and farmers' interests rejected initiatives to include farm workers in social insurance schemes as well as demands to expand their work-related rights. Regarding a national framework law for provincial labor regulations, for example, political authorities of the federal states and employers' representatives petitioned against the inclusion of collective bargaining, overtime compensation, and, for example, holidays in

35 Moser and Varley, "State and Agricultural Modernisation," 19.

36 I discuss this in detail in Richter, *Produktion besonderer Arbeitskräfte*, chapters 5.2.3, 5.2.4 and 5.4.4.

37 Austrian State Archives, AdR, BMfSV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 465, sig. SA 16/III, no. 16,783/21. Original quote in German, translation JR.

this legislation.³⁸ Most importantly, they joined the choir of conservative and right-wing politicians dismissing calls for fixed working hours, even though the eight-hour day for employees and laborers in industry and commerce had already been realized. Since some farmwork, such as the harvest, could not be postponed, and since animals needed care on weekdays as much as on weekends, and since imponderables always had to be expected, they argued, it was clear that defined working hours were not possible in this line of work.³⁹ In addition, being accepted into the household also meant that one had to work hard along with everyone else, for as long as necessary.⁴⁰ Instead, it was rural customs (like specific farmers' holidays and the fuzzy, unwritten local rules of ethical working times) that should provide protection from excessive work.⁴¹

The provincial laws that regulated agricultural labor relations from the beginning of the 1920s were correspondingly inconsistent. The provisions acknowledged a need for limiting hours but reflected regional power relations and relied on "traditional" rural practices. Lower Austria, Burgenland, or Carinthia, for example, had introduced a ten-hour working day on an annual average, which implied longer working days in the summer months. Compliance was not controlled. Moreover, the provincial laws obliged farm laborers to work overtime if deemed necessary. A restriction of or compensation for extra hours was stipulated only to some degree, with differences made between the provinces. Additionally, tasks such as feeding and caring for animals or doing the household chores were exempt from working time limits from the start.⁴² In Upper Austria or Salzburg the

38 Austrian State Archives, AdR, *Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft* (Federal Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry, BMFLuF), Kanzlei B (Department B), box 424, no. 18,660–2/14–26, sheets 3–5.

39 Austrian State Archives, AdR, BMFLuF, Kanzlei B (Department B), box 424, no. 18,660–2/14–26 sheets 4–5. Cf. also, for example, Austrian State Archives, AdR, BMfSV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 465, sig. SA 16/III, no. 16,783/21; International Labour Office, "The Present Regulation of Working Hours in Agriculture," *International Labour Review* 25, no. 1 (1932): 79; Willi Mann, *Entlastung des städtischen Arbeitsmarktes durch die Landwirtschaft* (Düren: Buchdruckerei Max Danielewski, 1932), 32; *Stenographisches Protokoll des Landtages von Niederösterreich-Land* (Stenographic Minutes of the Provincial Council of Rural Lower Austria), 12th legislative period, 16th meeting, March 22, 1921, especially 223, 232.

40 Minutes National Council, 1st legislative period, 100th meeting, March 30, 1922: Karl Niedrist, CSP, 3342.

41 Ortmayr, "Ländliches Gesinde," 383–84.

42 Gesetz vom 1. Juni 1921, betreffend die Landarbeiter- und Hausgehilfenordnung für das Land Kärnten, State Law Gazette for Carinthia 1921, no. 102, § 7; International Labour Office, *Das Gesamtarbeitsvertragswesen in der Landwirtschaft* (Geneva: C.H. Beck'sche Buchdruckerei, 1932), 71, 77.

situation was worse: these states introduced a nine-hour rest period at night plus breaks of two hours during the day instead of setting fixed working hours. The same provision applied to domestic aides from 1920, who were, at least on paper, entitled to overtime pay and additional recovery time by law.⁴³

Exclusion from Unemployment Support

Farmers' representatives in parliament and the municipalities, moreover, fiercely criticized the Eight-Hour Day Act and the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1920, even though agricultural workers could not benefit from either of the laws. In their view, such legislation encouraged passivity and set a poor example for rural populations. Depicting commercial workers as lazy and spoilt, at the same time they praised the farming populations' supposed diligence and willingness to work as they would not rest until the work was done.⁴⁴ References to a specific work ethic were part of the romanticizing agrarian narrative of healthy, pristine, untainted, and morally superior rural life. Farmers' representatives, conservative and nationalist scholars, and politicians all held this up in contrast to urban lifestyles, cultures, and commercial labor that, in comparison to farm work, increasingly appeared to be the epitome of "modern" work.⁴⁵

They emphasized that, unlike in the city, unemployment was unthinkable in the countryside since work would never run out. According to this line of argument, unemployment insurance in agriculture would only lead to sluggishness and unwillingness to work, which farmers and their representatives

43 Gesetz vom 10. März 1921 über die Regelung der Dienstverhältnisse der häuslichen, land- und forstwirtschaftlichen Dienstnehmer in Oberösterreich, Provincial Law and Decree Gazette for Upper Austria 1921, no. 20, § 7, (1) and (3); Domestic Aides Act, § 7 (1); Gesetz vom 20. Jänner 1922 über die Regelung der Dienstverhältnisse der häuslichen, landwirtschaftlichen und forstwirtschaftlichen Dienstnehmer im Lande Salzburg (Landarbeiterordnung), Provincial Law Gazette for Salzburg 1922, no. 53, § 8 (1), (3) and (5).

44 Minutes National Council, Ist legislative period, 100th meeting, March 30, 1922: speeches by Karl Niedrist, CSP, 3341–44; Felix Bichl, GdP, subsequently *Landbund* ("Rural Federation," a German-nationalist farmers party that identified with the corporate state model), 3334; Viktor Zeidler, GdP, 3345–47; Austrian State Archives, AdR, BMLuF, Kanzlei B, box 263, no. 36,563/RfA/29.

45 See, e.g., Auderset, "Consigning the 'Human Motor,'" 1–2; Hanisch, "Die Politik und die Landwirtschaft," 22–25; Mechthild Hempe, *Ländliche Gesellschaft in der Krise: Mecklenburg in der Weimarer Republik* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2002), 157–66, 184; Patel, "The Green Heart of Governance," 1, 7–8.

claimed to have already observed among commercial workers.⁴⁶ It would ultimately promote the so-called rural exodus.⁴⁷ Allegedly, ever since the last decades of the nineteenth century, former farm workers had poured into the cities or into industry and commerce, where work was easier, the hours shorter, and, last but not least, unemployment benefits rewarded idleness.⁴⁸

The notion of an essential area of production without unemployment was rarely doubted at the beginning of the 1920s. However, during the agrarian crisis from 1927 onwards, and with the onset of the Great Depression, work opportunities became increasingly scarce. At first, this was noticeable during the winters when a growing number of servants in agriculture were left without work.⁴⁹ The 1930s then saw a lack of available positions even during more labor-intensive periods as farmers increasingly relied on family labor.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, some farmers and authorities maintained the popular idea of endless work opportunities at farms until the turn of the decade.

The need to exclude farm workers from unemployment insurance therefore seemed self-evident. When such provisions were passed in parliament in 1922, Josef Resch (1880–1939), member of the Christian-Social Party, rapporteur of the Committee on Social Administration and long-standing Minister for Social Administration in the interwar years, swept away any demands to the contrary and exempted domestic aides from insurance in the same breath:

The fact that people employed in agriculture and forestry have been excluded from unemployment insurance does not need any further explanation. There are no unemployed in agriculture and forestry, there

46 Minutes National Council, 1st legislative period, 100th meeting, March 30, 1922, especially the speech by Karl Niedrist, CSP, 3341–44. See also Minutes National Council, 1st legislative period, 100th meeting, March 30, 1922: Felix Bichl, GdP, 3334; Philipp Größbauer, independent member of parliament (previously German-national, subsequently *Landbund*, 3339–40; Minutes National Council, 1st legislative period, 166th meeting, February 3, 1923: Philipp Größbauer, 5206; Hermann Kallbrunner, “Rücküberführung von Arbeitskräften in die Landwirtschaft in Österreich,” *Berichte über Landwirtschaft IV* (1926): 744.

47 See, e.g., Ernst Langthaler, “Landflucht, Agrarsystem und Moderne: Deutschland 1933–1939,” in *Nationalsozialistisches Migrationsregime und “Volksgemeinschaft,”* ed. Jochen Oltmer (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012): 97–100.

48 Minutes National Council, 1st legislative period, 100th meeting, March 30, 1922: speeches by Karl Niedrist, CSP, 3341–3343 and Viktor Zeidler, GdP, 3345–47; Kallbrunner, “Rücküberführung von Arbeitskräften,” 744.

49 Ortmayr, “Ländliches Gesinde,” 409; see also Ernst Langthaler, *Schlachtfelder. Alltägliche Wirtschaften in der nationalsozialistischen Agrargesellschaft 1938–1945* (Böhlau: Vienna, 2016), 274.

50 Rita Garstenauer, “Diskurs ohne Praxis? Landflucht und Abwanderung aus der Landarbeit (1920er bis 1960er Jahre),” *Rural History Yearbook 5* (2008): 249; Sandgruber, “Die Landwirtschaft in der Wirtschaft,” 275–76.

is always a shortage of labor. But also in the category of domestic aides, we can currently state that there are no unemployed. It would therefore only be an unnecessary burden on employers and also on domestic aides if domestic aides were to be included in unemployment insurance.⁵¹

Even in 1927, when domestic aides in Germany won unemployment support and interest organizations within Austria started their campaigning once again, Resch did not waver from his firm standpoint.⁵² Paradoxically, the exclusion of both categories of workers from unemployment insurance even supported Resch's argumentation. This was because farm and domestic workers were hardly ever recorded by public labor offices and thus there were no complete official statistics. In addition, their interest organizations were weak, and workers were organized only to a small degree.⁵³

This meant that farm workers' full integration in social insurance was not desired because in parliament, employers and their representatives set the tone. The widespread assumption that agriculture was a special type of work justified its relative informality and gave grounds for regulation which differed from that of commercial labor. Furthermore, politicians and administrative authorities saw distinct differences between the workers themselves. The farming population—and people from the countryside in general—were assumed to possess perfect physical strength, practical training, and an intuitive understanding of the land, nature, animals, and tasks. Those who grew up in rural areas and who were not alienated from farm work by commercial labor—as politicians, authorities or farmers assumed—possessed the intrinsic knowledge and able bodies which urban workers lacked.

51 Minutes National Council, Ist legislative period, 129th meeting, July 19, 1922: Josef Resch, 4147. Original quote in German, translation JR.

52 Minutes National Council, IIIrd legislative period, 25th meeting, December 17, 1927: Josef Resch, 753–54 and addendum no. 106.

53 Richter, *Produktion besonderer Arbeitskräfte*, 127–28. The Social-Democratic union for farm and forestry workers, "Österreichischer Land- und Forstarbeiterverband," which coexisted with smaller Christian organizations, organized 32,000 workers in 1930, reaching almost 72,000 workers in 1922. According to the Austrian census of 1934 there were almost 350,000 agricultural and forestry workers (including servants) in Austria. See Hanisch, "Die Politik und die Landwirtschaft," 51; Bundesamt für Statistik, *Die Ergebnisse der österreichischen Volkszählung vom 22. März 1934*, vol. 2, *Bundesstaat Tabellenheft* (Vienna: Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, 1935), 66; Ernst Bruckmüller, "Vom 'Bauernstand' zur 'Gesellschaft des ländlichen Raumes': Sozialer Wandel in der bäuerlichen Gesellschaft des 20. Jahrhunderts," in *Geschichte der österreichischen Land- und Forstwirtschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. 3, ed. Ernst Bruckmüller et al. (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 2002), 541–45.

The idea of a specifically rural capacity to work emerged in the political debates on measures to reduce unemployment. In the 1920s, labor offices and the Industrial District Commissions (*Industrielle Bezirkskommissionen*, IBK, plural IBKs) attempted to place on farms unemployed persons who had previously worked in commerce and industry. The IBKs constituted the main bodies of labor market administration. They were supervised by the Federal Ministry of Social Administration and coordinated the labor offices. The Austrofascist regime later transformed the IBKs into provincial labor offices (*Landesarbeitsämter*). Before this regime came into power, decision-making had been in the hands of employee and employer representatives alike—now the authorities were directly subordinate to the ministry.⁵⁴

To advance labor intermediation among farms, the IBKs even paid farmers bonuses if they agreed to train unemployed workers.⁵⁵ Such measures were not well received by either side. From the workers' perspective, a change to agriculture meant hard work, long hours, low wages, and, if the employment lasted too long, a loss of entitlement to unemployment benefits.⁵⁶ Some switched back and forth between different farm occupations or between agricultural and commercial labor; women added gainful domestic work to such livelihood activities.⁵⁷ In the recurrent economic crises of the interwar years, constant changes of employment were testament to workers' instable incomes but also their attempt to earn a living in the best possible way. They worked wherever there were opportunities—and left when better ones came up elsewhere.⁵⁸

54 Irina Vana, "Arbeitslose Männer und verdienstlose Frauen? Auswirkungen der austrofaschistischen Arbeitsmarktpolitik auf die geschlechtliche Normalisierung von Arbeitslosigkeit," in *Austrian Journal of Historical Studies* 27, no. 3 (2016): 19.

55 Kallbrunner, "Rücküberführung von Arbeitskräften," 745; Mann, *Entlastung des städtischen Arbeitsmarktes*, 14–15; Jessica Richter, "Geordnete Wanderungen gesteuerte Arbeitssuche? Arbeitsmarktausgleich in der österreichischen Landwirtschaft (1918–1938)," in *Austrian Journal of Historical Studies* 31, no. 1 (2020): 129–35.

56 Austrian State Archives, AdR, BMfSV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 87, no. 3, 140/1924, main file, 3–4.

57 Peter-Paul Bänziger, *Die Moderne als Erlebnis: Eine Geschichte der Konsum- und Arbeitsgesellschaft 1840–1940* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020), 137; Elizabeth B. Jones, *Gender and Rural Modernity: Farm Women and the Politics of Labor in Germany, 1871–1933* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 55; Raffaella Sarti, "Rural Life-Cycle Service: Established Interpretations and New (Surprising) Data: The Italian Case in Comparative Perspective (Sixteenth to Twentieth Centuries)," in *Servants in Rural Europe, 1400–1900*, ed. Jane Whittle (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017), 243–50.

58 Jessica Richter, "Notbehelfe in Krisenzeiten: Lebensunterhalt und landwirtschaftlicher Dienst in Österreich (1918–1938)," *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 68, no. 1 (2020): 79–104.

In turn, farmers asked to employ former commercial workers complained about them quitting after a short period of time and about workers' weakness and unwillingness to work.⁵⁹ Even Social Democrats, who emphasized workers' eagerness and pointed to their economic hardships, agreed to the extent of admitting that the relevant knowledge and skills, and the necessary physical strength, could not be acquired overnight. Ferdinand Hanusch (1866–1923) explained in 1922:

There is an ineradicable antipathy towards the urban worker in the countryside. [...] Gentlemen, don't be mistaken that a worker from the city who has never seen a plough can go out today or tomorrow and become a farm laborer. One needs to have grown up in the country, one needs to know the difficulties of farm work, that one's whole body has to be trained in order to be able to do this work.⁶⁰

Hanusch had been Social Democratic Minister of Social Administration in the early republic until 1920 and thus played a leading role in introducing unemployment insurance. The problems described in his statement seem to be confirmed by the failures of the labor market programs implemented in the interwar years. Labor market authorities had barely managed to place unemployed commercial laborers in agriculture, and certainly not on the scale planned—unless they had previously worked in agriculture.⁶¹ This was one approach to stopping the rural exodus: keep the rural population available to work on farms and, if they had already switched to commerce and industry, “return” them to agriculture.⁶²

Another instrument to achieve this was to tailor social security measures specifically for rural populations. On the one hand, a minimum degree of protection was intended to make agricultural work more attractive. This had been an argument in favor of the introduction of health insurance for farm

59 Austrian State Archives, AdR, Federal Chancellery, *Wanderungsamt* (Migration Office), sig. 8/4g, box 2,236/189, no. 53,004/25: Provincial government of Burgenland to Federal Chancellery, February 10, 1925; Austrian State Archives, AdR, BMfsV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 87, no. 3,140/1924, main file, 3–4; Minutes National Council, 1st legislative period, 100th meeting, March 30, 1922: speech by Franz Spalowsky (1875–1938), 3338.

60 Minutes National Council, 1st legislative period, 100th meeting, March 30, 1922: Ferdinand Hanusch (1866–1923), Social Democratic Workers' Party, 3331. Original quote in German, translation JR.

61 Richter, “Geordnete Wanderungen,” 129–35.

62 See, for example N.N., “Rücküberführung von Arbeitskräften in die Landwirtschaft im Wege der Betriebsumschulung,” in *Die Landwirtschaft*, no. 5 (1926): 133–34.

workers in the parliamentary debates,⁶³ but the discussion even dated back to pre- World War One years.⁶⁴ On the other hand, access to unemployment support was increasingly restricted. While labor offices pushed the unemployed with agricultural experience to accept positions on farms,⁶⁵ different legal requirements for receiving support were established for rural/agricultural and urban/commercial workforces. From 1923 onwards, workers who lived in a—and this was the official term—“entirely rural community,” and who worked for small commercial enterprises with up to five employees, were ineligible for unemployment insurance. Such “entirely rural,” i.e., agriculturally dominated, communities were determined by decree. Furthermore, to ensure the availability of farm workers, residents of such rural communities were generally excluded from emergency assistance.⁶⁶

Policymakers and authorities, moreover, aimed to exclude those workers from unemployment support who had been farm workers before moving on to industry and commerce. If employed long enough, they earned an entitlement to support, but this entitlement was increasingly curtailed.⁶⁷ For example, a worker usually needed at least 20 weeks of social insurance contributions over the previous 12 months to receive support. But an amendment to the Unemployment Insurance Act doubled the number of contribution weeks for former farm workers to 40.⁶⁸ Similarly, the labor office could grant an extension of unemployment support from the usual 20 to 30 weeks. According to an amendment of the law of 1929, this was only

63 Minutes National Council, 1st legislative period, 60th meeting, October 21, 1921: Olga Rudel-Zeynek (1871–1948), CSP, 2195; Viktor Zeidler, GdP, 2197.

64 According to the historian Martin Moll, a largely state-financed old-age insurance was presented in press debates as a remedy for rural flight that did not harm farmers. See Martin Moll, “Krisen im ländlichen Raum der Steiermark vor 1914: Wahrnehmung und Gegenstrategien,” in *Die ländliche Gesellschaft im Zeitalter des Ersten Weltkrieges: Herausforderungen und ihre emotionalen Folgen*, ed. Harald Heppner et al. (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2024), 132.

65 Austrian State Archives, AdR, BMfSV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 112, no. 26,056/26; Austrian State Archives, AdR, BMfSV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 48, no. 18,159/20; Irina Vana, “Gebrauchsweisen der öffentlichen Arbeitsvermittlung,” (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 2013), 133.

66 Bundesgesetz vom 28. April 1923, betreffend außerordentliche Maßnahmen der Arbeitslosenfürsorge und Abänderung des Gesetzes vom 24. März 1920, St G. Bl. Nr. 153. (VIII. Novelle zum Arbeitslosenversicherungsgesetz), National Law Gazette 1923, no. 153, art. II (2), art. IV, § 1a (2).

67 Austrian State Archives, AdR, BMLuF, Kanzlei B, box 263, no. 8,961–RfA/33, main file, and no. 27,618/2–14/30.

68 Bundesgesetz vom 28. Juli 1926, betreffend Abänderung einiger, insbesondere finanzieller Bestimmungen des Arbeitslosenversicherungsgesetzes und Fortsetzung der außerordentlichen Maßnahmen der Arbeitslosenfürsorge (XVIII. Novelle zum Arbeitslosenversicherungsgesetz), Federal Law Gazette 1926, no. 206, art. II.

possible for former farm workers if they had previously been employed in commercial employment for a full year. Emergency assistance, if granted at all, was additionally limited to 10 weeks.⁶⁹

From 1931, the Christian Social government tightened access to support even further. Employment in publicly financed work such as road construction or drainage was made more difficult for rural workers—and it no longer necessarily counted towards unemployment insurance.⁷⁰ Such harsh measures were at this time already primarily enforced on the basis of an emergency decree.⁷¹ Engelbert Dollfuß was the Minister of Agriculture in this government and advanced to chancellor in the following year. Beginning in 1933, he silenced parliament, and then in 1934 he banned opposition parties and organizations, which included the Social Democratic Union for Agricultural and Forestry Workers. He was murdered during the failed National Socialist July Putsch 1934 and was succeeded by Kurt Schuschnigg, up until then Minister of Justice.

The dictatorial Austrofascist regime implemented additional cuts, exacerbating widespread destitution amongst those out of work. It reduced the amount and maximum duration of unemployment support and further complicated access to it, which further impacted the number of unemployed receiving support. This affected the jobless in general, but specifically targeted women, young people, and rural populations. These had often worked in insured employment only temporarily or had switched between agricultural and commercial labor. Labor market authorities also tended to deny women and young people's need for benefits, assuming they were cared for by fathers or husbands. Additionally, the unemployed were cut off from support if relatives owned agricultural property. This was even the case if these relatives were not formally liable to support them.⁷²

Adopting similar measures, policy makers and labor market authorities persuaded and pressured women to “return” to unpaid and paid domestic

69 Bundesgesetz vom 20. Juni 1929 betreffend außerordentliche Maßnahmen der Arbeitslosenfürsorge (Altersfürsorge) und die Abänderung einiger Bestimmungen des Arbeitslosenversicherungsgesetzes (XXIII. Novelle zum Arbeitslosenversicherungsgesetz), Federal Law Gazette 1929, no. 223, 1st Section, art. 5; IInd Section, art. 10.

70 Previously, the Ministry of Agriculture had repeatedly instructed authorities to exclude agricultural workers from publicly funded work. See Austrian National Archives, AdR, BMfLuF, Kanzlei B, box 263, no. 27,618/2–14/30.

71 Von Richard von Strigl, “Aufbau des österreichischen Arbeitsmarkts,” in *Monatsberichte des österreichischen Instituts für Konjunkturforschung*, no. 12 (1936), supplement 5: 6; Vana, “Arbeitslose Männer,” 18–19.

72 Vana, “Gebrauchsweisen der öffentlichen Arbeitsvermittlung,” 142–43; Vana, “Arbeitslose Männer,” 19, 21–22.

work all through the interwar years. Firstly, domestic aides' social rights were expanded to some degree in 1920/21 with the purpose of pacifying social protest and tackling their reluctance to enter service. Secondly, the labor market administration restricted women's access to benefits to a comparably short duration. Thirdly, labor offices pushed unemployed women laborers into domestic service by threatening to cut off support.⁷³ Politicians and authorities justified this with reference to labor market needs and pointed to the supposed specific capacity that rural populations and women had for work. While they associated farm workers with physical strength and an aptitude for agriculture, they drew on the widely accepted imaginary of women being "naturally" skilled at household chores, care, and child rearing. Both intersected in the gender-specific division of work on farms: women's tasks were often located in and around the house, in the household, stables, or garden; men, in contrast, worked outside, responsible for larger draft animals like oxen and horses, and were paid better. There were gender specific tasks, but both were responsible for field work. Farm workers' standing depended, moreover, on their social background and age, with younger non-family workers at the bottom of the hierarchy.⁷⁴

Struggling for Support: Interventions with the Authorities

The special rules for (former) farm workers and rural workers in general led to resentment, anger,⁷⁵ and confusion among the labor force. Some found ways to resist by forging employment documentation⁷⁶ or by convincing relatives, godparents, or others to employ them when a few more weeks of commercial employment were needed to become eligible for unemployment benefits.⁷⁷ One worker even attempted to eliminate the legal differences

73 Richter, *Produktion besonderer Arbeitskräfte*, 20–21, 97–98.

74 Norbert Ortmayr, "Sozialhistorische Skizzen zur Geschichte des ländlichen Gesindes in Österreich," in *Knechte. Autobiographische Dokumente und sozialhistorische Skizzen*, ed. Norbert Ortmayr (Vienna: Böhlau, 1996), 339–43.

75 Austrian National Archives, AdR, BMfsV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 111, no. 24,734/26.

76 See, e.g., Austrian National Archives, BMFSV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 233, no. 69,321/32.

77 See, e.g., *Archiv soziale Bewegungen in Oberösterreich* (Archive of Social Movements in Upper Austria), interview with N. N., born August 4, 1907 in St. Thomas/Weizenkirchen, 3, conducted for the study Edwin Grinninger and Johann Mayr, *Geschichte, Geschichten und Bilder. Ein politisches Lesebuch über die Entwicklung der Sozialdemokratie im Bezirk Eferding* (Linz: Institut für Wissenschaft und Kunst Oberösterreich, 1989).

between agricultural and commercial workers altogether at the Supreme Administrative Court.⁷⁸

Many workers challenged the official decisions made in administrative proceedings when they felt they had been unjustly denied support. The lengthy administrative processes usually started with workers' complaints about the labor offices' decisions, which the IBKs and, from 1934, the provincial labor offices were in charge of reviewing. If dissatisfied with the outcome, applicants could complain to the Ministry of Social Administration that supervised the labor market administration.⁷⁹

Workers' claims were often dismissed—as the numerous surviving files of the ministry show—but some were successful. The ministry granted benefits in cases of faulty proceedings⁸⁰ or incorrect previous decisions.⁸¹ Sometimes, it determined that the IBKs had approached a case in an overly bureaucratic manner, disregarding its specificities.⁸² In other cases, the ministry took a more restrictive approach and did not allow room for goodwill.⁸³ But this was not the last means of redress. From 1931 onwards, a few unemployed workers appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court or, from 1934, the Federal Supreme Court.⁸⁴ These cases are remarkable, as the procedures had already gone through all administrative stages beforehand.

A good many of these cases revolved around the question of whether plaintiffs were to be categorized as agricultural/forestry, domestic, or commercial workers. This was a delicate matter from an official point of view as each category of worker was associated with different rights and entitlements. Generally, workers' categorizations depended on the

78 Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 244/31 of January 9, 1931, collection no. 17,839 (A.), 10–13.

79 State Law Gazette 1920, no. 153, § 15. All Supreme Administrative Court rulings that I cite here are taken from the official, annually published collection known as “Budwiński's Sammlung” until the founding of the First Republic. It can be accessed online at: “Annual selection – Collection of Findings of the Supreme Administrative Court 1876–2010,” ALEX Historische Rechts- und Gesetzestexte, Austrian National Library, <https://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/alex?apm=0&aid=vgr>.

80 Austrian National Archives, AdR, BMFSV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 233, no. 65,570/32.

81 Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 142/30 of January 9, 1931, collection no. 16,493 (A.), 12–14.

82 Austrian National Archives, AdR, BMFSV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 327, no. 117,822/36.

83 Austrian National Archives, AdR, BMFSV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 108, no. 7,108/26.

84 In July 1934, the Austrofascist regime replaced the Federal Constitutional Court and the Administrative Court with a Federal Supreme Court. It retired a number of judges for political reasons. Jurisprudence changed in line with the regime and was also directed against the opposition. Ilse Reiter-Zatloukal, “Die (Un) Abhängigkeit der Richter unter der austrofascistischen und nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft,” in *Beiträge zur Rechtsgeschichte Österreichs*, no. 2 (2016): 424–37. Based on the findings discussed here, however, no radical change can be identified.

classification of their workplaces: according to labor and social insurance legislation, working in an agricultural business led to categorization as an agricultural worker, while employment in industry and commerce meant being classified as a commercial worker.

In practice this was not always so straightforward. Authorities were confronted with a vast variety of employment relationships, some of which could not be clearly assigned to one or the other category. Such cases put the very classification of employment relationships up for debate—and with it their hierarchization. The exclusion of agricultural workers from unemployment insurance was based on the argumentation that agriculture was a field of work marked by its specialty and the absence of unemployment. Hence, it was in the interest of policymakers and administrative authorities to enforce boundaries, even if they were blurred.

For example, a number of enterprises inhabited a grey zone between agriculture and commerce.⁸⁵ Some were both at the same time, such as sugar factories that also cultivated their own crops. Others, like gardening businesses, occupied a (more or less) intermediate position, depending on whether they dealt with self-produced as much as purchased plants. Producing plants was something inherently agricultural—but re-selling goods certainly was not, potentially turning a gardening business into a commercial enterprise.⁸⁶ Moreover, farmers often maintained side businesses at their farms, ranging from quarries to butcheries. Sometimes, they operated on a larger scale, complicating the decision on which kind of business outweighed the other.⁸⁷

For such somewhat undetermined or hybrid enterprises, it was necessary to find out what exactly it was that workers were supposedly doing. Were they primarily working on the employer's farm, in his household, or in his commercial business? Many workers were expected to help out

85 Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 336/28 of November 23, 1928, collection no. 15,425 (A.), 765–67; Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 1079/30 of November 2, 1932, collection no. 17,010 (A.), 79–81.

86 Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. 5,280 of November 13, 1895, collection no. 9,006, 1209–10; Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 335/29 of November 9, 1929, collection no. 15,852 (A.), 790–91.

87 Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. 845 of February 1, 1901, collection no. 83 (A.); Federal Supreme Court, decision no. A 654/34 of March 1, 1935, collection no. 332 (A.), 215–16; Federal Supreme Court, decision no. A 287/34 of May 29, 1935, collection no. 516 (A.), 360–64. All Federal Supreme Court rulings that I cite here are taken from the official collection, published annually by the court itself. It can be accessed online at: “Annual selection – Collection of findings of the Federal Supreme Court,” ALEX Historische Rechts- und Gesetzestexte, Austrian National Library, <https://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/alex?apm=o&aid=bgr>.

everywhere—in the fields and stables as much as in the side businesses, and possibly also in the household—and worked wherever they were needed. In some cases, the workload in one or another area shifted with the seasons or with changes in the business. From the authorities' perspective, this made extensive research and numerous interviews with witnesses necessary to determine to which category a worker belonged.⁸⁸ Local/district and federal authorities often disagreed. But the higher the authority involved—and this particularly applied to the Supreme Administrative Court—the more their argumentation went beyond each individual case and contributed to sharpening the criteria used to distinguish between workers. With each of its decisions, the Supreme Administrative Court further defined the contours separating agricultural, commercial, and domestic workers. Depending on how they were categorized, workers were assigned different work-related rights, obligations, and social security entitlements.⁸⁹

Constructing Occupational Affiliation

Anyone who wanted to claim unemployment support had to meet a number of requirements: they had to be entitled—i.e., to have previously been employed in insured commercial work—, their livelihood had to be endangered, and they needed to convince the labor market authorities of their ability and willingness to work.⁹⁰ However, authorities frequently turned down workers' requests for benefits if they had a background in farm or domestic work. This was especially the case wherever secondary benefits (such as an extension of unemployment support or emergency assistance) were concerned. Some of these workers filed complaints, pointing to their previous employment in commercial occupations, even though paying such benefits was at the discretion of labor market authorities, who were

88 Austrian National Archives, AdR, BMfSV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 125, no. 13,926/27; box 116, no. 59,882–5/26; Tyrolean Regional Archives, Office of the Tyrolean Regional Government 1928, department 1b, registration no. 182, no. 723.

89 See my analogous analysis for domestic workers: Jessica Richter, "What is 'Domestic Service' Anyway? Producing Household Labourers in Austria (1918–1938)," in *Towards a Global History of Domestic and Caregiving Workers*, ed. Dirk Hoerder et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 497–99.

90 Irina Vana, "'Eingereiht in die große Schlange ...' – Verwaltung von Arbeitslosen und Arbeitssuchenden am öffentlichen Arbeitsamt (Österreich 1918–1934)," in *100 Jahre Arbeitsmarktverwaltung. Österreich im internationalen Vergleich*, ed. Mathias Krempel and Johannes Thaler (Vienna: Vienna University Press/V & R, 2017), 95–96.

obliged to examine each application carefully. Time and again, the labor market authorities would instead merely point to former employment in agriculture and classify the worker accordingly.⁹¹ If workers challenged these decisions, formal proceedings would then revolve around the question as to which occupation they belonged.

The legal term “occupational affiliation” (*berufliche Zugehörigkeit*) was a criterion first introduced in 1922 when the Ministry of Social Administration authorized an extension of unemployment support for up to 30 weeks. Recipients needed to “belong” to an occupation that was subject to compulsory insurance, and which was characterized by a “permanently very unfavorable” labor market situation.⁹² The same criterion was later applied to decisions made on the receipt of emergency assistance.

Such support was intended to help those who, through no fault of their own, had little opportunity to find employment in their vocation. But access was to be restricted for applicants who had constantly switched between insured and non-insured occupations and livelihoods. The regulation rewarded consistency, which, in the crisis-ridden interwar period, skilled male Austrian⁹³ citizens could achieve best. Women, in contrast, were “always at work, but not at home in any vocation,” as Käthe Leichter, head of the women’s department of the Vienna Chamber of Labor, put it in 1930.⁹⁴ Their livelihoods were particularly affected by low income, informality, and instability, and they were disadvantaged in terms of unemployment benefits. This could also be said about underage or young workers. Similarly, rural workers who tried to swap agricultural occupations for commercial ones were often turned away at the labor office with reference to the supposed ever-present vacancies in agriculture.⁹⁵

91 Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 142/30 of January 9, 1931, collection no. 16,493 (A.), 12–14.

92 Verordnung des Bundesministeriums für soziale Verwaltung vom 18. August 1922, über die Verlängerung der Höchstdauer der Arbeitslosenunterstützung (II. Durchführungsverordnung zum Arbeitslosenversicherungsgesetz in der Fassung des Bundesgesetzes vom 19. Juli 1922, B. G. Bl. Nr. 534), *Federal Law Gazette* 1922, no. 616, § 1.

93 Non-citizens who had acquired an entitlement generally received unemployment benefits. However, the authorities did not always recognize it or adequately examine the case. In addition, non-Austrian’s access to the labor market and thus the possibility of winning an entitlement to support was limited. Austrian National Archives, AdR, BMfSV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 116, no. 54,476 and box 118, no. 73,848/26.

94 Käthe Leichter, “Die Entwicklung der Frauenarbeit nach dem Krieg,” in *Handbuch der Frauenarbeit in Österreich*, ed. Kammer für Arbeiter und Angestellte (Vienna: Chamber of Labor, 1930), 38. Original quote in German, translation JR.

95 Vana, “Gebrauchsweisen der öffentlichen Arbeitsvermittlung,” 131, 133.

Casual work was consequently not enough to establish vocation; the Supreme Administrative Court and, under Austrofascist rule, the Federal Supreme Court, generally agreed on this. “Belonging” equated to being “rooted” in a vocation, which was supposed to have become the “permanent and sole basis of existence,” as the Federal Supreme Court explained in 1934.⁹⁶ From the court’s perspective, vocational belonging thus became a characteristic of a person that the administrative authorities needed to thoroughly investigate. Later in 1934, the Federal Supreme Court went into more detail. To the disadvantage of a recent university graduate it explained that this distinctive feature only developed over time.⁹⁷

The cases that the courts dealt with in the 1930s were evidence of the consequences of the great crisis—of recurring job losses and attempts to earn a living wherever there was an opportunity. Applicants not only moved back and forth between occupations in industry and commerce on the one hand and domestic or agricultural work on the other, but also between gainful employment and vocational education. To understand how the law, the authorities, and the high courts constructed the definition of occupational affiliation, one needs to consider a broader spectrum of cases than those involving farm labor. Indeed, the authorities compared employment with and without insurance, making former domestic servants’ cases, for example, equally relevant as farm workers’ cases to this chapter.

Patchy work histories, though, were not the only thing to trigger official proceedings. As mentioned above, the business itself sometimes made it necessary to switch between agricultural and commercial activities. At sugar factories, some workers would first work in the fields and in the factory from autumn—only to start agricultural work again the following spring. So did Marie F. between 1922 and 1925 at the Hirm sugar factory in Burgenland, until she finally lost her position. She initially received unemployment benefits, until the state tax authorities objected. The ministry compared how long Marie F. had spent in agricultural and then in commercial work, eventually deciding that Marie F. had predominantly been an agricultural worker. She had spent less than the necessary 40 weeks in insured employment and was thus denied further support. Marie F.’s simultaneous employment in agriculture and in commercial occupations did not give her any advantage.⁹⁸

96 Federal Supreme Court, decision no. A 1122/34 of November 29, 1934, collection no. 116. (A.), 145–47, quote 146. Original quote in German, translation JR.

97 Federal Supreme Court, decision no. A 652/34 of December 6, 1934, collection no. 126. (A.), 160–61.

98 Austrian State Archives, AdR, BMfsV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 122, no. 4,594/27.

Marie F.'s case was never heard by the Supreme Administrative Court—but H.R.'s⁹⁹ case of 1931 was. The complainant had never worked in agriculture before, so her 20 instead of 40 weeks of previous insured employment sufficed for her to apply for an extension of support. Born in 1908, H.R. was only 22 years old. Within the two years of leaving school between 1922 and 1924, she was, with interruption, employed as an unskilled commercial worker in several jobs. This was followed by a lengthy illness, which lasted until 1927, as well as one and a half years in a position as a domestic aide. Two subsequent commercial occupations lasted a little over a year until the summer of 1930. On this basis, the IBK refused to grant further unemployment support after her original entitlement had expired, arguing that she was not affiliated with a particular occupation. H.R. had only been in commercial employment for 32.5 months: hardly long enough to justify belonging to an occupation from the perspective of the labor market authorities. Like the IBK, the Supreme Administrative Court assessed H.R.'s employment history from the day she had left school—but its interpretation of the case was the opposite. When compared to her positions as a domestic aide, she had predominantly worked as an unskilled commercial worker, the court explained, where there were not enough open positions available. The court insisted that this, as well as H.R.'s young age, had to be considered in the decision.¹⁰⁰

In other cases, the court decided in a similar manner.¹⁰¹ Every time, the decision was guided by a list of the complainant's different occupations and forms of livelihood since their first employment. "In order to be able to correctly assess the question of occupational affiliation [...] the entire working life of the unemployed person must be surveyed," the court stated.¹⁰² Thereby, it made an effort to identify occupational affiliation based on unambiguous criteria, and it frequently overturned labor market authorities' previous assessments. This benefitted some workers whose work biographies the court assigned to the relatively formalized category of commercial work. They were granted a claim for support, contrary to the restrictive stance of the IBKs and, later, the provincial labor office.

99 The claimant's name is abbreviated to "H.R." in the file.

100 Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 969/30 of April 8, 1931, collection no. 16,611. (A.), 209–11.

101 Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 85/31 of October 13, 1931, collection no. 16,810. (A.), 476–77; Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 697/31 of December 9, 1931, collection no. 16,897. (A.), 579–81; Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 77/33 of June 27, 1933, collection no. 243–44.

102 Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 369/33 of October 3, 1933, collection no. 17,705. (A.), 293–94. Original quote in German, translation JR.

The Supreme Administrative Court stressed, moreover, that merely quantifying the relation between commercial and farm labor was not sufficient to reach a decision. Every case needed careful evaluation instead.¹⁰³ This approach allowed the court to consider long-term occupational changes in an individual's biography, which IBKs frequently failed to acknowledge.¹⁰⁴ One successful complainant at the Supreme Administrative Court was Johann S. He had been employed in agriculture continuously until 1927. Then he had accepted a position as an industrial worker in a cement factory, which he had held for three years before he was made unemployed. The court took the continuity and duration of the employment at the factory as a sign that Johann S. had changed his occupation and become an industrial laborer. This contradicted the previous decision of the labor market authorities which, on the basis of Johann S.' employment history, had come to the conclusion that his activities in agriculture had predominated. With reference to the numerous employment opportunities on farms, they had rejected his application.¹⁰⁵

The Supreme Administrative Court thus made it clear that a person's age and the actual composition of her/his work history needed to be considered as much as the diminishing income opportunities available due to the recurring economic crises. In the case of an office clerk, it declared in 1931 that his last five years, which had been characterized by unemployment and casual work, could not be held against him in the decision—especially since he was already 50 years old.¹⁰⁶

These decision-making principles certainly were advantageous for some workers. As the main authorities of the labor market administration, the IBKs/provincial labor offices aimed to organize the labor market and to keep the number of support recipients low. Often, these authorities did not examine the individual cases in detail. The Supreme Administrative Court would later criticize this and alter decisions—but of course this worked only in those cases that it actually heard. Appeals at the highest levels were rare, leaving a number of eligible workers without access to state benefits. At the same time, the Supreme Administrative Court's decisions contributed to the construction of differences and hierarchies between commercial,

103 Federal Supreme Court, decision no. A 1122/34 of November 29, 1934, collection no. 116. (A.), 147.

104 Austrian National Archives, BMfsV, *Sozialpolitik*, box 233, no. 68,977.

105 Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 770/31 of December 15, 1931, collection no. 16,903 (A.), 588–90.

106 Supreme Administrative Court, decision no. A 600/31 of December 9, 1931, collection no. 16,897 (A.), 579–81.

domestic, and agricultural workers or, respectively, to the re-/creation of formal and informal laborers. The court thus contributed to producing different categories of worker, each with a different status and different rights and entitlements.

Conclusion

From the end of the nineteenth century, work increasingly became a matter of national interest. Emerging social security systems and labor legislation formalized specific kinds of labor and brought along rights and entitlements vis-à-vis the state. New labor market authorities contributed to reorganizing it. But this did not apply to work *per se*. Labor rights and entitlements were tailored to commercial workers but hardly seemed to fit farm work with its particular circumstances. Agricultural work followed the vagaries of natural conditions, climate, weather, and seasons. There was a need to adapt to changing local situations. Servants in agriculture lived and worked with the farmers and were integrated into their households. Their dependency went far beyond work as such and it was legally codified.

Agricultural labor relations were informal, but not unregulated *per se*. Already the servants' regulations had defined the duties and rights of both servants and their employer/head of the household. This corresponded with the principle of "protection against obedience" and the farmer's superiority. In the interwar period, this constitution of gainful work was in flux. On the one hand, commercial wage labor more and more advanced to become the model of "modern," formalized work, which also transformed farm work. By comparison, gainful work in agriculture looked increasingly old-fashioned and in need of change and formalization. On the other hand, the familiar paternalistic relationship and organizational principles on the farms began to erode, especially as the economic crisis worsened. This development had already begun at the end of the nineteenth century, at least with farm workers' (temporary or long-term) movement into commerce and industry.

The political and social struggles and legal changes throughout the interwar period were an expression of these developments. The new balance of power in the Republic and the long-simmering discontent enabled an extension of farm workers' social rights and entitlements, formalizing this line of work to some extent. Yet this should not be overstated. Agrarian representatives in parliament and employer-friendly organizations resisted

unwanted state influence and fought to preserve their own interests. As a result, agricultural workers were denied many of the labor movements' achievements. Their legally guaranteed rights often remained vague and incomplete; the transition to formalized wage labor was not consistently pursued.

This was justified by the special characteristics of agricultural work. Conservative politicians, authorities, or agrarians would argue in favor of legislation specifically designed to encapsulate agriculture's peculiarities. From their perspective, even the rural population was different. Allegedly, countrywomen and countrymen were characterized by a distinct capacity for and understanding of agricultural work. In view of the diagnosed labor shortage in agriculture, rural workers were supposed to stay where they were, or at least where they belonged, from an official point of view: i.e., in informal agricultural occupations in rural areas. This was reflected in the design of unemployment insurance, which excluded agricultural workers, and increasingly even those who had previously worked on farms. Labor market authorities intensified their attempts to "return" former farm workers to agriculture and to exclude all those from unemployment support who they identified as agricultural workers. With the worsening economic crisis, the conservative government, and particularly the Austrofascist regime, expanded these restrictions in the 1930s.

In practice, however, this was not always easy. Some employment contracts could hardly be categorized as agricultural or commercial. Workers, moreover, combined different activities or moved back and forth between insured and uninsured occupations. Assuming they were, from their perspective, unjustly denied rights and entitlements, many workers fought back, some even going as far as the Supreme Administrative Court. These cases contributed to the official determination on who was (or was supposed to be) classified as an agricultural worker. However, this did not change their legal basis *per se*, which defined categories of workers and assigned different rights to them.

Some individual workers were successful with their claims. But the conflicts between workers and administrative authorities contributed overall to the reproduction of ever more distinct occupational categories: of agricultural work in contrast to commercial labor. These clear boundaries were the prerequisite for maintaining special legal regulations for farm work with relatively vague contractual principles. Moreover, they provided a justification for the unequal treatment of agricultural and industrial workers.

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The Post-War Period

Informal Work between Industrialization,
Modernization, and Boom

9. The Vulnerable Lives of “Unemployment” in Portugal’s Estado Novo Dictatorship, ca. 1930–1960¹

Elisa Lopes da Silva

Abstract: This chapter analyzes the construction and political uses of the category of “unemployment” in Portugal during the Estado Novo dictatorship (1933–1974). It argues that officially low unemployment rates concealed widespread underemployment and precarious labor, especially in an economy still strongly shaped by agriculture. The regime used unemployment as an administrative and political tool to manage seasonal, intermittent, and itinerant work, depoliticizing diverse out-of-work experiences. Drawing on state policies, statistics, institutional practices, and lived experiences, the chapter examines how out-of-work individuals were collectively classified and governed, including through bodies such as the Unemployment Commissariat, while also considering the role of political opposition. Overall, unemployment functioned as a political mediation of insecure labor relations in a European semi-peripheral authoritarian context.

Keywords: Portugal, job placement, Estado Novo, agriculture, Unemployment Commissariat, unemployment statistics

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Three men walk along a street with a firm step and together enter the municipal offices of a town in southern Portugal. Forming an orderly queue, they ask for some information at the counter. Others, also with a serious and resolute profile, head for the People's House (Casa do Povo), the body that manages rural laborers in the Estado Novo dictatorship (1933–1974). These men, shown on the state TV channel RTP news program “Development of Alentejo” (Desenvolvimento do Alentejo) walking into various public institutions, are registering as unemployed.² For the same reason, members of the para-military police National Republican Guard (Guarda Nacional Republicana, GNR) march through the streets of a small village in Alentejo, speaking to and gathering details from men on the doorstep. We are in 1966, a decade when “uncurable agricultural underemployment,” as the news report calls it, characterized rural labor experiences, even after migrations to the industrial belts of Lisbon and mass emigration beyond the Pyrenees profoundly changed the latifundia region. In the 1960s, the dictatorship constructed an ideal figure of the rural unemployed as a man reliant on public institutions, namely the police, to register his willingness to work and to solve personal problems. This idealized daily life took place in almost empty streets and squares, occupied only occasionally. The state's representation masculinized the figure of the unemployed person and presented unemployment as an isolated experience. The news report, produced by the Coordinating Committee for Public Works in Alentejo, aired on television in order to propagandize how state action had resolved the hard but predictable breaks imposed by the seasonal nature of agricultural labor.

Unemployment is a modern category, first created in industrialized and urban societies where work mostly became identified with market-related labor and wage labor became a mass phenomenon.³ From the end of the nineteenth century, unemployment gradually grew into a social question which authorities in Western Europe and the United States differentiated from pauperism,⁴ especially after World War One, when reformists responded to its challenges alongside the work of the International Labor

2 “Desenvolvimento do Alentejo,” Noticiário Nacional de 1966, Noticiário Nacional de Dezembro, 8 min., 40 sec. Available at <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/conteudos/desenvolvimento-do-alentejo/>.

3 Manfredi Alberti, *Senza lavoro. La disoccupazione in Italia dall'Unità ad oggi* (Roma: Laterza, 2016); Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986); Robert Salais et al., *L'invention du chômage* (Paris: Puf, 1986).

4 Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971); Christian Topalov, *Naissance du chômage, 1880–1910* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994).

Organization.⁵ Scholars have since re-evaluated definitions and perceptions of work by addressing the social figure of the unemployed, distinguishing that figure from the stray, unfit, or unproductive, and have examined the political, industrial, and epistemic conditions under which the category of unemployment was first identified and conceived as a governmental problem.⁶ This reframing followed labor history's post-Marxist turn. Along with economic historians' continued interest in unemployment, especially for measuring work-factor efficiency in crisis periods, political historians have examined it as part of welfare state history, articulating concepts of social rights and citizenship.⁷ Yet, these studies still mainly focus on early industrialized countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, privileging those nation states in which the work-society first emerged.

More recent literature has questioned the linear narrative of the hegemonic rise of a global work-society by focusing on non-Western nations in order to stress the historic global persistence of vulnerable labor relations.⁸ Among other shortcomings, that narrative does not comprehensively consider the full weight of unpaid family, domestic, self-employed, or agricultural labor.⁹ Keen to question the place of women and non-Western workers in the current global division of labor, then, the international agendas of gender and postcolonial studies have addressed the moving borders of

5 Maria Grazia Meriggi, *La disoccupazione come problema sociale: riformismo, conflitto e "democrazia industriale" in Europa prima e dopo la grande guerra* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2009); Ingrid Liebeskind Sauthier, "Modern Unemployment: From the Creation of the Concept to the International Labour Office's First Standards," in *Globalizing Social Rights. The International Labour Organization and Beyond*, ed. Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 2013), 67–84.

6 Susana Pereira Bastos, *O Estado Novo e os seus vadios: contribuição para o estudo das identidades marginais e da sua repressão* (Lisbon: D. Quixote, 1997); William Walters, *Unemployment and Government: Genealogies of the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000); Christian Topalov, *Naissance du chômeur, 1880–1910* (Paris: Albin Michele, 1994).

7 Ivan Luzardo-Luna, "Labour Frictions in Interwar Britain: Industrial Reshuffling and the Origin of Mass Unemployment," *European Review of Economic History* 24, no. 2 (2020): 243–63; Jose Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy (1886–1914)* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972); Desmond King, *Actively Seeking Work? The Politics of Unemployment and Welfare Policy in the United States and Great Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Marjorie Levine-Clark, *Unemployment, Welfare and Masculine Citizenship: "So Much Honest Poverty in Britain," 1870–1930* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

8 Stefano Bellucci and Andreas Eckert, eds., *General Labour History of Africa. Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th–21st Centuries* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2019); Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, "Precarity as a Political Concept, or Fordism as Exception," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 7/8 (2008): 51–72.

9 Margaret Maruani, *Travail et emploi des femmes* (Paris: La Découverte, 2000).

work, the inconsistencies of labor statistics, and the discontinuities of work trajectories. If cultural-historical studies emphasize that wage labor attained hegemony only at the level of representation, it nonetheless structured life courses, shaped social identities, and informed welfare policies.¹⁰ Global history has underlined how statistics-making and the governing projects of international organizations imposed global operative measures.¹¹ These lines of inquiry, which focus on non-Western settings, gender imbalances, and international relations, are also relevant to the study of Portugal, where labor was only loosely formalized up until the 1960s.

Unemployment has been a disputed category since its inception. In this chapter, I hold that unemployment was a conceptual framework used by the Portuguese authorities over a long period of time to represent and govern the elusive phenomenon of work seasonality, intermittency, and itinerancy. This period coincides mainly with the *Estado Novo*, in which the corporatist state was a central piece in the planned “nationalization of work.”¹² My argument builds on the fact that precarious working and living conditions were twentieth-century historical norms not only in non-Western nations, but also in some European regions. This was partly because farming work, which has seasonality and intermittency as its defining characteristics, played a decisive role in the productive structure of some Southern European countries, such as Spain, Greece, and southern Italy, until late into the twentieth century. In the Portuguese case, by the middle of the twentieth century agricultural workers, whether through cultivating their own family farms, renting plots, or working in large estates, accounted for nearly half of the working population, according to the 1950 census.¹³ Portugal’s low unemployment rates, as calculated by economic historians for the period after 1950, hide the magnitude of underemployment and other forms of work insufficiency.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the categories of unemployment or unemployed were used, contested, and claimed by state institutions,

10 John Burnett, *Idle Hands: The Experience of Unemployment, 1790–1990* (London/New York: Routledge 1994); Michael Denning, “Wageless Life,” *New Left Review* 66 (2010): 79–97.

11 Aaron Benanav, “The Origins of Informality: The ILO at the Limit of the Concept of Unemployment,” *Journal of Global History* 14, no. 1 (2019): 107–25; António Casimiro Ferreira, “Portugal, a OIT e as Políticas de Emprego entre 1960 a 1974,” in *OIT e Portugal. 100 anos de História*, ed. António Casimiro Ferreira (Lisbon: OIT, 2019), 212–25.

12 Álvaro Garrido, “A institucionalização do ‘social’ no Estado Novo português: previdência corporativa e seguros sociais voluntários,” *Estudos Históricos. Rio de Janeiro* 31, no. 64 (2018): 198–218.

13 Instituto Nacional de Estatística, *IX Recenseamento Geral da População (1950)*, tomo III, vol. 2, *População Agrícola* (Lisbon: Bertrand, 1950), 16–17.

political organizations, and individuals during the Estado Novo. While attentive to the interplay between technical language and the social use of these notions, I argue that, for the Estado Novo regime, they functioned as tools of political mediation for a wide range of informal and insecure labor relations. One of the more direct effects of this mediation was that it obscured the prevalence of precariousness. However, if it is important to point out the categories' inaccuracy, I hold that this inaccuracy was not an unintentional effect. Rather, the Estado Novo's use of the terms unemployment and unemployed was a specific way to govern precarious labor, albeit one challenged by different individual and collective actions. I will develop this argument in three sections. The first section studies how out-of-work people, i.e., individuals who were for different reasons distanced from formalized work relations, were managed by the state as a group, and, occasionally, mobilized as a collective with common interests. The second section explores the ways of and the reasons for counting, classifying, and describing the situations of the workless population both by the Estado Novo's institutions and the communist opposition. The third section studies the ways in which the Estado Novo governed unemployed persons through its Unemployment Commissariat (Comissariado do Desemprego, UC).

Out-of-Work Experiences and Social Mobilization

On April 7, 1939, more than 800 building workers on the Lisbon-Cascais Marginal Road stopped showing up for work. The road along the mouth of the River Tagus, which was intended to connect the Portuguese capital to the tourist resort of Cascais, was a major endeavor of the regime, which at the time was focusing on tourism through the building of scenic routes. The cause of the "mutiny with abandonment of work" was a labor dispute over working time. Most of these workers were unoccupied men who had been assigned to the construction site by the UC. In response to the hold-up, the building company called in the GNR and the secret political police (Polícia de Vigilância e Defesa do Estado, PVDE), to "investigate the incident."¹⁴

The PVDE's report to the Ministry of the Interior provides a detailed account of the events of those days. According to the Oeiras and Cascais municipal representatives, the Italian-Portuguese Construction Company

14 National Archives of Torre do Tombo (*Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo*, ANTT), Ministério do Interior, Correspondência Recebida, DS/C, maço 509, Estrada Marginal Lisboa-Cascais, Relatório da PVDE (março 1939), 1.

(Sociedade Italo-Portuguesa de Construções), which was also responsible for the building of the new Lisbon port at the time, had “hired staff from the most diverse professions who were almost all local residents and were unemployed” in order to “alleviate the local crisis.” In order to stay on schedule, the company obtained authorization from the National Institute of Labor and Welfare (Instituto Nacional do Trabalho e da Previdência) to enforce the “from sunrise to sunset” working hours rule in road construction instead of the agreed eight hours regulation, which only covered staff considered “rural” or “undifferentiated” and left out bricklayers. Once the new order was publicized, almost all the 848 workers stopped showing up at the construction sites. The bricklayers expressed their solidarity with them and abandoned their work, too.¹⁵

The company called in the GNR, which “immediately sent the cavalry to the work sites.” Several company orders were issued over the following days, with little result, and the company was advised by PVDE to take “the greatest care in dismissals” because this could easily lead to “new conflict.” The secret political police had no doubts about the reasons for the incidents and did not attribute a “political nature” to them: “These [i.e., the workers] are not so-called ‘rural laborers.’ They are, rather, individuals from the most varied professions and less arduous than the ones they are currently engaged in, which their misery has forced them to accept. Unaccustomed to the spade and the pickaxe and used to working only eight hours, they found these more than enough.” After the police repression of the mutiny and, from then on, police surveillance at the worksite, the laborers were forced to agree to work from “sun up to sun down” or “a maximum of 10 hours of effective work.”¹⁶

It is not surprising that working time was the terrain of struggle. Various labor organizations and political parties, already subject to intense repression from the preceding Military Dictatorship (1926–1933), had all cast the reduction of working hours as the main tool in the fight against rising unemployment in industry since the early 1930s. However, construction companies and town councils had begun to impose ten-hour working days on those unskilled people hired to build and repair roads, a schedule similar to that imposed on agricultural work, but two hours longer than

15 ANTT, Ministério do Interior, Correspondência Recebida, DS/C, maço 509, Estrada Marginal Lisboa-Cascais, Relatório da PVDE (março 1939), 2–3.

16 ANTT, Ministério do Interior, Correspondência Recebida, DS/C, maço 509, Estrada Marginal Lisboa-Cascais, Relatório da PVDE (março 1939); ANTT, Ministério do Interior, Correspondência Recebida, DS/C, maço 509, Estrada Marginal Lisboa-Cascais, “Ordem de Serviço n.º3.”

the working time for skilled workers.¹⁷ This stemmed from the fact that most of these activities were performed by the same workers, who shifted between them according to the productive cycle of each. Equally significant, the legal regulation of working hours was similar across unskilled sectors because the political powers and large landowners wanted to ensure that the bodies engaged in agriculture would not escape to the construction industry. The Lisbon-Cascais Marginal Road's workers were claiming the status of skilled workers and refusing to accept the discipline imposed on "undifferentiated" workers.

The unemployed were considered by the state powers as a whole or indistinct group of workers. While there was an individual registry of the unemployed within the UC, this institution handled the majority of registrants as a collective entity.¹⁸ Council representatives treated them as a homogenous group, assigning them to construction projects through the UC.¹⁹ During the mentioned work stoppage, the "undifferentiated" workers thus responded as a collective, with shared interests, in a common struggle. The political police sought to attribute common expectations and motivations to them, unlike the construction company which was unable to make sense of its workers' actions. The police narrative also allows us to understand how the job placement policy gave rise to collective subjectivities of work.

Governed as an unskilled labor force, men and women who experienced seasonal or occasional out-of-work experiences often mobilized collectively over successive decades, demanding work or calling for the improvement of working conditions. Various labor disputes broke out, with a notable surge in mobilization among the workless population, particularly in the large rural estates of Alentejo and Ribatejo. Since the 1940s, newspapers and pamphlets printed and distributed by the underground Communist Party had highlighted and encouraged sit-ins by the "unemployed" at People's Houses and town halls during periods of low work; via these distributed materials the party had also demanded stable work, a fair day's pay, or the launching of public work projects.²⁰

17 Fátima Patriarca, *A Questão Social no Salazarismo. 1930–1947*, vol. 1 (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda, 1995), 198–99.

18 Chapter V "Classification of unemployed," Decree no. 21699, September 30, 1932.

19 ANTT/AOS/PC – 11, Cx. 560, PT12, "Lista de Operários da Construção Civil de Lisboa."

20 Amongst other examples is this underground newspaper of the Communist Party: "Lutemos unidos contra a fome e o desemprego," *O Camponês. Órgão de Unidade Nacional Anti-Fascista para os Camponeses do Sul* 1, no. 9, December 1947 [1].

In the united “call to arms” there seems to have been an evolution in the gendering of the revolting subject. Already in 1935, women’s voices of dissent against recent state policy were heard in the neighborhood of Campo de Ourique, then on the outskirts of Lisbon. The UC was an organization created three years earlier to implement a restricted job placement policy and to provide assistance to the poorest. While visiting a UC meal distribution center in Rua Correia Teles, in Lisbon, an UC official recounted the following episode in the UC’s published bulletin:²¹

When we left, the most insubordinate women, breaking away from the suffering crowd, approached our car and—mistakenly attributing to us powers of command—loudly expressed their desire, their will! They did not want meals, they wanted money! The government gentlemen should give money to everyone! They would know very well how to buy what they needed! And as the car descended the exit ramp, the group of energumens, already semi-revolted by our muteness, were still clamoring: —Money! Money! Just give us money!

The fact that the UC’s official bulletin, contrary to the usual censorship practices, publicized a situation of open protest against the state might perhaps be attributed to the moral of the story being told: charity was to be thanked; women in groups expressed irrational desires; money should only be earned through work. First and foremost, however, these protests by out-of-work women were told without being considered as political acts because they did not express rebellion in the language of the organized labor movement. Instead, outside the propagated work ethic which celebrated the dignity and worth of wage labor in reclaiming work for the poor, these women also refused charitable assistance. It appears that the actions identified as political by the Estado Novo regime were predicated on the gender of the actors and their work ethic.

In 1932, when the Communist Youth addressed their “unemployed comrades,” men were the target of their words. Even before the institutionalization of the fascist Estado Novo, but already under the open repression of the Military Dictatorship, the feeble Portuguese section of the Communist Youth called for an alliance in the National Day of Struggle Against Unemployment between the unemployed and the rest of the workforce, demanding that

21 “Dar de comer a quem tem fome (Impressões e notas colhidas durante uma visita a diversos postos de distribuição de refeições na cidade de Lisboa),” *Boletim do Comissariado do Desemprego*, no. 5 (1935): 8.

employers and the state provide a 75% subsidy for unemployed workers.²² At the time, the status of out-of-work women was disputed within the communist and anarchist labor movement, given women's subaltern role in the model of the male breadwinner.²³ Just over a decade later, the struggles of female wage-earners were often listed with pride and praise in the proclamations of the clandestine communist newspapers *O Camponês* (The Peasant) and *Avante!* (Forward).²⁴ Women were still paid less than men and the use of their labor by landowners was, as the communist press argued, a way of lowering men's wages. Be that as it may, the collective actions around unemployment did not fail to include unemployed women from olive, cork, and harvesting farm work. Unemployed women became the target of communist propaganda that encouraged "peasant" men and women to fight "shoulder to shoulder" on the latifundia. The most memorable of all resistance episodes revolved around the figure of Catarina Eufémia, a female landless worker from Baleizão, Alentejo, who, while pregnant, was shot dead by a police officer as she fought for better working conditions in 1954.²⁵ She became a symbol of the anti-fascist resistance, especially during the Carnation Revolution (1974–1975.) In addition to gender differentiations, these events suggest that the making of collective subjectivities of work was shaped by a state of in-betweenness and instability that took place beyond formalized labor relations. Unemployment was the name of precarious labor relations; unemployed was the name of the rebel.

From Precarious Labor to Precarious Unemployment Numbers

Unemployment or unemployed were the terms under which, from 1931 onwards, the state administration managed a set of situations of casual and irregular labor, poverty, mendacity, and borderline crime. The persistent out-of-work situations can be explained, in part, by the weakly marketized, specialized, and formalized labor relations and by a state apparatus with weak social intervention mechanisms. The workless were

22 Ephemera – Biblioteca e Arquivo de José Pacheco Pereira (Ephemera Archive), Jornada Nacional de Luta contra o Desemprego (Leaflet), Secção Portuguesa das Juventudes Comunistas.

23 Patricarca, *A questão social*, 103.

24 "Desempregadas camponesas reivindicam pão," *Avante!*, série VI, no. 6, November 1944, 3; "Mais acção e unidade da classe operária na luta contra a exploração e o desemprego," *Avante*, série VI, no. 186, March 1954, 2.

25 Margarida Fernandes, *Terra de Catarina. Do latifúndio à reforma agrária, ocupação de terras e relações sociais em Baleizão* (Oeiras: Celta, 2006).

the object of varied discourses throughout twentieth-century Portugal, whereby social perceptions, scientific representations, state accounts, political claims, and self-narratives succeeded, opposed, and overlapped each other. Their experiences were submitted to different forms of problematization, which had the effect of creating the issue of unemployment from different perspectives:²⁶ moral, whereby certain state and Catholic church institutions had considered unemployment as honest poverty, worthy of assistance, since the beginning of the century; social, as a risk to capitalist societies, and to the few defenders of a welfare state during the First Republic (1910–1926); socio-psychological, presenting a problem of demoralized workers for jurists and other experts in the social field; and, since the 1950s, economic, a problem that affected the national economy in the management of labor productivity.²⁷

Unemployment and unemployed were terms that emerged late in Portuguese statistical documentation compared to other European countries and the United States. In 1890, in the first population census that used the new methods of the 1872 St. Petersburg International Statistical Congress, a distinction was only made between those individuals working in a “profession,” those who were “unproductive” (which included people under 20 years old), and those who “suffered from blindness, deafness-muteness idiocy and mental alienation.”²⁸ It was not until the 1940 census that the term unemployed was used to describe the condition of the workless, when the “unemployed population” was distinguished from the “disabled” and “inactive.”²⁹ It was during the 1930s that the categories of unemployed and unemployment became part of everyday life, providing a stable vocabulary by which to express a social and political debate, to describe the material deprivation of workers, to denounce social injustice, or to justify welfare intervention. The political struggles around social protection, and, more broadly, the relation between workers and state powers shaped the intense debates, conflicts, and transformations in the political and state

26 Walters, *Unemployment and Government*.

27 André Costa, “A criação do sistema português de segurança social (1962–1984)” (PhD diss., University of Lisbon, 2021); António Valadares de Aragão Pacheco (relator), “Os factores humanos no desenvolvimento económico,” in *Terceiro Relatório Anual da Comissão Coordenadora das Obras Públicas no Alentejo* (Lisbon: Comissariado do Desemprego, 1959), 6–44.

28 Ministério da Fazenda, Direcção Geral de Estatística e dos Próprios Nacionais, *Censo da População do Reino (1890)*, vol. III (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1900), 2, 229.

29 Instituto Nacional de Estatística, *VIII Recenseamento Geral da População no Continente e Ilhas Adjacentes em 12 de Dezembro de 1940*, vol. XXV. *Memória Descritiva* (Lisbon: Bertrand, 1947), 9–10.

organization of those years, which transitioned from the First Republic's democratic liberalism to the Military Dictatorship and the Estado Novo's institutionalization of fascism in 1933.

The year 1931 was decisive in this debate. Unemployment became a political issue, and an attempt was made to define what an unemployed person was, following the political chronology of other industrialized countries most affected by the 1929 crisis. Without any major visible demonstrations by unoccupied people on the streets, the government, guided by the hand of future dictator António de Oliveira Salazar, then Minister of Finance, launched the country's first unemployment survey.³⁰ It was an initiative of modest scope and feeble methods, which relied on the registration in parish councils all those who declared themselves unemployed. The fact that experts noted the lack of an occupational classification grid did not prevent them from realizing that among the just over 38,000 unemployed, more than 14,000 had previously worked as agricultural employees, in unidentified occupations and situations, and more than 5,000 in construction. Monitoring the next few months, they recorded different numbers of unemployed, varying between 26,000 and 40,000. Analyzing their data, state officials tried to differentiate between what was "absolute unemployment" (with little fluctuation) and "temporary rural unemployment."³¹ The gender breakdown, which does not appear in the survey, is not even noted by the experts as relevant, who assumed that all the unemployed were men.

Despite the statistical nature of the endeavor, registration was chaotic. On the one hand, individuals were not in the habit of registering their individual work situation and declaring their "willingness" to work; on the other hand, the state authorities did not yet have the criteria and procedures in place to turn workless individuals into the category of the unemployed. It is therefore not surprising that UC officials made successive corrections to the registers throughout the 1930s. In this process, those who had their enrolment annulled were "the needy, the unidentified, all individuals in the liberal professions, minors, women who are not heads of households and those who are improperly enrolled." Those who had their enrolment canceled were the "undesirable, disruptive, extremist and amoral."³² Also deleted from the registers were individuals for whom the UC "will not

30 Direção Geral de Estatística, *O desemprego em Portugal: resultados do inquérito realizado em Agosto de 1931* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1931).

31 Decree no. 21699, September 19, 1932.

32 *Boletim do Commissariado do Desemprego*, no. 20 (1938): 18.

extend its restorative hand: the lacking in moral suitability; the unfit; the alcoholic and sick; the undesirable.”³³

The conventions for defining and counting the unemployed have been a matter of dispute since the first efforts to record, govern, and politicize labor relations began, but this became more contentious in 1931. That year, the Socialist Party counted around 90,000 unemployed people and, in 1932, the illegalized Communist Party counted 150,000 unemployed when it called for a National Day of Struggle Against Unemployment. Socialists made a distinction between “permanent unemployed” and those who worked no more than 2, 3, or 4 days a week; communists added to the unemployed numbers the underemployed, i.e., all those “whose work was reduced to 2 and 3 days a week,” which, they said, amounted to 1,200,000 people out of a total population of just over 5 million.³⁴ Many police reports of the Public Safety Police (Polícia de Segurança Pública, PSP), written in the context of increasing social surveillance in the cities, recorded the meetings of the various “classes” of workers, detailing the growing “miseries” of maritime workers, metalworkers, logisticians, and other small traders affected by the lack of work, or work of an irregular nature, which led to lower wages and longer working hours.³⁵ The vivid reports in the press of the “distressing,” “frightening,” “terrible,” and “anguishing” crisis raging in the world of work at the beginning of the 1930s, in addition to the crisis among agricultural wage earners such as cork workers and workers in construction and small industries, dramatically revealed what the figures of the “involuntary unemployed” seemed to obscure.³⁶ However, it was the reports of civil governors and the GNR, mediators ideally situated between rural areas and the central state powers, that warned of the periodic lack of work and the dangers to public order that this entailed.³⁷ In the cities, particularly in Lisbon, job instability, redundancy, but also, for all those who had any work, real devaluation of wages and reduction in daily working hours or the number of days worked per week, all defined the contours of an informalized economy characterized by workers living from hand to mouth, alongside begging and committing occasional theft.

33 *Boletim do Commissariado do Desemprego*, no. 20 (1938): 19.

34 Ephemera Archive, Operários e Camponeses. Apostos para o 29 de Fevereiro (Pamphlet), ed. Comsind (1932); Patriarca, *A Questão Social*, 162–63.

35 Bastos, *O Estado Novo*, 70.

36 Cardoso, *Ecos da Grande Depressão*, 385; Fernando Rosas, *O Estado Novo nos anos trinta (1928–1938)* (Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1986), 96.

37 Bastos, *O Estado Novo*, 71–72.

The deficiencies in the official data were immediately pointed out by statistical experts. In the following years, the numbers of the "involuntarily unemployed" fluctuated between 31,000 and 38,000, which, in the words of UC officials in 1934, "represents a minimal portion of individuals without work."³⁸ For many of them, "intermittency amounts to six months of unemployment and there are municipalities where inactivity represents three quarters of the year and takes on the character of permanent unemployment."³⁹ In 1943, state officials admitted that it was not possible "to obtain statistical data that can be studied with great rigor on the unemployed in construction and rural work due to fluctuations in unemployment and sudden rarefaction, without obeying any general law."⁴⁰ The registration of the unemployed following the 1931 survey was also not in line with the "new ways of investigating and analyzing problems relating to the labor markets and their crises" desired by UC officials, as these methods of collecting information made it impossible for the state to manage labor as a productive factor.⁴¹ Moreover, the Estado Novo regime's distrust of governing social issues with numbers, even for propaganda purposes, was explicit. The "statistical sum of individuals" differs from the "real life of the nation," argued Salazar in 1934 at the First Congress of the National Union, the Estado Novo's single party, rejecting statistical data as an effective tool for supporting a "Portuguese solution to unemployment."⁴²

In 1940, the number of unemployed identified by the census more than tripled compared to any year in the previous decade.⁴³ The statistical calculation of the unemployed had shifted from voluntary registration to a method based on the general population census, encompassing all those who had the physical and mental capacity to work as well as those who had already been employed and were looking for paid work. Women, regardless of their marital status, were counted in this census (even though the vast majority who were part of the working population did not have a profession

38 "O mal e os remédios," in *Boletim do Comissariado do Desemprego*, no. 2 (1934): 173.

39 *Boletim do Comissariado do Desemprego*, n. 20 (1938): 17.

40 "Trabalho e Desemprego – Métodos de Investigação e Análise dos Problemas Relativos aos Mercados de Trabalho e suas Crises," in *Boletim do Comissariado do Desemprego*, no. 25 (1943): 144.

41 Dinato Ferrão, *Trabalho e desemprego. Métodos de investigação e análise dos problemas relativos aos mercados de trabalho e suas crises* (Lisbon: Gráfica Lisbonense, 1945).

42 António de Oliveira Salazar, *Boletim do Instituto Nacional do Trabalho e da Previdência* (August 15, 1934): 5.

43 Instituto Nacional de Estatística, *VIII Recenseamento Geral da População no Continente e Ilhas Adjacentes em 12 de Dezembro de 1940*, vol. I (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional de Lisboa, 1945), 447.

but rather an unpaid occupation, such as domestic or housewife). Given the lack of evidence indicating a significant rise in unemployment figures for this year, the updated statistics raised doubts about the accuracy of the absolute numbers of unemployed individuals that had been documented (and criticized) since the early 1930s. Consequently, this should prompt a reconsideration of historiography's dismissal of the unemployment phenomenon, which has often minimized the social repercussions of the global crisis in the early 1930s and its correlation with the rise of fascism in Portugal.⁴⁴

In the 1950s census, the data collected on the unemployed, although disaggregated by profession, sex, region, occupation, and, most importantly, length of unemployment, did not make it possible to reflect on and categorize different types of unemployment beyond "normal" and "cyclical" employment. This methodology also explains why fewer than 20,000 unemployed in agriculture were accounted for among the more than 90,000 unemployed identified that year, at a time when the National Assembly and the Corporatist Chamber were calling for immediate measures to tackle the "labor crises" in agriculture, seen as the source of the country's main unemployment problem.⁴⁵ Moreover, the UC bulletin stated it would not present data on the "rural unemployed" from 1949 to 1951, as it could not provide reliable figures.⁴⁶

The comprehensive and detailed Agricultural and Forestry Survey (*Inquérito Agrícola e Florestal*) conducted between 1950 and 1958 and based on fieldwork by agronomists provided a very different picture from the 1950 census.⁴⁷ The "labor crises" in the southern latifundia were described and projected for each of Portugal's municipalities. Distressing reports in the agronomic literature also documented a significant rise in "seasonal agricultural unemployment," attributed to the monocultural production. The large-scale modernizing hydraulic projects led to the spread of temporary work arrangements and to the seasonal migration of rural workers. In contrast to the highly industrialized nations of Europe, unemployment in post-World War Two Portugal was primarily associated with poorly formalized, precarious, and temporary forms of work, particularly in the agricultural sector. This unemployment was not regarded as a vestige of a

44 Patriarca, *A questão social*, 163.

45 Elisa Lopes da Silva, *Colonizar a Metrópole. Estado, ciência e técnicas de colonização interna no Estado Novo* (Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2025).

46 MOP, *Boletim do Comissariado do Desemprego*, no. 29, years 1948, 1949, and 1951.

47 For example, Plano de Fomento Agrário, "Inquérito Agrícola e Florestal. Concelho de Santiago do Cacém" (1951), 81–85.

pre-modern era but rather a result of contemporary changes in agricultural production relations. Fieldwork by agronomists, rather than thorough statistical efforts, circumscribed and roughly quantified the problems that needed more urgent state intervention.⁴⁸ From the perspective of state rationality, the most valuable data for estimating the probability of social upheaval were detailed descriptions of the vulnerability of working conditions, produced by closely monitoring labor seasonal variations and assessing the level of social discontent. In addition to "seasonal unemployment," "hidden unemployment" and "underemployment" were the new terms used in state expertise of the late 1950s, when low labor productivity became a problem to be solved in the planned economy of the First Development Plan (1953–1958), and, particularly, the Second Development Plan (1959–1964), which focused on the transition from an agricultural-based economy to an industrialized one.⁴⁹

Unemployment Policies

In Portugal's Estado Novo, unemployment was subject to weak, inconsistent, and sporadic public policies. Vulnerable labor relations existed alongside a limited network of corporatist protection and assistance, practically limited to the male breadwinner. In a dictatorship based ideologically on the ethical value of work, unemployment was tackled by making work compulsory for those lacking alternative means of subsistence.

During the First Republic, unemployment had been loosely considered as a social risk, following the creation of the Social Exchanges of Work (Bolsas Sociais de Trabalho) by the newly founded Mandatory Social Insurance Institute (Instituto dos Seguros Sociais Obrigatórios) (1919–1935). These bodies played a pioneering role, albeit for modest purposes and with minor results, in the first securitization of social risks (work accidents, old age) organized by the state.⁵⁰ The Social Exchanges of Work had the main function of organizing a labor supply and demand market, helping to place unoccupied people; and they soon stipulated the creation of "compulsory social insurance against *chômage*," which, however, never happened.

48 Silva, *Colonizar a Metrópole*.

49 Inspeção Superior do Plano de Fomento, *Relatório Preparatório do II Plano de Fomento. II) Agricultura, Silvicultura, Pecuária* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1958), 136–38; Benanav, *The Origins of Informality*, 112–13.

50 Decree no. 5639, May 10, 1919; José Luís Cardoso and Maria Manuela Rocha, "O seguro social obrigatório em Portugal (1919–1928): acção e limites de um Estado providente," *Análise Social* XLIV, no. 192 (2009): 439–70.

By the turn of the 1930s, unemployment had definitely become a governmental problem. Although the post-1929 global crisis did not lead to mass unemployment, visible either on the streets of Portuguese cities or in state statistics and surveys, nevertheless, as historiography has pointed out, the issue of unemployment was outlined and carefully considered by the state powers. It was a time of rapid political change, in which the suspension of parliament was accompanied by increasingly repressive measures imposed by the Military Dictatorship, opening the way to the fascist-inspired Estado Novo.

In February 1932, five days before the National Day of Struggle Against Unemployment, declared by the already weak Communist Party, then-Finance Minister Salazar established an Unemployed Assistance Fund.⁵¹ Under pressure from the media, political organizations, and private companies, the government, highlighting a significant rise in unemployment from the previous year, launched a measure akin to those taken in other nation states.⁵² The purpose was to create an emergency fund with contributions from employers and workers from which agricultural workers were exempt, in favor of supporting involuntary unemployed people and workers who had less than three days' work each week and more than three dependents; this fund was to be managed on a decentralized basis by district committees and municipal private relief delegations. Unemployment was also, in this scheme, the name given to unstable and seasonal work relations on the margins of more formalized work. Widely criticized by employers, communists, socialists, and trade unionists, the fund was dismantled within a few months. There was no further state attempt to securitize against the risk of unemployment in the following three decades. Against impositions of "egalitarian formulas for the entire population," such as social security for unemployment, the government then sought a "Portuguese solution to the unemployment problem," as it repeatedly stated from 1933.⁵³

The government now addressed unemployment with partial and intermittent measures. Estado Novo's "nationalization of work" meant

51 Law-Decree no. 21238, May 16, 1932 (Regulamento provisório da Caixa de Auxílio aos Desempregados).

52 ANTT, AOS / CO / PC – 11, "Correspondência sobre as seguintes questões: sugestões para combater o desemprego (1928–1931)"; ANTT, PIDE, Propaganda apreendida, no. 432, "'Jornada Nacional contra o Desemprego' pelo Comité Regional do Distrito de Lisboa do Partido Comunista Português," available at <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/viewer?id=4436816>; Patricarca, *A Questão Social*, 168–71.

53 "O estado actual da organização corporativa," *Boletim do Instituto Nacional do Trabalho e da Previdência* I, no. 18 (1934): 4.

in effect dismantling the different forms of social security carried out by the mutualist and cooperative movement, employers' paternalism (philanthropic or Catholic), and state-compulsory insurance that had been in force since the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ The political dispute directed at social issues in the context of fascism was expressed in Portugal throughout the 1930s through the disciplining and repression of the labor movement, imposed, in the first place, by the corporatist system, which doctrinally sought to reconcile labor and capital.⁵⁵ Employing a paternalist and charitable logic, the corporatist system entailed the creation of institutions representing capital and labor separately, intended to monopolize the representation of the labor force. These institutions included so-called labor bodies which were, doctrinally, socio-professional representative bodies in charge of creating and managing social benefits through welfare funds. With the National Labor Statute, a key law of Portuguese corporatism modeled on the Italian fascist *Carta del lavoro* (Labor Charter), and other legislation published in 1933, the regime created compulsory Guilds, National Trade Unions, People's Houses, and Fishermen's Houses, all framed by the National Institute of Labor and Welfare. This "corporatist providence" was intended to be able to deal with sickness, invalidity, old age, and death.⁵⁶ While "involuntary unemployment" was nominally included as a risk to be covered by national trade unions and to encompass the industrial and service professions, it never had an implementation decree.⁵⁷ Additionally, the clauses regarding the payment of unemployment contributions were removed in 1950.⁵⁸

National Trade Unions, however, began to manage unemployment in other ways. Their growing control over access to professions meant that only unemployed people registered with them could be put to work in the relevant industry.⁵⁹ As for landless agricultural workers and fishermen, in some People's Houses, and especially in Fishermen's Houses, there was only

54 Joana Dias Pereira, "Mutualism and Welfare: Experiences, Debates and Policies on Social Security Sustainability in Portugal (1860–1934)," *CIREC-España, Revista de Economía Pública, Social y Cooperativa*, no. 107 (2023): 101–26.

55 Álvaro Garrido, "A institucionalização do 'social' no Estado Novo português: previdência corporativa e seguros sociais voluntários," *Estudos Históricos. Rio de Janeiro* 31, no. 64 (2018): 198–218.

56 Law-Decree no. 21699, May 30, 1932.

57 48º article of Estatuto do Trabalho Nacional and Law no. 1884, March 16, 1935.

58 República Portuguesa, *Normas Regulamentares das caixas sindicais de previdência e caixas de reforma ou de previdência* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1950), 23.

59 Law-Decree no. 23712, March 28, 1934; "Sobre a colocação de desempregados," *Boletim do Instituto Nacional do Trabalho e da Previdência* I, no. 9 (1934): 8.

meager and occasional assistance for seasonal workers.⁶⁰ These houses were supposed to tackle unemployment by paying wages “to members working on projects of common interest in times of lack of employment,” regularly funded by the UC, and were expressly forbidden to subsidize people from their common funds.⁶¹ The same rationale was behind the government’s imposition of “collective labor agreements” between landowners or Farmers’ Guilds and the People’s Houses, which governed the compulsory recruitment of day laborers by the latifundia farms of Beja, Évora, Portalegre, and Santarém until the 1950s.⁶² But perhaps the most sustained protection against the risk of unemployment came from the Economic Housing program, also an institution of the corporatist system, which had been set up in the 1930s with the aim of building houses for the poor.⁶³ Since the houses were bought on credit, albeit subsidized by the state, protection against the risk of unemployment for their owners, who could only be “heads of household” and who were therefore mostly men, became a necessity in order to financially sustain this social policy. The exceptional nature of this unemployment protection scheme reveals the absence of a general state protection system against labor insecurity.

Fundamentally rejecting corporatist welfare for unemployment, the Estado Novo dealt with job insecurity mainly through initiatives of job placement, with the main purpose of funding short-term work. To achieve this, in 1932 the UC was created within the Ministry of Public Works as a coordinating body with the dual function of providing job placement for unemployed people and assistance to “unemployed invalids.”⁶⁴ Job placement policy was carried out by partially subsidizing the wages of unemployed people, who were required to work part-time in various public institutions or initiatives and, to a lesser extent, in private companies, or by hiring unemployed people to work on public construction projects.⁶⁵ These salaries were funded by an Unemployment Fund composed of

60 Álvaro Garrido, “Assistência e previdência no mar português: a acção social das Casas dos Pescadores (1933–1968),” *Ler História*, no. 62 (2012): 7–29.

61 “A previdência nas Casas do Povo,” *Boletim do Instituto Nacional do Trabalho e da Previdência* I, no. 14 (1934): 2.

62 Law-Decree no. 32729, April 15, 1943; “Acordo colectivo ajustado entre os proprietários e os trabalhadores rurais da Casa do povo de Mora,” in *Casas do Povo. Caixas de Previdência* (Coimbra: Coimbra Editora, 1939), 59–64.

63 Law-Decree no. 23052, September 23, 1933; Álvaro Garrido and David Pereira, *A economia social em movimento. Uma história das organizações* (Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2018), 162.

64 Law-Decree no. 21699, September 19, 1932.

65 Comissariado do Desemprego, *Quinze Anos de Actividade (1932–1947)* (Lisbon: Gráfica Boa Nova, 1948).

contributions from workers (2% of their salary) and employers (1%) in industry, commerce, and services. These work promotion initiatives were complemented with diverse charitable measures. Given the UC's public visibility, the Communist Party deemed it crucial to expose the skewed management priorities of the Unemployment Fund's budget, which was predominantly allocated to public works and to remunerating specialized staff.⁶⁶

Indeed, the majority of rural and urban unemployed laborers would be assigned to construction projects. While centralization and coordination by a single state body and fund represented novelty, the measures associated with launching public works echoed longstanding state efforts to alleviate the social impact of labor instability dating back to at least the latter half of the nineteenth century. As early as 1932, plans were underway to assign unemployed construction workers, apprentices, and rural laborers to urban improvement and water and sanitation initiatives. Throughout the 1930s, a plethora of activities emerged, engaging construction workers, servants, joiners, and masons in various national development projects promoted by the Estado Novo. These endeavors included the preservation of architectural heritage, construction of road networks, and participation in the mentioned Economic Housing program, alongside numerous smaller rural and urban enhancement projects managed by municipal authorities and civil governments in response to local lack of employment. Agricultural workers, on the other hand, were to be put to work on the most emblematic schemes to modernize the rural landscape (afforestation, correction of water basins, and policing of roads and other rural improvements). The recruitment of the unemployed as a labor force was essential for the national regeneration propagandized by the Estado Novo in the 1930s.

For the few registrants employed in commerce, or who lacked a defined trade, their only prospect was the possibility of being requested by a public service or private company to work on a subsidized basis. Over the years, these have always been a minority. In 1959, their number did not exceed 4,000.⁶⁷ Occasionally, the UC supported other categories of intermittent workers in the burgeoning entertainment industries growing in the cities, such as actors, musicians, and other technical personnel, whose salaries were co-funded by the UC. The existence of orchestras, theatrical shows,

66 "Para onde vai o Fundo de Desemprego?" *Avante. Órgão Central do Partido Comunista Português* VI série, no. 163 (1947): 3.

67 Parecer n.º 39/VII, "Projecto de Proposta de Lei n.º 526/ VI Reforma da Previdência Social," in *Actas da Câmara Corporativa*, no. 128, VII legislature (April 6, 1961), 1301.

or cinematographic works relied, in fact, on this support.⁶⁸ This highlights how unemployment policies aimed at funding a diverse range of labor experiences were characterized by intermittency, seasonality, and itinerancy.

In addition to this policy of job placement, the UC advertised modest training schemes that remained very limited and centralized in Lisbon. Clerks and typists, but also seamstresses, pavers, and other tradespeople were not only financed by the UC but received training in workshops built by the UC. From the mid-1940s, the UC created clothing, shoemaking, and typography workshops. There were also Centers for Re-education and Professional Improvement (Centros de Reeducação e Aperfeiçoamento Profissional). In 1962, these centers included training in typing, nursing, telegraphy and radiotelegraphy, stone preparation, weaving, and unemployment fund inspection. The training schemes were thus gendered, as were job placements. The day-to-day administration of the UC had enshrined the practice of refusing enrolment and salary co-payment to married women, even when no regulation or legal document required it—a practice reversed in the early 1960s, along with other legislation regarding labor market restrictions placed on married women.⁶⁹

Beggars, vagrants, the incapable or disabled, the casually unemployed, and the underemployed were subject to common assistance measures, although the case-by-case monitoring of these measures tried to distinguish between the real poor and those who were fit to work. Assistance measures were then combined with other state interventions, like the Family Assistance Institute and the National Institute of Labor and Welfare.⁷⁰ This tendency was common to other European peripheral dictatorships, where Catholic social thought and organizations permeated corporatist institutions. Meals were distributed to those enrolled in the UC and to children in Lisbon and Oporto; shoes and clothing were made by the unemployed in the UC's workshops; and assistance was given to invalids throughout the country. These assistance actions would become more formalized over the years and were widely propagandized by the regime. However, until the 1960s, state initiatives to assist and protect these precarious segments of the population retained their supplementary character in the field of social management, which institutionally rested with the Misericórdias

68 Archive of the Ministry of Labor, Solidarity and Social Security (*Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social*, MTSS), film file "O milagre de Fátima" (uncatalogued).

69 Virgínia Ferreira, "O efeito Salieri: O sindicalismo perante as desigualdades entre mulheres e homens no emprego," *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, no. 62 (2002), 121–48.

70 Irene Flunser Pimentel, "A assistência social e familiar do Estado Novo nos anos 30 e 40," *Análise Social* 34, no. 151/152 (2000): 477–508.

and other Catholic and charitable associations.⁷¹ Welfare protection against the social risk of being out of work was not covered by these non-state measures, which meant that social support was essentially in the hands of the family.

Unemployed, beggars and invalids, rather than being fixed social figures, represented different moments in individual life trajectories to be managed by state institutions and other assistance-based organizations, albeit with different degrees of symbolic valorization. The dignified poor person was a centerpiece of the Estado Novo's labor ideology, which judged the morality of poverty through work ethic. However, during these years, begging and other similar practices continued to be the most frequent solutions to the uncertainty of labor relations; many workers were viewed with ambivalence but often experienced solidarity with the rest of the population, despite their growing repression and criminalization by the state.⁷²

The late 1950s and early 1960s marked a turning point in the experiences, debates, and policies directed at the unemployed. Their mass-migration to European countries beyond the Pyrenees (especially France and West Germany), mainly from the northern regions, the similarly large-scale migration of agricultural workers from the southern fields to the industrial belt of Lisbon, and the military conscription for the African independence wars from 1961 onwards, which affected the male population throughout the country, profoundly changed social and labor relations. Despite its fragility, the process of industrialization also led to the formalization, security, and protection of labor relations. These labor experiences were accompanied by intense debates within the regime's technocracy on social security, notably the inclusion of unemployment among the social insurance payments to be provided by corporatist bodies.⁷³ "The current scheme's ineffectiveness and complete outdatedness as a system to 'combat unemployment' cannot be doubted," stated the report of the Corporatist Chamber, the Estado Novo's consultative chamber, when discussing the draft law on social security reform in 1961.⁷⁴ Public works funding, particularly through the payment of unskilled workers' wages, and the subsidized salaries of public services, were the two central ways of combating unemployment, but, they argued, they proved to be ineffective because they were "uneconomical" as they

71 Law-Decree no. 32225, September 12, 1942.

72 Law-Decree no. 36 448, August 1, 1947; Bastos, *O Estado Novo e os seus vadios*, 80.

73 See, amongst others, magazine *Seara Nova* and journal *Revista de Economia do ISCF*.

74 Parecer no. 39/VII, "Projecto de proposta da lei n.º 526/VII, Reforma da Previdência Social," *Actas da Câmara Corporativa* (April 6, 1961), 1300.

did not contribute to the country's economic growth.⁷⁵ From 1962 onwards, office clerks, factory workers, and persons employed in industry, commerce, and services should have their social risk of "involuntary unemployment" protected, albeit weakly, by the new legal framework dedicated to social security reform.⁷⁶

During the 1960s, the move towards state securitization of unemployment was accompanied by labor training measures to support economic development planning. This transformation in the state's relationship with unemployment reflected an evolution, or overlapping, of the notion of work as an individual moral practice and collective ethical obligation and work as an economic value. Not only worthy of social assistance, involuntary unemployment was now considered a labor factor that influenced the national economy. Unemployment rates became another statistical indicator, among which labor productivity indexes figured prominently in helping to measure economic progress (and regression). In line with other European policies, the National Employment Service was created in 1965, promoting an active policy of improving the workforce, in which workers were valued for their vast productive potential (e.g., promoting vocational training).⁷⁷ Yet despite the technocratic efforts aimed at laying the foundations of a social security system, these policies did not reflect a relationship between social rights, democracy, and citizenship. The social protection and improved living standards promoted by the authoritarian Estado Novo's social policies did not include the promotion of political rights and citizen participation, which were hallmarks of the construction of welfare states in liberal European countries.

But not all the workforce for this planned economic development was of an industrial nature. In 1950, half of all workers in Portugal were still engaged in agriculture; among these, just under one million agricultural wage earners in Alentejo alone lived mainly according to the rhythm of casual farm labor. The introduction of machinery and water-intensive crops (rice and tomatoes) in the newly irrigated regions had increased the casualization of agricultural labor, and the social magnitude and political danger of the problem of rural worklessness continued to escalate. In part,

75 Parecer no. 39/VII, "Projecto de proposta da lei n.º 526/VII, Reforma da Previdência Social," *Actas da Câmara Corporativa* (April 6, 1961), 1301.

76 Law No 2.115 (June 18, 1962), base IV, no. 4.

77 Ferreira, "Portugal, a OIT e as Políticas de Emprego entre 1960 e 1974," 121–35.

the rural development planned for Alentejo in the late 1950s aimed to tackle the worsening precariousness of labor conditions and political conflict.⁷⁸ In 1956, the government created the Coordinating Committee for Public Works in Alentejo, whose name euphemized its main purpose: to mitigate the social impact and the demands of rural wage earners in Alentejo's latifundia, who were excluded from the new welfare system put in place in 1962.

Conclusion

Images of solitary unemployed men wandering through the bright and tranquil streets of a rural village in 1966 signaled the fading political imagination of Alentejo. The cyclic "labor crises" endured by agricultural laborers since the 1930s, that had become increasingly sporadic after the great urban migrations and processes of mechanization, were now labeled "underemployment," in line with international technical vocabulary. Simultaneously, formal labor relations had increased, stemming from industrial and service sector expansion, and were accompanied by new government strategies for managing the unemployed that prioritized labor productivity. This interplay between new labor relations and workforce policies intensified the dichotomy between employment and unemployment that had up to then had been more present in state representations than in life trajectories.

Since 1933, the model representation of work—formalized and standardized, regular, organized, disciplined, hierarchical—had underpinned the corporatist system implemented by the Estado Novo. By presenting itself as the representative of fixed and stable professional bodies, regulating access to professions, and ensuring protection, however limited, against work risks, the corporatist organization contributed to making invisible the multiplicity and vulnerability of working situations that did not conform to the fixity of professional identity. In Franco's Spain, too, professional or entrepreneurial solidarity and identity were the basis of the social protection of labor, which—fragmented and distributed between various central and provincial state, but also private bodies—largely excluded the precarious types of casual or temporary labor, even after the introduction of the 1963 social security policies.⁷⁹ It was an ideologi-

78 Silva, *Colonizar a Metrópole*.

79 González Madrid et al., "El franquismo y la construcción del Estado de Bienestar en España: la protección social del Estado (1939–1986)," *Pasado y memoria: Revista de historia contemporánea*, no. 17 (2018): 361–88.

cal representation that split the already fragmented world of work by excluding reproductive and care work, which was performed essentially by women. The refusal to establish forms of state welfare for worklessness, when ephemerality, intermittency, and seasonality marked the world of work in the 1930s and 1940s, was accompanied by a set of sporadic measures that sought to alleviate the material deprivations suffered by vulnerable workers.

The duality that frames the modern notion of unemployment as a simple negative counterpart to employment has proven to be an inadequate way to represent Portugal's world of work during the *Estado Novo*, where unemployment functioned more as a mediating category for a set of precarious working and living situations. Unemployment for the *Estado Novo* was operational less as a reliable category of representation than as a way of managing and politicizing vulnerable labor relations until the 1960s on the part of the fascist government through the UC and by the opposition Communist Party, where the latter used the designation for its mobilization and political demands. The technical use of the term unemployment in statistics, institutions, and public policies mainly reflected the fluid participation of the workforce in an economic landscape that lacked strict divisions in the lived experience of production. Unemployment was the name given to a liminal space between work and non-work which was difficult to conceptualize through statistical construction.

Unemployment and temporary or seasonal unemployment were categories used by the state to manage these vulnerable labor relations, which, however, were not only the survivals of slow and small-scale industrialization characterized by casual, artisanal work in the cities and agricultural self-sufficiency in small farms in the northern regions. They were also used to articulate the outcomes of vulnerabilities stemming from the advancement of capitalist agriculture on the southern large estates, dedicated to monoculture farming—predominantly cereals—and subsequently expanded to include tomato cultivation following the irrigation schemes facilitated by the regime's significant hydraulic projects. The “labor crises” were social problems identified locally, at the municipal level, and solved by targeting those areas. Continual, adaptable, description-focused monitoring by experts and local political representatives facilitated their close assessment and the anticipation of social conflict, particularly in the 1950s.

It was this vulnerable workforce of agricultural capitalism, poorly protected by corporate welfare, that became a rebellious collective. “Work produces not only goods and services but social and political subjects,” claims

philosopher Kathy Weeks.⁸⁰ During the 1940s and 1950s, these workers, which the Communist Party referred to as the “unemployed,” periodically demonstrated, demanding better working conditions. At the same time, the government also strategically used the notions of unemployment or the unemployed through the UC, setting up a political mediation for the handling of all those who had a more or less distant relationship with formalized work, such as people out of work, women without a profession, seasonal migrants, and beggars. The vulnerability of life was being understood as a unified object of rule.

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80 Kathy Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxisms, Anti-Work Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 8.

10. Rethinking Precarity: Labor, Law, and the Literary Imagination on the Margins of Europe, Late 1940s–1960s

Adrian Grama

Abstract: This chapter examines how the state socialist regimes of postwar East Central Europe addressed precarious work through labor law, legal interpretation, industrial development, and skill-formation policies. Empirically, it undertakes a comparative analysis of labor law under state socialism in East Central Europe and in other late industrializing contexts, such as Portugal under the Estado Novo. The chapter argues that precarious labor emerged historically—whether as a target of public policy, a focus of trade-union activism, or a theme in literary representation—from a fundamental contradiction: the tension between the restrictive scope of labor law and the heterogeneous employment regimes that any modern economy, socialist or capitalist, inevitably produces.

Keywords: labor law, state socialism, Estado Novo, precarity, employment

Workers' states and *Unrechtsstaaten*, what did the socialist regimes that took root in East Central Europe in the late 1940s make of precarious work? Was it a matter for labor law and jurisprudence? Or a feature of a shattered and traditionally backward economy inherited from the war and pre-war epochs to be addressed by industrial development and skill acquisition? Put differently, was precarious work under state socialism, when it was acknowledged as such, part of a history of the formalization of employment relationships, which subsumed diverse types of work under a standard employment

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contract, or was it subjected to a general modernizing push that cared little for legal categories and their enforcement by public power? Any answer to these questions, however provisory, can only be framed comparatively by exposing the trajectory of labor law under state socialism in East Central Europe to other cases of late industrializing countries that synchronized labor legislation with the overall development of their economies. For it is from the contradiction between the restrictive scope of labor law and the variegated employment regimes which any economy generates—socialist or capitalist—that precarious labor emerges historically, as an object of public policy, trade-union militancy, or, as I suggest below, the literary imagination.

Of recent coinage, in Europe at least, precarious work as a topic of discussion was from the outset shaped by the alleged tensions or frictions between an ever more diverse employment infrastructure in need of greater flexibility and the rigidity of the labor law superstructure bequeathed by decades of Fordist mass production. Such was one of the main conclusions of a major reflective piece published in the early 1990s by the International Labor Organization and authored by Tiziano Treu, distinguished legal scholar and prominent political figure of the Italian Second Republic. Following the manifold economic crises of the 1970s and the ensuing Eurosclerosis, Treu argues, employers and their associations in many European countries pushed for the transformation of employment patterns on two fronts, each resulting in significant concessions from trade unions and national legislators. On the one hand, the range of different types of employment contracts was greatly expanded, removing established limitations (administrative or otherwise) on the prerogative of employers to hire and fire, thus cutting the costs of managing the workforce. On the other hand, the scheduling and distribution of working time was heavily altered, allowing for flexible hours, the lifting of restrictions on part-time or night work, and the redrawing of the line between work and life. The confluence of the two in practice, notably against the background of a rising service economy, Treu notes, could no longer be adequately described as “atypical” or “peripheral” employment, stating that “precarious would be the more accurate term.”¹

Behind these observations is the larger issue of the mismatch between the normative order, which came into being during the middle decades of the twentieth century in order to regulate employment, and the new demands of production. If work could no longer be identified as atypical or peripheral, this was because it could no longer be interpreted as a remnant

1 Tiziano Treu, “Labor Flexibility in Europe,” *International Labour Review* 131, no. 4/5 (1992), 502.

of the past, characteristic of employment that accompanied but did not define Fordist mass production. The new semantics of precarity indicated a present in which less secure types of employment were actively created, indeed propeled, by law and policymaking, which carried no exceptional traits whatsoever but rather defined a new normal, not unlike that in other regions of the globe. No wonder that during the 1990s, sociologists could already imagine scenarios in which Europe's employment systems would come to resemble those of Latin American or African countries, a landmass of informality dotted by peaks of formal jobs reserved for fortunate minorities of highly skilled workers.² It was in this context that calls to revamp the analytical categories of the social sciences were first voiced, and injunctions to retell the history of the working-class in Europe through the prism of precarity were articulated in research agendas.³

Where, then, should one look for problematizations of precarious work in the past, beyond this late twentieth-century conjuncture? And how did the incongruity between the reach of labor law and the diversity of employment relationships become a topic of public concern? This chapter proceeds in three parts. In the first part, I engage with the literature on precarity in history by focusing on what is likely to become the standard work in the field, Eloisa Betti's *Precarious Workers*, an examination of contemporary Italy from the postwar decades to the present. I read Betti's work in search of hypotheses for a comparative historical sociology of precarity at work in the European twentieth century that might bridge the gap between legal and social history. In the second part, I take up a case study of the garment industry in Portugal of the 1950s and 1960s to show why, building on Romeu Correia's little-known novel *Trapo Azul* (*Blue Cloth*, or simply *Denim* in an approximate English translation), a focus on labor law is crucial for understanding precarious work, even in contexts such as the Estado Novo that constrained collective bargaining. For, as the renowned jurist Otto Kahn-Freund famously noted regarding the latter days of the Weimar Republic, subdued trade unions, far from being detrimental to the enhanced protection of the individual worker, were actually a precondition of it. In the third part, I explore how communist policymakers in Romania after 1945 imagined the issue of precarious work. Here, too, the focus is on a literary

2 Ulrich Beck, "Die Brasilianisierung des Westens – zwei Szenarien," in Ulrich Beck, *Schöne neue Arbeitswelt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), 28–37. See also Luciano Gallino, *Italia in frantumi* (Bari: Laterza, 2006), 7 *et passim*.

3 Most explicitly by Jan Breman and Marcel van der Linden, "Informalizing the Economy: The Return of the Social Question at a Global Level," *Development and Change* 45, no. 5 (2014), 920–40.

text: about tanneries in interwar Bucharest by the famous avantgarde poet Geo Bogza, reinterpreted in a short propaganda documentary piece of the 1960s as a way of highlighting the progress achieved by this industry and its workers under state socialism. Finally, in the concluding remarks I piece together the threads of the argument by reflecting on the reception of Portuguese novelist Pereira Gomes's *Esteiros* in state socialist Romania, the translation of which occasioned a flurry of musings on precarity at work.

“Social Piety”

Asked in the early 1990s to recall the cultural background that shaped postwar Italy's major pieces of labor legislation, Gino Giugni—the country's leading labor law mind—came up with a surprising answer. Laws that significantly increased the protection of workers on the job—by regulating fixed-term contracts, dismissals, or pregnancy—were all the outcomes of a culture of “pauperist solidarity” informing the mood of parliament, as evinced by a large-scale study into the condition of workers commissioned by lawmakers in the mid-1950s. This final report, Giugni noted, was permeated by “social piety” (*pietismo sociale*), depicting workers as “exploited, fired, persecuted or ill.” Not merely an expression of a certain brand of social Catholicism espoused by Italy's ruling party, the Christian Democrats, this was a widely held view across the political spectrum, one which socialist and communist members of parliament, as well as the trade unions under their influence, fully embraced. “If Marxists were a bit more Marxist,” Giugni argued, “and a little less pauperist, as not everyone understood that the Marxist doctrine is very different from pauperism and does not supply instruments to social piety, many errors would have been avoided.”⁴ How is Giugni's elliptic assessment to be understood? What were the faults of the labor legislation passed at the height of the Italian economic miracle? What of “social piety”?

It should be noted that Giugni is describing the inner mechanisms of the legislator, with the gears of law-making in the sphere of labor relationships oiled by a peculiar compromise between government and opposition. Rather than a polarized pluralism characterized by the presence of a large, anti-systemic Communist Party blocking off or frustrating successive legislative initiatives by the Christian Democrats, postwar Italy can be better understood as a variety of consociationalism in which a culture of

4 Gino Giugni, *Fondata sul lavoro? Conversazione con Alberto Orioli* (Rome: Ediesse, 1994), 47.

agreement flourished underneath ideological strife. Pauperism was part of it, and so too was social piety, as an attitude to precarious employment. And this reading of the postwar decades was far from unusual. Sociologist Alessandro Pizzorno reached a similar conclusion, underlining how, rather than fomenting open conflict between trade unions and employers' associations, as one would have expected from the largest anti-systemic Marxist political party of Western Europe, the Italian Communist Party settled for deals in parliament.⁵ How much the participation of the communists in the postwar consociational democracy involved a departure from Marxism or a modification of it is of little importance to us here.⁶ What mattered for Giugni was that in agreeing to laws inspired by social piety rather than pushing for labor conflict, Italian communists missed the opportunity to erect a more durable legal edifice around dependent employment. For it was, in his opinion, the unconstrained confrontation between capital and labor rather than their mutual binding to Catholic notions of social justice in parliament that would have better served the Italian working-class.

Giugni was following here the analysis of the labor laws of the late Weimar Republic proposed by Otto Kahn-Freund, the insights of whom he considered relevant for Italy as well. Much like in the Germany of the late 1920s, in the Italy of the first two postwar decades, the legislator, Giugni explained, intervened only to grant protection to the least fortunate workers, encouraging jurisprudence to articulate a doctrine of "favorable treatment" for employees, with the consequence that the individual employment relationship came to be regarded in terms of social compassion or piety, sidelining workers as an organized group engaged in collective bargaining.⁷ For Kahn-Freund, this was not merely the upshot of a certain "petty bourgeois" paternalism of the judges but rather part of a larger process of depoliticization of the working-class that he detected in interwar Germany, one that revealed just how close the jurisprudence of the *Reichsarbeitsgericht* (Reich Labor Court)

5 Alessandro Pizzorno, "Le difficoltà del consociativismo," in Alessandro Pizzorno, *Le radici della politica assoluta* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1993), 285–313.

6 Devoid of polemical intent the question makes little sense. More relevant is to ask whether Marxism, in overvaluing "productive work," provided the blinkers that directed trade unions away from attending to the service sector, or whether Marxism, as the overall culture of the more militant sections of the Italian General Confederation of Labor, through its fixation on productivity and growth missed the chance to negotiate a better transition out of Fordism. For the first question, see Aris Accornero and Nino Magna, "Il lavoro dopo la classe," *Stato e mercato*, no. 17 (1986): 253–70; for the second, see Bruno Trentin, *La città del lavoro. Sinistra e crisi del fordismo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1997).

7 Gino Giugni, "Il diritto del lavoro negli anni '80," in Gino Giugni, *Lavoro legge contratti* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989), 300–1.

came to the principles enshrined in the Carta del lavoro (Labor Charter) of fascist Italy. Indeed, according to Kahn-Freund, German judges were deeply hostile to organized labor conflict, which they attempted to subsume under an ideal of economic peace, shielding the employers' interests and relegating trade unions to the role of "instruments of peace."⁸

The imposition of this "higher" goal on collective bargaining was restrictive for organized labor and biased in favor of organized capital, but it did go hand in hand with the judges' concern for the protection of the workers in individual employment relationships. This was the other side of Kahn-Freund's analysis. In multiple rulings, the Reich Labor Court showed a propensity to protect the income and employment stability of workers, and operated with notions of loyalty, trust, and care that were traditionally applied to the civil service. This was a phenomenon of *Verbeamtung* rooted in feelings of social piety, conferring security on the individual employment contract not just for the disadvantaged elderly or disabled war veterans but also for regular manual workers in cases of dismissals, vacations, and remuneration.⁹ Coupled with the commitment to economic peace which handicapped trade unions and the pledge to increase the protection of the individual worker born out of judges' compassion for the worker's lot, the jurisprudence of the Weimar Republic of the late 1920s, according to Kahn-Freund, helped pave the way to dictatorship.¹⁰

As Giugni suggested, Kahn-Freund's essay should be read as a double indictment: both of any jurisprudential practice limiting the liberty of organized labor and of the paternalist judge (and lawmaker) moved by social piety to regulate the individual employment relationship in compensation for the muted or even suppressed collective conflicts between labor and

8 Otto Kahn-Freund, "Das soziale Ideal des Reichsarbeitsgerichts: Eine kritische Untersuchung zur Rechtsprechung des Reichsarbeitsgerichts," in *Arbeitsrecht und Politik: Quellentexte 1918–1933*, ed. Thilo Ramm (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1966), 167.

9 Pace Giugni, it should be here pointed out that Kahn-Freund borrowed the notion of social piety from Franz Neumann, who employed it with much the same meaning to analyze the guiding philosophy of the Reich Labor Court in the late Weimar epoch; see Franz Neumann, "Die politische und soziale Bedeutung der arbeitsgerichtlichen Rechtsprechung," in *Arbeitsrecht und Politik: Quellentexte, 1918–1933*, ed. Thilo Ramm (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1966), 135. As to *Verbeamtung*, the notion is difficult to render in English. For Kahn-Freund, it stood for the extension of legal guarantees typically enjoyed by civil servants (*Beamte*) to other workers, a process that made employment more secure.

10 Kahn-Freund never recanted this assessment and stood by the methodology that informed it. In an interview toward the end of his life, he did argue that he overstressed the intentional nature of the behavior of the judges; Otto Kahn-Freund, "Autobiographische Erinnerungen an die Weimarer Republik. Ein Gespräch mit Wolfgang Luthardt," *Kritische Justiz* 14, no. 2 (1981): 193.

capital. The appeal of this normative view of labor law is understandable, as it pairs well with a robust view of democratic rule that grants organized labor, in parity with capital, a leading role in regulating the economy.¹¹ But it is worth questioning it from the standpoint of a history of precarious labor. For what Kahn-Freund noticed in the jurisprudence of the Weimar Republic was after all a purposive reduction of precarity, such as, for instance, through the leveling of the legal status of manual workers to that of the office or white-collar workers (*Angestellte*), further diluted during the Nazi regime.¹² That this took place in a context of constrained collective bargaining should only make us aware that policies and laws targeting precarity at work have not always been driven by (and did not necessarily presuppose) labor conflict. In his assessment of postwar Italy, Giugni, however, went one step further in suggesting that legislation protective of employment yet originating outside of labor conflict—initiated by compassionate legislators and reinforced by judicial practice—was bound to err.

It was only with the publication of Eloisa Betti's masterful *Precarious Workers* that we have been able to take the full measure of this observation. Two distinct intellectual resources propelled the issue of precarious labor (*lavoro precario*) into the Italian public sphere of the late 1950s. The first one was constituted by developmentalist economics, which seized the chance to investigate anew the "Southern Question" against the background of the economic boom in the North. Various studies of the largely agrarian and artisanal Mezzogiorno revealed a composite landscape of labor characterized by informality, including casual, irregular, seasonal, and temporary work, in which the sheer backwardness of the economic infrastructure wasted human labor in cycles of underemployment, low productivity, and low pay. Centering on the figure of economist Paolo Sylos Labini, Betti describes the formation of this discourse as a challenge to mainstream economic categories and policymaking. Precarious work is here grasped as an obstacle to economic development rather than a legal category, to be remedied by planning, investments, and vocational training. The second emerged from the ranks of women trade unionism, where precarious work is classified as unstable, unregulated, unskilled work susceptible to exploitation and the denial of skill acquisition. This too was a developmentalist take on the issue, with precarious work relegated to the labor intensive, backward industries

11 Ruth Dukes, "Constitutionalizing Employment Relations: Sinzheimer, Kahn-Freund, and the Role of Labor Law," *Journal of Law and Society* 35, no. 3 (2008): 341–63.

12 Thomas Blanke, "Arbeiter und Angestellte – Auf dem Weg zum einheitlichen Beschäftigungsverhältnis," *Arbeit und Recht* 39, no. 1 (1991): 1–13.

that relied on women's cheap labor, notably in home-based production, but one that was also open to being interpreted in the categories of labor law.¹³ For if the opposite of precarity at work is job stability, should it not be incumbent on the law to provide guarantees of the duration or continuity of the employment contract?

The ideal of stability was arguably what motivated the parliamentary investigation into working conditions of the late 1950s. Beyond the Catholic concern with the dignity of the workers, other factors were at play as well: the constitutional order of the First Republic that placed labor at its core; a long record of employers violating employment contracts; discrimination against non-unionized workers; and the precedent of struggles for the minimum wage. The upshot was a succession of bills that together might be interpreted as a labor law package against precarious work or, in the language of the time, "particular labor relations," which aimed to prohibit workforce subcontracting and brokerage (1960), limit the recourse to fixed term-contracts (1962), ban dismissal for marriage and spinsterhood clauses (1963), and finally introduce *justa causa* as ground for dismissal to counterbalance the employer's right to *ad nutum* firings. Preceding these, a law passed in 1958 attempted to bring a modicum of protection to the vast archipelago of homework that expanded during the postwar Italian economic miracle.

How are these pieces of legislation to be assessed? No matter the rhetoric or underlining convictions that mobilized majorities in parliament, through social piety or otherwise, Betti argues that most of these laws failed to reach their goal. Employers still used any loopholes to hire on fixed-term contracts, or blackmailed homeworkers to register as self-employed; while the monetary compensation for unfair dismissal was too meagre to make up for being fired without *justa causa*.¹⁴ Few were the voices in the epoch who drew attention,

13 Eloisa Betti, *Precarious Workers. History of Debates, Political Mobilization, and Labor Reforms in Italy* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2022), 36.

14 The best description of social piety as a ground for law-making as well as its denial in practice by the connivance of employers and their workers is Edoardo Nesi's prize winning novel *Storia della mia gente* (2010). Half fictionalized autobiography, half social criticism of Italian elites embracing globalization, Nesi writes as a former businessman (descending from a family of factory owners) in the textile industry of Prato, once a thriving nexus of small and medium-sized companies, of late taken over by Chinese immigrants and all but ruined by the competition of *il prezzo romeno*. Mention of labor law occurs two times in the novel. First is a *cri de coeur* following the failure of labor inspectors to impose minimum work safety standards on the Chinese owned workshops in contemporary Prato, making a mockery of the "profound justice that led to the formation of our labor legislation [...] born as a reaction to the monstrous exploitation of the person [...] to guarantee more rights to those who work and establish that a right is still a right even if nobody protests in its name. And will be defended. Forever." The

as Giugni would do decades later, to the fact that such a legislative package would likely undermine the autonomy of collective bargaining and encourage a culture of *litigiosità giudiziaria* (judicial litigation) in which lawyers would defend the rights of workers in court, who would be paid only when employers lost the case. Yet the laws failed in an indirect way as well, as shown in the process that led to the key piece of labor legislation of the First Italian Republic, *Lo statuto dei lavoratori* (Workers' Statute) of 1970, a law that capped off the country's most intense episode of labor conflict and renewed the question of the relationship between collective agreements and legislation.¹⁵

For Betti, the Workers' Statute was as close as one could get to securing the ideal of stable employment, subsequently reinforced by a new law equalizing the status of homeworkers with those of regular employees. In particular, article 18 stipulated for the first time in Italian labor law that for companies with more than 15 employees, unfairly dismissed workers must be reinstated, a clause that significantly increased the cost of dismissals and eliminated the pay-as-you-fire procedure established for dismissals without *justa causa*. Over the past decades, this article has been constantly chipped away by successive Italian governments, often in protracted struggles with the trade unions, only to be finally laid to rest, as Betti shows in splendid detail, in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis.¹⁶ For Giugni, however—the legal mind behind the Workers' Statute—the centerpiece of the law was not so much its protection against dismissal but rather, in marked contrast with the legislation of the early 1960s, its support of trade-union autonomy. What undermined the Workers' Statute, according to Giugni, was not the revisions of article 18 but rather the spread of the underground economy, where no laws apply and where no trade unions can engage in collective bargaining.¹⁷

second mention of labor law comes in the middle of a description of the industrial boom in Prato of the 1960s and 1970s, when, Nesi writes, Italian companies prospered “away from the eye of tax authorities and the law, in a world perfectly sealed, protected by walls and nuclear missiles, customs and tariffs.” (Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this chapter are my own.)
 15 See, for instance, Mario Giovanni Garofalo, “Art. 18 Reintegrazione nel posto di lavoro,” in *Lo statuto dei lavoratori. Commentario*, ed. Gino Giugni (Milan: Giuffrè, 1979), 254 who shows that many of the clauses of the 1966 law on dismissals were already present in the *accordo interconfederale* of 1965.

16 Betti, *Precarious Workers*, 203 *et passim*. For the trade unions' investment (and stakes) in these legal reforms, see Aris Accornero, “The (Failed) Reform of Article 18,” *Italian Politics* 18 (2002), 199–220. For an indictment of article 18 by a prominent labor law scholar, taken to have produced rather than alleviated precarity, see Pietro Ichino, *Inchiesta sul lavoro. Perché non dobbiamo avere paura di una grande riforma* (Milano: Mondadori, 2011), 75 *et passim*.

17 Gino Giugni, “Giuridificazione e deregolazione nel diritto del lavoro Italiano,” in Gino Giugni, *Lavoro legge contratti* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989), 351–54.

What, then, should be the main take-aways of this Italian case in dealing with precarity? First, it is notable that the law was neither the only nor even the primary solution for responding to precarious labor. It became so once precarity was understood as lack of stability, and the focus switched from thinking about development, skill acquisition, and investments to limiting the employers' power. Second, the means of addressing this issue could and did vary, from legislation passed in parliament to collective agreements resulting from bargaining. In each case, however—and on this point Betti's meticulous research joins Giugni's observations—labor law has always been restrictive, applying unevenly to the world of work by allowing for a multitude of exceptions. Finally, modeled on the protections enjoyed by male workers on assembly lines, the process of extending the guarantees of stability to workers outside of the Fordist universe of mass production reveals no straightforward correspondence between legal form and employment infrastructure. What Fordism did was generalize about a social rather than a legal ideal of stability at work, later to be expanded, however inchoately, by trade-union militancy or social piety to groups of workers employed beyond the assembly line. In this process, as Betti shows, labor law became the central solution to precarity. What, then, of two national contexts—Portugal and Romania during the middle decades of the twentieth century—bereft of mass production, trade-union freedom, and parliamentary assertion? The remaining part of this chapter will document how precarity was approached in these circumstances.

“This Law so Natural”

Much like the developmentalist economics of the mid-twentieth century, literature of a neo-realist or “populist” kind served as a medium for depictions of precarious labor in many national contexts.¹⁸ Take, for instance, the opening paragraph of Romeu Correia's *Trapo Azul*, a novel published in 1948, through which the author introduces the fishing communities of his native Almada, located on the banks of the Tagus, opposite the city of Lisbon.

18 Still the best survey of the genre is Gregory McNab, *The Neo-realist Novel in Portugal: Literature as a Political Weapon* (PhD diss., New York University, 1973), 1–27. On Correia as the best populist novelist of mid-century Portugal, see José Pedro Zúquete, *Populismo, lá fora e cá dentro* (Lisbon: Fundação Francisco Manuel Dos Santos, 2022), 90.

Spring was late this year. Rain and more rain. Only toward the end of April did the sky clear and the fields greened and blossomed. A new mood grew inside of me and the girls of my kind, all locked indoors during the winter. The summer was our liberation, our shield, as its abundance of fruit was a gift for our tiny, malnourished stomachs. There is no shame in saying it for it is common knowledge here: in the land of fishermen life is made of excruciating toil and meagre pay. The masters of the fishing companies use the same registers as their fathers, who themselves inherited it from their forefathers. No elderly person on this beach could explain who created this law so natural (*aquela lei tão natural*), so respectful of numbers, yet so absurd.

Uttered by the novel's main character, Laurinda, a fifteen-year-old girl, these words describe the circle of capitalist exploitation in the metropolitan Portuguese fishing industry. What could be more precarious than fishing on commercial ships: seasonal (winters were dead periods), dangerous (villages were littered with religious paraphernalia), miserably remunerated, often paid in kind? Correia's second novel, *Calamento*, published in 1950, paints a vivid picture of the fishermen of Costa Caparica: waking up to board the ships in the middle of the night (*ensejo da noite*) or in the early hours of the morning, facing storms, catching sardines, and contemplating a different fate for their children. For indeed, as one character notes, commercial fishing has reduced the size of the catches, and no fisherman can any longer look forward in earnest to a future on the ocean. Jobs in factories were the only escape, as in and around Lisbon "there were always bosses." For women, the wives and daughters of fishermen, the options were no brighter. In *Calamento*, Correia portrays the emergence of tourism on the beaches of Caparica, as bourgeois families descend from Lisbon to spend the summer weeks sunbathing, renting out huts from the villagers, and being serviced by them. Selling the fish their husbands are entitled to is the only other option.¹⁹

Marrying a fisherman, Laurinda observed, is not advisable for a young woman. Living with such men—"workers without working hours"—will

19 Romeu Correia, *Calamento* (Lisbon: Parceria A.M. Pereira, 1978), see in particular 56 for the process of hiring fishermen; 83 for the family of Senhor Ribeiro, an employee with Teles & Cunha in Lisbon, arriving for the summer vacation upon the advice of his medical doctor; 126 for the factory as a desirable future for boys; and finally, 150 for fishermen's wives begging Senhor Rui, a ship owner, to save them from famine during the winter. For an ethnographic account of pretty much the same topics covered by Correia, see the classic study of a fishing village in Northern Portugal by Sally Cole, *Women of the Praia: Work and Lives in a Portuguese Coastal Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

“always be like having water on board,” suffocating under the anxiety of losing one’s husband to the sea. Breaking this cycle can only happen through entering the world of homeworkers of the garment industry which flourished across Almada. *Trapo Azul* follows the trajectory of Laurinda as she and her older sister become seamstresses, first in a small workshop under the supervision of an acquaintance and then in the thriving sweatshop of Menina Ema. Finally, she becomes a self-standing, independent seamstress. The question of literary merit aside, the value of Correia’s novel resides not so much in the documentation of the labor process itself as in the representation of the larger node of social relations where the chains of sub-contracting link the homeworkers of Almada to the shops of Lisbon.

The workshops of Almada where Laurinda enters the profession all produce *macacos*, workers’ outfits made out of denim. As an apprentice, one started with needlework on buttonholes, bringing the tools needed from home (scissors, needles, etc.), gradually making one’s way up to the sewing machine, which required not just a record of commitment to the job but also the goodwill of the master. Larger sweatshops, like the one owed by Menina Ema, herself a former worker who climbed up to the status of *mestra* (boss), distinguished between married and unmarried women workers, valuing both over those in a mere relationship, who were more likely to quit their job on a whim. Seamstresses worked barefooted on their Singer sewing machines, in an atmosphere of numb sadness (*torpor de tristeza*): abusive yelling, intolerance for gossip, feverish work rhythms. Over their lunchbreak, those fortunate enough to have something to eat would often chat about marriage, some recalling the violence they endured at the hands of their husbands; others daydreamed about faraway places: “In America, some factories play music because in this way workers work harder.”²⁰

It does not take long for Laurinda to become independent or, as one of her former colleagues called her, a capitalist: take out a loan, acquire her own Singer machine, and move back to her parents’ house to set up shop.²¹ But this is merely to exchange the exploitation suffered under Menina Ema

20 When Menina Ema’s own daughter contemplates the prospect of marrying a worker, the mother’s reaction is brutally hostile: “Um operário, santo Deus! Um homem sem futuro, um mal-trajado, um bêbedo!” Romeu Correia, *Trapo Azul* (Lisbon: Editorial Notícias, 1989), 126 and 142 for the ironic remark addressed to Laurinda by Arnalda, an employee of Ema: “Aonde vais, *capitalista*?” (Italics in the original).

21 On the marketing strategies of Singer, including the practice of encouraging bank loans to be repaid in installments, see Leda Papastefanaki, “Sewing at Home in Greece, 1870s to 1930s: A Global History Perspective,” in *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers (1800–2021)*, ed. Malin Nilsson et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 82 *et passim*.

for the no less direct one of the shop masters of Lisbon. For self-standing seamstresses had to secure their own sufficient orders from the shops (*lojas de costura*), a process that entailed not only traveling to the capital city—standing in queues with other seamstresses, sub-contractors, and masters—but also establishing personal relationships with shop owners (*fanqueiros*), even at the price of entering games of seduction, entertaining marriage proposals, and eventually conceding to give sexual favors. Much of this could often resemble a ritual of humiliation rather than negotiation, with shop owners deciding singlehandedly the prices they would pay and picking out those seamstresses willing to work for it. It is only through enticing Arlindo, the nephew of one of the shop owners, that Laurinda finally gets a first order, and builds trust with the owners of the store Silva & Nunes: “The entry of Arlindo in my life was a wonder. Someone was giving me a hand. I became full of life, full of hope for better days. I could count on friendship, but also on protection! And this luck translated into prestige....” It is only once friendship turns into emotional abuse, and as dependency on the goodwill of Arlindo determines the availability of work, that Laurinda even considers taking a job in a factory.²² But this desperate solution is never pursued in the novel, and Correia ends *Trapo Azul* with Laurinda leaving her family house to move in with her sister, looking to become “independent and useful [...] without needing to live off the expenses of the first man who fancies me.”

Even in this brief summary of the novel, the main components of what has been called *marchandage* or sub-contracting, as well as the class structure and gender roles that undergird it, become clear.²³ Yet neither labor law nor the ideal of stability receive any mention. Correia’s characters live in a world ruled not by contracts but by personal relationships, and even factory work, the supposed embodiment of a less personalized and more secure employment, is only mentioned in fleeting moments of despair, as a last resort for women. This is still very much precarity at work, but one so deeply embedded in local society that to apply to it the categories of developmentalist economics or those of labor law would inevitably remove it from the web of social relationships of dependence to which it belongs. For it is not only at work that Laurinda is

22 Correia, *Trapo Azul*, 179. This is the advice Laurinda receives from her sister: “Work for somebody else for a short while. There are plenty of sub-contractors (*empreiteiras*) around.” And she smiled: “It is better to earn something than nothing at all. And in any case, at the cork factory, as a beginner, you won’t be paid better”

23 On marchandage or generalized sub-contracting in the Paris textile and fashion industries of the early twentieth century, and its impact on labor law, see Claude Didry, *L’institution du travail. Droit et salariat dans l’histoire* (Paris: La Dispute, 2016), 72 et *passim*.

exploited, but also in the family, mostly by her father, a retired tax inspector who lives off her income and accumulates debt with Silva & Nunes by asking for payments in advance in her name. This extractive kinship unit, too—the family—in treating children as small animals (*animaizinhos*), drove precarity.

Absent from *Trapo Azul*, labor law was nevertheless a central feature of labor relations during the Portuguese Estado Novo. It came in two forms: first, as regulation of the individual employment contract through law 1:952 of March 1937 (replaced by *decreto-lei* 47032 in 1966, further revised in 1969), and second, as collective agreements between trade unions and employers' associations. The relationship between the two was one of complementarity: collective agreements could, in principle, contain clauses more favorable to the workers than those of the law of 1937; conversely, they could not infringe on the rights already established by that law. How this tension played out is a blind spot of contemporary Portuguese historiography, with two notable exceptions: the early and the late years of the Estado Novo.²⁴ Granted, in between the late 1930s and the late 1960s—periods that marked their origins and revival—collective agreements seemed formally ossified, and were surely rare, taking years for them to be revised, often with little input from the trade unions themselves, whose bargaining rights were not merely severely constrained but also occasionally corrupt. For instance, throughout much of the 1950s, in addition to financial fraud, the leadership of the National Trade Union of Seamstresses of Lisbon, composed predominantly of Catholic women, also welcomed among its ranks a factory manager, in a flagrant conflict of interest with the existing regulations.²⁵

It fell on jurisprudence, particularly the rulings of the Supreme Administrative Court (Supremo Tribunal Administrativo)—Portugal's highest court—to uphold the ideal of stability in labor relations and sort out, often against the lower courts, the precedence of collective agreements. This was not always a consistent jurisprudence, but it was sufficiently coherent to allow us to see a process unfold, not unlike the one described by Otto Kahn-Freund for Weimar Germany and Fascist Italy.²⁶ For it is indeed hard

24 Fátima Patriarca, "A regulamentação de trabalho nos primeiros anos do regime corporativo," *Análise Social* 29, no. 128 (1994): 801–39 and Ricardo Noronha, "Inflação e contratação colectiva (1968–1974)," in *O Estado Novo em Questão*, ed. Nuno Domingos and Victor Pereira (Lisbon: Edições 70, 2010), notably 247–51.

25 Subsequently removed upon an official investigation, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Inspeção dos Organismos Corporativos, cx. 34, proc. 1, 68.

26 For one example of inconsistency pertaining to vacation days, see the critique of Manoel Martins de Almeida, "O direito a férias no trabalho por tarefa," *A indústria do norte*, no. 456 (1957): 29.

to find in the jurisprudence of the Supreme Administrative Court a single ruling that did not favor the employees, whether blue- (*assalariados*) or white-collar (*empregados*) workers. And it is equally hard not to read some of the rulings as an explicit endorsement of stability, notably in industries characterized by seasonality such as canned fish, which were “notoriously subjected to crisis.”²⁷ More importantly, jurisprudence developed its own notions, absent from both law or collective agreements, such as “indirect dismissal,” and here lower courts contributed too.

Take, for instance, a case from 1963 involving a shoemaker, which might just as well be applied to a seamstress out of *Trapo Azul*.²⁸ Manuel Figueira Albano appealed before the Lisbon Labor Court, claiming both indemnity for denied vacation days and compensation upon unfair dismissal. Manuel considered himself part of the permanent staff of Sapataria Lisbel (Lisbel Shoe Shop), who hired him to make shoes in his own house assisted by an apprentice. But he was also engaged occasionally in domestic work for his employer. The company then relocated Manuel to one of its factories in Benfica, to work on the assembly line (*em cadeia*), against which he protested and finally quit. The judges found the claim for unfair dismissal to be justified only for the move from Lisbon to Benfica, which caused a substantial alteration to his conditions of work, and, as such, was a way of forcing Manuel out of employment. But they did not approve the compensation for the missed vacation days, which, even if true, could not apply to his status before the relocation to Benfica. Working in one’s home, away from the direct supervision of the employer, on an irregular schedule and with a helper as a side-worker, qualified Manuel as a homemaker, not part of the permanent staff, hence an “autonomous” worker excluded from the law based on the individual employment contract of 1937. The collective contract of the shoemaking industry, however, improving on this law, granted even homeworkers vacation days, making Manuel entitled to claim both indemnity and compensation. Taking note of this, the court

27 For the abusive lengthening of the working day due to sudden abundance of fish, see Acórdão de 9 de Dezembro de 1941, in *Colecção de acórdãos*, vol. 2, ed. Portugal. Supremo Tribunal Administrativo (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1943), 208. For illegal dismissals due to the absence of fish, see Acórdão de 9 de Fevereiro de 1954, *Colecção de acórdãos*, vol. 15 (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1955), 82–84 and Acórdão de 9 de Julho de 1957, *Colecção de acórdãos*, vol. 19 (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1959), 532. Finally, for the equal treatment of blue and white-collar workers as per the clauses of the collective agreement which improved on the law of 1937 see Acórdão de 17 de Julho de 1956, *Colecção de acórdãos*, vol. 17 (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1957), 577–79.

28 Reprinted in *Estudos sociais e corporativos*, no. 9 (1963): 148–52. For how the notion of indirect dismissal was used by the Supremo, see “Acórdão de 13 de Outubro de 1964,” in *Estudos sociais e corporativos*, no. 12 (1964): 221–23, again for the alteration of the conditions of work.

granted Manuel compensation for being denied holidays, thus prioritizing collective contracts over the individual law on the employment contract, in addition to indemnity for being forced out of employment. Had there been no collective contracts for the shoemaking industry, Manuel would have received just the indemnity for unfair dismissal, as working from home was not considered dependent or subordinated work under the law of 1937, a type of work that should be legally compensated with a certain number of vacation days per year proportionate to one's seniority or length in service.

It would be far-fetched to claim that under the Estado Novo in Portugal, collective contracts provided protection for precarious work. But it is beyond doubt that they were, undergirded by jurisprudence, objects of struggle that in some exceptional circumstances supplied some guarantees of stability to workers, even to homeworkers, above and beyond the law on the individual employment contract. Much of it depended, naturally, on access to the judiciary, and it should not come as a surprise that an in-depth study conducted among the seamstresses of Lisbon in the mid-1960s found very few homeworkers calling for more protective laws. In all likelihood intended to serve future law-making, the study arrived at the conclusion that, like Laurinda in *Tapo Azul*, the highest seamstresses aspired to was independence, most of them showing aversion to factory work, fixed schedules, and the workplace atmosphere (*ambiente de oficina*).²⁹ Indeed, the study ought to be read as the ethnographic supplement to Correia's novel, proposing to answer the question as to "why so many women continue to this day to accept and even to opt to work as external workers, in such unfavorable conditions."³⁰

Much like the Italian law of 1958, the collective contract of the garment industry obliged Portuguese employers and the trade unions to keep a detailed record of homeworkers: their pay rate, skill level, contributions to social security, and residence.³¹ The vast majority of them, however, were kept in the shadows, unregistered, and dependent on orders from shops, which they obtained through personal relations (*relações pessoais*) or acquaintances (*conhecimentos*), and for which they had to cultivate a vast network of contacts among owners of shops, workshops, factories,

29 Maria de Conceição Tavares da Silva, "Trabalho no domicílio," *Estudos sociais e corporativos*, no. 4 (1962): 13–41—a survey of the legal status of homeworkers in various European countries.

30 Maria de Conceição Tavares da Silva, "Problemas do trabalho feminino externo na indústria do vestuário," *Estudos sociais e corporativos*, no. 8 (1963): 112.

31 Eloisa Betti, "Industrial Home Work and Fordism in Western Europe Women's Activism, Labour Legislation and Union's Mobilization in Golden Age Italy, 1945–75," in *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers (1800–2021)*, ed. Malin Nilsson et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 232–40.

ateliers, or sub-contractors.³² This was irregular work, often interrupted for weeks and months (which homeworkers considered, tongue-in-cheek no doubt, their vacation) due to the lack of orders (*estações mortas*), and one that required constant and costly effort to “keep oneself updated” with the latest opportunities. Surely a source of anxiety, this uncertainty was mostly regarded as blind fate (*fatalidade invencível*), to be made up for in periods of frenzied activity, typically around the major holidays.³³ Owners of their own sewing machines, women homeworkers could come from a variety of backgrounds, and blamed their meagre pay on the oversupply of workers rather than on the employers, who covered neither the cost of electricity nor transportation, let alone the degradation of the Singers. Having thus painted a picture of the universe of women homeworkers, the study ended not with recommendations for upgrading labor law but rather with a piece of Catholic advice on the protection of the family and of the overworked female body. This, too, was a variety of social piety, soon to be confirmed by a landmark ruling of the Supreme Administrative Court which, involving a case of indirect dismissal during pregnancy, argued that, due to the intimate nature of the event, women workers were not obliged to inform their employer of their condition.³⁴

Squalor

Nothing was more alien to representations of precarious work under state socialism than social piety and labor law categories. To understand why, we might as well plunge into the writings of Romanian avantgarde poet Geo Bogza, who, eking out a living as a reporter in the 1930s, produced the most comprehensive literary map of the world of work of interwar Romania. In a series of reportages, Bogza undertook to describe the work and life of oil workers, gold miners, butchers, washerwomen, garbage pickers, street vendors, dogcatchers, tanners, and, after 1945, coal miners.³⁵ Several common themes run through these descriptions. First, the degradation of the body,

32 “Estar nas boas graças,” in da Silva, “Problemas,” 130.

33 Maria de Conceição Tavares da Silva, “Problemas do trabalho feminino externo na indústria do vestuário (Conclusão),” *Estudos sociais e corporativos*, no. 9 (1964): 101.

34 Acórdão do Supremo Tribunal Administrativo de 4 de Junho de 1967, in *Estudos sociais e corporativos*, no. 23 (1968): 189–95.

35 To the legitimate question whether the reportage, as genre, belongs to literature, Bogza would have probably answered emphatically in the affirmative, as other prominent practitioners of the genre in interwar Romania did, see, for instance, F. Brunea-Fox, *Reportajele mele, 1927–1938*

male and female alike: hardly a Bessarabian tailor who was not a hunchback, crooked under the cramped spaces where many of them lived and worked, repurposing second-hand clothes, as none of their customers could afford new ones.³⁶ Exhausted slaughterhouse workers (*parlagii*), weighing less than the dogs of their employers; exhausted washerwomen, sleeping less than their children and husbands; famished oil workers, fueled only by a diet of apples and breadcrumbs—all seemed to be on the edge of starvation. Second, the mortal danger of the working conditions: the mountain villages of the gold miners, Bogza noted, were replete with religious symbols, not unlike, we might say, the fishing villages of the Portuguese coast—in Correia's *Calamento*, one fishing boat was called *Deus te guie* (God Guides You); at the gold mine of Roșia Montană, miners prayed collectively twice a day, once before they went underground and again once they emerged.³⁷ Finally, exploitation, including self-exploitation: oil barons ran their fields like generals at war, disregarding any human cost; independent gold miners employed their own children to ferret out the gold because, without the resources to enlarge the tunnels, only tiny bodies would fit underground.

Wretched and abused bodies amidst hellish working conditions was the topic of Bogza's most famous reportage, "Tanneries" (*Tăbăcării*), first published in 1934. Here, literary mastery and sociological observation combined to depict the "most odious industry on the face of the earth," located not far from the center of Romania's capital city, Bucharest. It was the general squalor that impressed any visitor to the tanneries: workers covered in smut; the smell of decaying, rotten flesh; putrid debris in and outside the factories. The workforce was a mosaic of unskilled migrant workers from Transylvania and locals of all sexes and age groups manning the machines: "women because they are cheaper than men, children because they are cheaper than women."³⁸ The labor process was itself mixed, with the burdensome physical exertion typically assigned to men and the machine work to women, a strategy intended to undercut skill and wage costs. In addition, various methods of speeding up production were implemented, often at the risk of work accidents, while the trade union was merely a front

(Iasi: Polirom, 2020), 18–19 for the argument that the reportage was akin to the literary memoir or diary.

36 Geo Bogza, *Țări de piatră, de foc și de pământ* (Bucharest: Fundația pentru literatură și artă Regele Carol II, 1939), 243.

37 Geo Bogza, "Țară de piatră," in Geo Bogza, *Anii împotrivirii* (Bucharest: U.T.M., 1953), 161–62, 200. See also Geo Bogza, "Bresla măcelarilor," *Vremea*, May 12, 1935, 15.

38 Geo Bogza, "Tăbăcării," in Bogza, *Anii împotrivirii* (Bucharest: U.T.M., 1953), 102.

for the employers' interests, busily collecting membership fees rather than collectively bargaining on behalf of those who paid their dues.

Was Bogza in possession of a notion of precarious work? Perhaps the best statement to this effect comes from his incursion into the lives of coal miners, a longer text researched shortly after the end of World War Two and published in 1947. "Men and Coal in the Jiu Valley" (*Oameni și cărbuni în Valea Jiului*) begins with a reflection on the atom bomb and the future of mankind in the nuclear age, as Bogza sits on the beaches of the Black Sea, in the company of coal miners sent by their employers to rest and recover. With coal needed for postwar reconstruction, Bogza visits the mining region of the Jiu Valley, where he finds much of the same exploitation, terrible working conditions, and mutilated bodies as in his interwar writings: miners work three shifts naked, in "hellish heat"; always hungry and fatigued, many missing some fingers as they roam around desperately in search of food.

But it was the sight of their living quarters, so-called *colonii*, that evoked the sheer destitution of the mining communities: the misery and squalor left behind, Bogza suggested, by capitalist industrialization and the pursuit of profit. With an eye for the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous, Bogza saw the Jiu Valley as a land stratified through historical time, man and machine belonging each to diverse epochs: "Unlike in any other region of our country, what is surprising about the Jiu Valley is the imbrication of modern, industrial forms of life with ancient, often archaic ones, through which the lives of the natives carry on."³⁹ Bogza looked forward to a socialist future in which such dissonant temporalities would be resolved, not so much through any betterment of the work performed by miners, which was doomed to remain alienating, but rather through the arrival of decent living and working conditions.

Embraced by and embracing the Communist Party after 1947, Bogza became an influential voice of the regime.⁴⁰ This vision of overcoming the dissonant temporality in the realm of work and life would frame the ways in which precarious labor under socialism would be conceived. It could involve neither social piety nor labor law. The first because talk of exploitation under state socialism was either taboo or relegated to self-criticism that resulted in administrative redress rather than law-making; work accidents were a

39 Geo Bogza, *Oameni și cărbuni în Valea Jiului* (Bucharest: Editura de stat, 1947), 196.

40 In 1956, during the First Writers' Congress of Socialist Romania, Bogza asked for the country's national poet—Mihai Eminescu, a nineteenth-century bard—to be buried on the shores of the Black Sea so that miners, metalworkers, textile women workers, train conductors and students could pay their respects during their vacations; "Cuvântul lui Geo Bogza," in *Lucrările primului congres al scriitorilor din Republica Populară Română* (Bucharest: Editura de Stat, 1956), 215.

paradigmatic example.⁴¹ The second because labor law under state socialism was “exhaustive” in the sense in which, as one jurist explained, what was permitted was only what the law explicitly permitted, with no possibility to alter it via contracts, collective or individual.⁴² Within this legal system, jurisprudence still played the leading role, but this was a merely technical one of synchronizing the evolving labor legislation and making sense of the many loopholes contained by the Labor Code.⁴³

Precarious work could thus emerge only as an object of comparison in a developmentalist discourse that reached diachronically back into Romania’s capitalist past and synchronically in the capitalist present of the Cold War. Take, for instance, the eleven-minutes-long documentary “Tanneries” (*Tăbăcării*) made by director Mirel Ilieșiu in 1963. Bearing the same title as Bogza’s reportage, the film is an exercise in juxtaposition, whereby images and words recorded in 1934 were counterposed with the presentation of a modern, socialist tannery, located on the outskirts of Bucharest.⁴⁴ Mediating between the two was the figure of Bogza himself, in flesh and bone, invited to visit the new facility and reflect upon the gap between past and present. Driven by car, Bogza entered a landscape of order, with new buildings left and right, on a road delimited by rows of blooming flowers. The “dialogue of contrasts,” an off-screen voice informed the viewers, was ready to begin. Spanning thirty years, Bogza himself reflected on the circumstances that led to his reportage, reading excerpts from his text, while the camera moved in the present to capture impeccably dressed tanners in immaculate working clothes, as they strolled around the factory, chatting and smiling. Inside the factory, the contrast became even starker, as Bogza read his depiction of the filthy working environment of old and the camera showed an airy, luminous, high-ceilinged hall, filled with automated machines arranging the leather, as if in a classic of structuralist anthropology where dualisms—cold and hot, primitive and civilized—abounded. No wonder that the curator who recovered Ilieșiu’s documentary and issued

41 Adrian Grama, “Labor’s Risks: Work Accidents, the Industrial Wage Relation and Social Insurance in Socialist Romania,” in *Labor in State Socialist Europe after 1945: Contributions to Global Labor History*, ed. Marsha Siefert (Budapest: CEU Press, 2020), 245–71.

42 Gheorghe Brehoi, “Contractele colective de muncă la nivel național pentru anul 1992,” *Dreptul*, no. 4 (1992): 9.

43 Șerban Beligrădeanu, “Examen al unor soluții jurisprudențiale eronate ale fostului Tribunal Suprem în domeniul legislației muncii pronunțate în anii 80,” *Dreptul*, no. 4 (1990): 2–5. The first Labor Code of socialist Romania was passed as Law 50 in June 1950.

44 Published in the newspaper *Cuvântul liber* in 1934, Bogza’s reportage was accompanied by the drawings of surrealist painter Jules Perahim.

it on DVD assigned it to the category of “political commissioning,” which it no doubt was, yet a political commission reflective of a deeper structuring structure of a working life under state socialism.⁴⁵

What of the change that the documentary was portraying? Bogza himself, invited to utter a kind of an epilogue to his reportage while walking the factory floor among tidy men, women, and machines, spoke of witnessing “with high moral satisfaction” a new “humane, dignified work.” This was what state socialism had brought about—an overcoming of abject toil, now esthetically rendered as a “dialogue of contrasts.” If work was now humane and dignified, this had more to do with technological progress, development, or modernization than with labor law. Yet this would be a misleading conclusion, insufficiently piercing the socialist world of work. For above and beyond the automated machines, untarnished overalls, and spotless factory floors, the documentary also inevitably showed, without mentioning it, a legal universe of *verbeamtete* employees, as Otto Kahn-Freund would have it, all hired on open-ended, life-long contracts: highly difficult to be dismissed, unlikely to be relocated, their wages set by ministerial decree. Socialist trade unions were as much of a transmission belt as the ones Bogza described in the 1930s, but the legal edifice build around the individual employment contract was poles apart.

Formally, Romanian socialist labor law was hardly different from the Italian or Portuguese one. As Bernard Rudden noted of Soviet private law, its structure and wording were instantly recognizable to anybody familiar with the French Civil Code or the German Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch, and many of its stipulations were not mere reflections of the Soviet economic infrastructure. It was thus not the concepts, rules, and techniques of Soviet private law that made it different, but its context and function. There was nothing uniquely socialist in the content of the norms on property of the Soviet Civil Code, Rudden argued; but these articles, he insisted, should be set alongside with the article of the Soviet Constitution that declared income from labor as the sole legitimate ground for ownership.⁴⁶ In other words, the context in which these norms operated limited their function by clearly circumscribing the objects to which they applied. Soviet citizens could own a multitude of goods—a savings account, a dacha, a car—as consumers

45 The documentary was issued in 2017 by Adina Brădeanu in the DVD collection *One World Romania*, Sahia Vintage, vol. 4: *Political Commissioning*. The collection includes five DVDs, each gathering a number of documentaries realized under state socialism under the following headings: vol. 1: *Documentary, Ideology, Life*; vol. 2: *Work*; vol. 3: *Children*; vol. 5: *Ephemeral Films*.

46 Bernard Rudden, “Scientific Socialism and Soviet Private Law,” *Notre Dame Law Review* 6, no. 2 (1986): 159–60.

rather than producers. To own something as a producer was to own capital, a pecuniary form of property that generated a type of income—profit in one form or another—abolished by the constitution.

Much of the same logic applied to labor law under state socialism. In its main concepts, this was a branch of law that distinguished between employment and self-employment; defined the employment contract in terms of juridical subordination; allowed for a variety of types of contracts according to duration; instituted procedures for dismissal; and, like the Italian Workers' Statute, obliged employers to rehire workers fired without *justa causa*. Jurisprudence then channeled these principles, discouraging the use of temporary contracts, reviewing cases of unfair dismissals, or clarifying the limits of sub-contracting.⁴⁷ Missing from the Romanian Labor Code of 1950, and socialist labor law more generally, was the figure of the employer as private owner of capital, free to impose or negotiate the terms for recruiting labor. *Verbeamtung* was the logical though not unavoidable upshot of this constitutive absence, the flipside of a socialized economy. Precarity as lack of job stability, to be remedied by law or contract, was thus excluded from the panoply of forms of precarity imaginable under state socialism, which could encompass abuse, transgression, or discrimination—in short, domination of the employee by the employer—as jurist Franz Neumann presciently noted, for “regardless of whether property is public or private, the exercise of power remains.”⁴⁸

Coda

This chapter has argued that our contemporary understanding of precarious work, more so in Europe than globally, has been shaped by successive stages in the evolution of labor law during which an ideal of stable employment—articulated in law, negotiated in collective agreements, and reinforced by jurisprudence—has come to be extended over ever-wider segments of the workforce. This process has been well documented for the First Italian Republic, where parliamentary assertion in the late 1950s and trade-union militancy in the late 1960s resulted in a generalization of legal guarantees

47 See, for instance, the cases presented before the Supreme Tribunal, in *Culegere de decizii ale Tribunalului Suprem al R.P.R pe anul 1957*, ed. Republica Socialistă România (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1958), 207–54.

48 Franz L. Neumann, “Labor Law in Modern Society,” in *The Rule of Law Under Siege: Selected Essays of Franz L. Neumann and Otto Kirchheimer*, ed. W.E. Scheuerman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 232.

of stability to workers active in industries traditionally out of the reach of labor law. Similarly, I argued that traces of this legal dynamic did unfold even under authoritarian, corporatist regimes like Salazar's Portugal, where it fell on collective agreements and jurisprudence rather than law-making to provide more stability to workers, however insufficient that legal protection might have been in practice. In such historical circumstances, precarity has come to be understood, both in the language of the time and in retrospect, as irregular, casual, seasonal work: features of informality that implied, as Romeu Correia's novel *Trapo Azul* illustrates, personalized and personal subjection, exploitation, meagre pay, and uncertainty galore.

The context in which labor law operated and the function it was supposed to fulfil under state socialism in East Central Europe, I have showed, did not fit neatly into this understanding of precarious work. It was not that these regimes did not know irregular, casual, seasonal, or other forms of informal work, which typically characterized work performed in agriculture or in the small cooperative sector—the latter no different from homeworkers of any capitalist society. It was just that industrial and service jobs, in the vast majority, were almost always inserted into a stable employment contract. I suggested that this was due to the absence of private employers, understood broadly as legal entities free to dispose of their capital how they chose, and hence able to decide the terms under which they deployed their workforce. From this perspective, the world of work of state socialism, for all its variety, was essentially peopled by workers who were actually *Beamte*. It was this structural feature that defined the specificity of discussions of precarity under state socialism, which could either reach back in time or look far afield to capitalism for negative examples of exploitation.

It may thus be instructive to end this chapter with a final example, the reception of Pereira Gomes's novel *Esteiros* (Estuaries) in socialist Romania. A militant of the Portuguese Communist Party, Pereira Gomes narrates one year in the life of a gang of teenagers in Alhandra, on the banks of the Tagus. The four chapters, titled after each of the four seasons respectively, follow the main characters around from autumn to summer: starving during the winter and looking forward to work in a tile factory in late spring. Tile production, already endangered by imports from France and the building industry's switch to concrete, remained one of the main sources of income for the locals: harrowing, backbreaking work, yet much preferred to working in the fields, where one "lives with the oxen and gets beaten up." The dream of the youngsters, especially of the one called Maquineta, is to become an apprentice with the *Fábrica Grande* (Big Factory) and work their way up to an industrial, skilled, and well-paid job. Yet just as Maquineta is called up

to the factory, after endless petitions his mother sends to the wife of the manager, he discovers that no such future is in store, particularly for “men and teenagers without secure work (*sem trabalho certo*).”⁴⁹

Esteiros is much more than a novel about the destitution of seasonal workers, exploited by seasonal entrepreneurs like Zé Vicente, the owner of the tile factory, who is himself exploited by Mister Castro, the owner of the land on which the tiles are manufactured. It is also a novel about wasted youth, crushed hopes, and misery, obliquely an indictment of the Estado Novo during which child labor was not only employed in vast numbers but also, paradoxically, protected by labor law.⁵⁰ In March 1938, the Supreme Administrative Court heard a case involving a ten-year-old boy who lost an arm while working in a factory and was now seeking compensation, after having been denied the claim in the lower courts. The employer, while acknowledging the child was doing menial work in the factory, much like Maquineta in Pereira Gomes's novel, argued that the child was not supposed to operate the machine that amputated his arm, and that, given his age, he could not have been employed with a contract. The judges ruled in favor of the child, citing the duty of all Portuguese citizens to perform work and mentioning that since no law expressly prohibited work under a certain age, a child working in a factory had to be considered employed with a work contract.⁵¹

Translated into Romanian in 1956, *Esteiros* was widely reviewed in the press of the time. In the introductory note he wrote for the novel, its translator, Ovidiu Drimba, noted that for the Romanian audience, the book would evoke an alien, unfamiliar landscape on the other side of the continent, but its message would be clear to all: the test of any political regime is how it deals with children.⁵² In *Femeia*, the magazine of socialist women, the novel passed as an indictment of a fascist dictatorship and of the economic order that underpinned it, depriving children of their childhood. The topic of the

49 Urbano Tavares Rodrigues, “O real e o imaginário em “Esteiros” de Soeiro Pereira Gomes,” *Colóquio/Letras*, Lisboa, no. 51 (1979): 26. For the scene, see Soeiro Pereira Gomes, *Obras Completas de Soeiro Pereira Gomes* (Lisbon: Edições Avante, 1979), 120–21.

50 Pereira Gomes dedicated his novel to the sons of all the men who did not have a childhood, to which a woman reader of *Esteiros* retorted that the novel should also have been dedicated to all the daughters of women who did not have a childhood; Felisabela Vieira, quoted in Manuela Cândio Reis, *A Passagem: Uma biografia de Soeiro Pereira Gomes* (Lisbon: Editorial Caminho, 2007), 156. For the use of child labor more generally, see Pedro Goulart and Arjun S. Bedi, “The Evolution of Child Labor in Portugal, 1850–2001,” *Social Science History* 41, no. 2 (2017): 227–54.

51 Acórdão de 29 de Março de 1938, *Colecção de acórdãos*, Vol. II (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1938), 582.

52 Ovidiu Drimba, “Esteiros,” *Gazeta literară*, no. 32 (1955): 6.

novel must have been familiar indeed, as many brick and tile factories in interwar Romania hired child labor, surely in conditions as precarious as the one described by Pereira Gomes.⁵³ And this must have been the feeling triggered in Valentin Dragu, a provincial journalist, who, upon reading the novel, decided to revisit the tile factory for which he had worked as a child in the company of half-naked, sunburnt, ravenous men and women, handling the tiles with their bare hands, around the clock.⁵⁴ Much like in Mirel Ilieșiu's documentary, his old factory was now unrecognizable: modern ovens, advanced machines, a canteen, and a medical cabinet, workers sporting overalls, engineers giving directions, managers surveying the production process, and the uplifting music of the famous pan flute player Fănică Luca playing in the background. No children in sight.

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53 As documented in, for instance, "Inspectoratul Muncii Timișoara," *Buletinul Muncii*, no. 5/8 (1935): 314.

54 Valentin Dragu, "Cărămidarii din Urziceni," in *Stegul Roșu (Viața Capitalei)*, no. 640 (1956): 2.

11. Laboring in the Twilight Zone: Contract Workers and Temporary Employees in Mid-Twentieth-Century (West) Germany

Anna Elisabeth Keim

Abstract: In contemporary German history, contract work has mainly been linked to labor market policies and labor migrants' moonlighting since the mid-1980s. This chapter argues that informal contract work existed in West Germany prior to its official recognition, particularly in the industrial and service sectors during the mid-twentieth century. The chapter highlights debates among labor lawyers concerning industrial contract workers from the late 1920s onwards, and examines the informal subcontracting system linking smaller construction firms with larger plants in the (West) German coal, steel, and chemical industries. Additionally, it discusses the rise of temporary employment agencies in the West German labor market during the 1960s, and how temporary workers and employees began opting for informality more frequently.

Keywords: contract work, informality, labor market, temporary employment, West Germany

In 1972, just before the end of the economic boom in West Germany, the Law on Labor Leasing¹ formalized for the first time the legal boundaries defining how contract work (*Leiharbeit*) or temporary work (*Zeit-Arbeit*)

¹ *Arbeitnehmerüberlassungsgesetz (AÜG).*

were to be practiced in the Federal Republic. With this law, contract work became institutionalized as a valid component of the West German labor market alongside standard employment and part-time work.² Before that, contract work had been either explicitly forbidden or subject to an unclear legal situation. In contrast to Western countries with a more liberal economic tradition, such as the United States, Canada, or Great Britain, where contract work was also controversial, debated, and partly regulated yet never completely forbidden,³ (West) Germany represented the more restrictive economic tradition of some European countries.⁴ Therefore, while the modern temporary employment industry had already emerged in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain in the 1940s and 1950s,⁵ in West Germany the liberalization and institutionalization of contract work as a legitimate segment of the labor market occurred later. Nevertheless, as this chapter intends to illustrate, the lending of labor power was practiced in (West) Germany informally throughout the middle of the twentieth century.

Until recently, German contemporary history was marked by the impression that contract work was mainly a result of “neoliberal” labor market policies that had been in place since the mid-1980s and which were tightly connected to the problem of mass unemployment during the period after the boom.⁶ Also, highly informal forms of contract work were almost exclusively

2 On part-time work in West Germany, see Christine von Oertzen, *The Pleasure of a Surplus Income: Part-Time Work, Gender Politics, and Social Change in West Germany, 1955–1969* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007).

3 On the US, see Erin Hatton, *The Temp Economy: From Kelly Girls to Permatemps in Postwar America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011); David van Arsdale, *The Poverty of Work: Selling Servant, Slave and Temporary Labor on the Free Market* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Louis Hyman, *Temp: How American Work, American Business, and the American Dream Became Temporary* (New York: Viking, 2018). On Canada, see Leah F. Vosko, *Temporary Work: The Gendered Rise of a Precarious Employment Relationship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). On Great Britain, see Chris Forde, “You Know We Are Not an Employment Agency: Manpower, Government, and the Development of the Temporary Help Industry in Britain,” *Enterprise & Society* 9, no. 2 (2008): 337–65.

4 Especially in Southern Europe, but also, for example, in Finland, contract work was forbidden even until the 1990s and 2000s.

5 In France and Switzerland, temporary employment companies were able to establish themselves already since the 1950s, too. On France, see Paul Brook and Christina Purcell, “The Resistible Rise of the Temporary Employment Industry in France,” *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 41, no. 1 (2020): 121–44.

6 For example, see Günther Schmid and Frank Oschmiansky, “Arbeitsmarktpolitik und Arbeitslosenversicherung,” in *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland*, vol. 7, *Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1982–1989*, ed. Manfred G. Schmidt (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2005), 249–50; Andreas Wirsching, *Abschied vom Provisorium 1982–1990* (München: DVA, 2006), 260–61, 313–15; Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael, *Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit*

associated with the illegal lending of “guest workers” and connected to the history of (anti)-racism.⁷ The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to add some relevant aspects to this picture which have been neglected so far. It will show that the subcontracting of workers constituted a problem in German labor law as early as the late 1920s when the term “contract worker” (*Leiharbeiter*) was first introduced. Also, the chapter draws attention to the fact that the practice of subcontracting workers in an informal yet semi-institutionalized way existed in core sectors of (West) German industry throughout the middle of the twentieth century—sectors that are generally regarded as emblematic of highly formalized labor. Further, the chapter aims to give some insights into the temporary employment industry that has emerged in the Federal Republic since the early 1960s and the informality of the process for placing female office employees. As in other Western countries, this industry used the terminology of “temporary work” (*Zeit-Arbeit*) to distinguish itself from the older forms of subcontracting for reasons of image branding and public trust building. Yet, apart from the terminology, the basic principle whereby a person or company lent a worker or employee to another company remained the same. For both the male contract workers in the industrial sector and the female temporary employees in the service sector, the chapter intends to give some estimates regarding the degree of insecurity of their work relationships as well as the extent of their agency in choosing informal work environments.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The first section gives a short overview on the development of the legal regulation of contract work from the Weimar era to the end of the post-war boom. The second section outlines the first debates about contract workers in German labor law. The third section describes the subcontracting of workers in core sectors of West German industry during the “economic miracle,” as well as the efforts to prohibit the practice. The fourth section briefly depicts the invention of temporary work (*Zeit-Arbeit*) during the 1960s and early 1970s and gives some insights into the work relationships of female temporary office employees.

1970 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 37, 40; Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte Deutschlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: C.H. Beck, 2017), 968–69; Bernhard Dietz, *Der Aufstieg der Manager: Wertewandel in den Führungsetagen der westdeutschen Wirtschaft, 1949–1989* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020), 415–16.

7 For example, see Carol Poore, *The Bonds of Labor: German Journeys to the Working World, 1890–1990* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 234–36; Oliver Trede, *Zwischen Miss- trauen, Regulation und Integration: Gewerkschaften und Arbeitsmigration in der Bundesrepublik und in Großbritannien in den 1960er und 70er Jahren* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2015), 175–77, 286–88; Frank Biess, “‘Ganz unten’: Günther Wallraff und der westdeutsche (Anti)-Rassismus der 1980er Jahre,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 19, no. 1 (2022): 17–47.

The Regulation of Contract Work until 1972

For several decades of the twentieth century, the regulation of contract work in Germany was linked to the growing regulation of job placement and conceived as a sub-category of the latter. Beginning in the later German Empire and intensifying in the Weimar Republic, a broad consensus took hold that job placement was best practiced by public institutions, namely the state employment offices and the Reich Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance,⁸ rather than by employment agencies maintained by employers, unions, charitable organizations, or commercial placement agents.⁹ These agents in particular, in Germany as well as in other European countries, became increasingly criticized for numerous encroachments on the labor market and for the exploitation of the workers and employees they placed.¹⁰

As a result, already during the German Empire the commercial placement agents had been forced to deal with increasing restrictions on their businesses.¹¹ Yet, it was down to the labor market laws of the Weimar Republic—the Labor Exchange Law (ANG)¹² in 1922 and the Law on Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance (AVAVG)¹³ in 1927—to implement a prohibition on the whole of the commercial placement industry, starting in January 1931.¹⁴ This late date for the prohibition to take effect was intended to allow the commercial placement agents to reorientate themselves professionally.¹⁵ According to the labor market laws of 1922 and 1927, not only was the commercial (permanent) placement of workers and employees to

8 *Reichsanstalt für Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversicherung* (RAVAV).

9 Compare Anselm Faust, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik im Deutschen Kaiserreich: Arbeitsvermittlung, Arbeitsbeschaffung und Arbeitslosenunterstützung 1890–1918* (Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag, 1986); Hans-Walter Schmuhl, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik und Arbeitsverwaltung in Deutschland, 1871–2002: Zwischen Fürsorge, Hoheit und Markt* (Nürnberg: Zentralamt der Bundesanstalt für Arbeit, 2003).

10 Sigrid Wadauer et al., “The Making of Public Labour Intermediation: Job Search, Job Placement, and the State in Europe, 1880–1940,” in “Mediating Labour: Worldwide Labour Intermediation in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” ed. Ulbe Bosma et al., special issue, *International Review of Social History* 57, no. 20 (2012): 174–75. For similar discussions in North America as well as at the ILO, see Vosko, *Temporary Work*.

11 These were introduced by two amendments of the Trade Law (*Gewerbeordnung*) in 1883 and 1900 as well as by the Reich Law on Placement Agents (*Reichsstellenvermittlergesetz*) in 1910.

12 *Arbeitsnachweisgesetz* (ANG).

13 *Gesetz über Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversicherung* (AVAVG).

14 Labor Exchange Law of July 22, 1922, paragraph 48, *Reichsgesetzblatt* I 1, no. 56 (1922), 667. In the AVAVG, the respective paragraph was renumbered as 54.

15 Walter Kaskel and Friedrich Syrup, *Arbeitsnachweisgesetz* (Berlin: Carl Heymann, 1922), 249. In 1931, compensation for some of the licensed commercial placement agents was settled

be prohibited but also the commercial “allocation” (*Zuweisung*) of workers and employees to third parties “for temporary employment.”¹⁶ This norm was added—as interpreted by experts at the time—to deal with certain forms of on-call work, prevalent, for example, in the cleaning industry, but was also meant to combat informal placement activities that some of the commercial placement agents had adopted as a result of the increasing regulation and eventual prohibiting of their industry.¹⁷

Under National Socialist rule, the “monopoly” (*Alleinvertretungsrecht*) of the public labor service was increased even further with the so-called “Monopoly Law”¹⁸ in 1935.¹⁹ However, the section on the “allocation” of workers and employees was eliminated from this law. Therefore, authorities of the National Socialist regime who were confronted with clandestine lending practices resulting from the high labor demand that had developed since the mid-1930s tried to suppress these costly and, from an ideological viewpoint, unwelcome practices by means of numerous decrees.²⁰ In the immediate post-war years, as well as during the first years of the Federal Republic, the unclear legal situation regarding contract work persisted up until 1957. In this year, with the major amendment to the former Weimar labor law (the AVAVG), the section entailing the prohibition of the “allocation” of workers and employees was re-introduced (though slightly rephrased).²¹ Accordingly, in the amended AVAVG of 1957, the lending (“allocation”) of workers and employees was still conceived of as a sub-category of labor placement and therefore explicitly prohibited again.

after prolonged debates over a separate law. See Law on the Compensation of the Commercial Placement Agents of March 25, 1931, *Reichsgesetzblatt* I 10, no. 9 (1931), 69–72.

16 Labor Exchange Law, paragraph 48, section 5 and Law on Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance, paragraph 54, section 3.

17 Kaskel/Syrup, *Arbeitsnachweisgesetz*, 250; Robert Adam et al., *Gesetz über Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversicherung vom 16. Juli 1927 in der Fassung der Gesetze vom 16. Dezember 1927 und 23. März 1928 mit sämtlichen Ausführungsvorschriften und Vollzugsanordnungen*, vol. I (Stuttgart: J. Heß, 1928), 263; Frieda Gröber, “Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Bekämpfung der verschleierte Stellenvermittlung,” *Der öffentliche Arbeitsnachweis* 3, no. 11 (1927): 806–8.

18 *Gesetz über Arbeitsvermittlung, Berufsberatung und Lehrstellenvermittlung (Monopolgesetz)*.

19 Schmuhl, *Arbeitsmarktpolitik*, 245.

20 Arbeitseinsatz in der Bauwirtschaft: hier: Einsatz von handwerklichen Arbeitsgemeinschaften und Ausleihung von Arbeitskräften, *Reichsarbeitsblatt* I 20, no. 30 (1940), 514; Runderlaß Nr. 8/42: Ausleihen von Arbeitskräften bei der Durchführung von Bauleistungen, *Mitteilungsblatt des Reichskommissars für die Preisbildung* I 5, no. 7 (1942), 89; Runderlaß Nr. 17/44: Vergütung für das Ausleihen von Arbeitskräften, *Mitteilungsblatt des Reichskommissars für die Preisbildung* I 7, no. 24 (1944), 252.

21 Law on Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance of April 3, 1957, paragraph 37, section 3, *Bundesgesetzblatt* I 9, no. 13 (1957), 327.

This renewed prohibition did not last for long, though. Only a decade later, in 1967, the Federal Constitutional Court decided to suspend the specific section again.²² This decision was the culmination of a legal dispute between the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance²³ and the Swiss company for temporary employment Adia Interim (see below). With Adia's success at the major German law court, the West German labor market was suddenly and irrevocably opened up for contract and temporary work firms. In the aftermath of the decision, the rising numbers of contract and temporary work firms that often did not operate according to current labor and social standards alarmed the West German labor administrations as well as the wider political arena.

In 1972, with the introduction of the Law on Labor Leasing,²⁴ a new compromise was reached: while the lending of workers and employees was now accepted as a valid component of the West German labor market, the practice became highly formalized so that the lent workers and employees could be protected effectively. According to this law, contract and temporary work had to resemble the standard employment relationship as much as possible. This meant a permanent contract with a contract or temporary work firm for a maximum lending period of three months, no limitation of the contract to one assignment only, and appropriate social security.²⁵ Furthermore, contract and temporary work firms now had to apply for a concession issued by the Federal Employment Office that could be denied in cases where irregularities became known.²⁶

Contract Workers in (West) German Labor Law

As we have seen, until 1967, the lending of workers and employees in (West) Germany was either forbidden or subject to an unclear legal situation. Nevertheless, it was practiced widely, a fact which could be observed by contemporaries. A first group to do so were the German labor lawyers. Therefore, labor law constitutes one important piece of source material revealing the existence of contract workers in the middle of the twentieth century.

22 Federal Constitutional Court: Judgement of April 4, 1967 (1 BvR 84/65), in Federal Archives Koblenz (in the following: BArch), 149/117818.

23 *Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversicherung* (BAVAV). From 1969, the authority was called Federal Employment Office (*Bundesanstalt für Arbeit*, BA).

24 *Arbeitnehmerüberlassungsgesetz* (AÜG).

25 Law on Labor Leasing, paragraph 3, *Bundesgesetzblatt I* 22, no. 83 (1972), 1393–94.

26 Law on Labor Leasing, paragraph 3, *Bundesgesetzblatt I* 22, no. 83 (1972), 1393–94.

In the Weimar Republic, the term “contract worker” (*Leiharbeiter*) was first introduced into the discipline of labor law by the Jewish Social Democratic labor lawyer Hugo Marx.²⁷ In an article published in 1929, Marx identified work relationships consisting of three parties (the worker, the contractor, and the main employer) according to whether there still existed some sort of “tie” (*Band*) between the worker and the contractor (often some sort of middleman or smaller company).²⁸ In cases where the “tie” between the worker and the middleman was reduced to a relationship on paper only, Marx spoke of the “system of the *Leiharbeiter*.”²⁹ He illustrated this by providing the example of a smaller company for boiler production that had lent some of its workers to a larger chemical plant. The consequence was that the chemical plant deployed the lent workers together with its own workers for the same work tasks and paid compensation to the boiler company, which continued to pay the wages of the lent workers along with their social security contributions.

In National Socialist Germany, it was mainly labor lawyer Reinhard Beine who continued the juridical systematization of contract work.³⁰ Beine observed different forms of subcontracting mainly between smaller building companies and the larger plants of the coal mining industry. In his dissertation, submitted in 1943, Beine distinguished between three groups of contract workers: the “real contract worker” (*echter Leiharbeiter*), the “false contract worker” (*unechter Leiharbeiter*), and the “occupational contract worker” (*Berufsleiharbeiter*).³¹ According to Beine, the first group remained most of the time with the building company and was only occasionally lent to other companies. The second group alternated on a regular basis between the construction sites of the building company and the mines, where the contract workers were also called *Unternehmerarbeiter* (workers working for a subcontractor). For the third group, Beine observed that the

27 On his life, see Hugo Marx, *Werdegang eines jüdischen Staatsanwalts und Richters in Baden (1892–1933): Ein soziologisch-politisches Zeitbild* (Villingen: Neckar, 1965); Horst Göppinger, *Juristen jüdischer Abstammung im “Dritten Reich”: Entrechtung und Verfolgung* (München: C.H. Beck, 1990), 302.

28 Hugo Marx, “Die rechtliche Stellung des sog. Leiharbeiters,” *Arbeitsrecht* 16, no. 6 (1929): col. 347.

29 On the following, see Marx, “Die rechtliche Stellung des sog. Leiharbeiters,” col. 348.

30 On his life, see Reinhard Beine, “Die rechtliche Stellung des Leiharbeiters” (PhD diss., Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1943), Curriculum Vitae, 141. In 1936, Beine was working as legal advisor (*Rechtsberater*) for the German Labor Front (DAF) in the Ruhr area. During this time, he became interested in the problem of the legal classification of the *Unternehmerarbeiter* in coal mining.

31 On the following, see Beine, “Die rechtliche Stellung des Leiharbeiters,” 11–15.

subcontractor did not dispose of a building company of his own and solely lent his workers to the mines and other companies.

Under National Socialism, the labor lawyers were especially interested in the situation of the *Unternehmerarbeiter* working in the vicinity of the mines, because of the regime's interest in stable "work communities" (*Betriebsgemeinschaften*) in industries that were important for war preparation. In coal mining, the *Unternehmerarbeiter* were deployed for a wide variety of tasks above and below ground.³² According to an article published by Beine in 1937, even while working for the mines the *Unternehmerarbeiter* were often still compensated only with the lowest wages paid to construction workers. Also, they received no benefits, such as concessionary coal (*Deputatkohlen*) or household and childhood allowances, even though they were occasionally deployed by the mines "for years."³³ Beine and other labor lawyers criticized this discrimination against contract workers and argued that there was no justification for contract workers receiving lower wages than the workers employed directly by the mines, who were doing the same work tasks.

In the 1950s, West German labor lawyers continued their efforts to systematize the various firms and workers involved in subcontracting. Labor lawyer Günther Trieschmann, for example, observed a broad spectrum of contract firms that comprised "companies with all signs of a business life" (*betriebliches Eigenleben*); "mixed companies" (*Gemischunternehmen*), with separate operating divisions for their businesses and for lending workers; as well as "mere companies for lending workers" (*reine Leiharbeiterbetriebe*).³⁴ In contrast to Beine, Trieschmann claimed that the *Unternehmerarbeiter* working in the vicinity of the mines should *not* be categorized as contract workers.³⁵ He was convinced that the *Unternehmerarbeiter* were deployed by the construction companies solely on the basis of "real work contracts" (*echte Werkverträge*).³⁶ Lawyer Helmut Endemann, on the contrary, was convinced that "there can be no doubt that the *Unternehmerarbeiter* in his

32 Reinhard Beine, "Die tarifrechtliche Stellung der Unternehmerarbeiter im rheinisch-westfälischen Steinkohlenrevier," *Deutsches Arbeitsrecht* 5, no. 6 (1937): 187; Enß, "Unternehmer- und Leiharbeiterwesen," *Monatshefte für NS-Sozialpolitik* 5, no. 24 (1938): 563.

33 On the following, see Beine, "Die tarifrechtliche Stellung der Unternehmerarbeiter," 187–89.

34 Günther Trieschmann, "Das Leiharbeitsverhältnis," *Der Betrieb* 9, no. 39 (1956): Supplement no. 16., no page.

35 Günther Trieschmann, "Der Leiharbeiter" (PhD diss., University of Cologne, 1952), 13–14, 18–21.

36 The differentiation between "real works contracts" (*echte Werkverträge*) and "false works contracts" (*Scheinwerkverträge*), which were used to conceal the lending of workers, constituted a recurring legal and administrative problem.

typical manifestation is a contract worker [...].³⁷ For Endemann, not only the more specific question of the *Unternehmerarbeiter* but the legal assessment of contract work in general was perceived as rather complicated.³⁸ He also reported on the different wage levels between the construction company and the larger companies borrowing the workers, which put the contract workers in a disadvantageous position compared to the core workforce.³⁹

Legal difficulties also emerged in court proceedings dealing with the problem of whether the company lending the worker (the subcontractor) or the company borrowing the worker (the main employer) was to be held liable in cases of insufficient wages or accidents. The courts could base their judgments on two different legal theories: "contract theory" (*Vertragstheorie*) and "incorporation theory" (*Eingliederungstheorie*). While the first held the worker's employment contract with the subcontractor as decisive, the second emphasized the fact that the contract worker had actually been incorporated into the workforce of the main employer.⁴⁰ As the contract workers and their legal representatives could not know beforehand on which theory the respective court would base its judgement, it was hard to determine whether they should direct their claims at the subcontractor or the main employer. The outcome, therefore, resembled a game of chance often disadvantageous to the lent workers.⁴¹

Industrial Contract Workers in the "Economic Miracle"

In the early Federal Republic, the existence of the contract workers, their situation in West German work society, and the legitimacy of subcontracting in general became more publicly debated issues. The subject of contract

37 Helmut Endemann, "Die Rechtsstellung des Unternehmerarbeiters," *Der Betriebs-Berater* 9, no. 15 (1954): 474.

38 Helmut Endemann, "Die Rechtsstellung des Leiharbeiters," *Der Betriebs-Berater* 6, no. 28 (1951): 787–88; Helmut Endemann, "Die Rechtsstellung des Leiharbeiters," *Blätter für Steuerrecht, Sozialversicherung und Arbeitsrecht* 8, no. 22/23 (1953): 363.

39 Endemann, "Die Rechtsstellung des Leiharbeiters," 787.

40 On the origins of the "incorporation theory" in Weimar labor law, see Heinz Potthoff, "Nicht Vertrag mit dem Arbeitgeber, sondern Beschäftigung im Betriebe ist die Grundlage des Arbeitsverhältnisses," *Arbeitsrechtspraxis* 1, no. 1 (1928): 5–7; Heinz Potthoff, "Die 'Enthronung' des Arbeitsvertrags," *Neue Zeitschrift für Arbeitsrecht* 11, no. 5 (1931): cols. 283–88.

41 Reinhard Beine, "Neue Rechtsprechung zum mittelbaren Arbeitsverhältnis," *Arbeitsblatt für die Britische Zone* 2, no. 10 (1948): 377–78; Higher Labor Court Düsseldorf, Judgement of April 4, 1949, Sa 72/49; Higher Labor Court Düsseldorf, Judgement of November 14, 1957, 7 Sa 338/57.

workers was no longer one of mere legal interest for labor lawyers but now began to concern societal interest groups and the broader public.

The practice of smaller construction firms lending their workers to larger plants in the coal, steel, and chemical industries, as had been depicted by the labor lawyers in the Weimar Republic and under National Socialism, continued in the early Federal Republic. For the large industrial plants, this informal system of subcontracting offered several advantages. Not only did it enable them to adapt their workforce quickly to changes in demand, it also offered them a means of testing new workers before employing them on a permanent basis.⁴² Using it, those workers perceived as costly because of health issues, handicap, or old age, or who were deemed as “anti-social,” could be filtered out.⁴³ Also, as the contract workers usually did not participate in the social benefit schemes at the plants, they were often cheaper than the permanent workforce, even though their wages were not always lower compared to the permanent workers. In certain constellations, they could even be paid higher wages than their permanent colleagues, for example when the wage agreements for unskilled workers in the chemical industry were lower than those in the construction sector.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the status of the contract workers during the early and mid-1950s generally can be assessed as more insecure compared to the permanent workforces.

This became clear in contemporary speculations about the identity of contract workers. Journalists, and also union representatives, came up with various groups of people not willing or able to work in a standard employment relationship, such as invalids, students, retirees, and people deemed “anti-social”—but also refugees from the German Democratic Republic.⁴⁵ Especially for the latter, contract work could also offer the possibility of accessing the West German labor market for the first time and then move on to more secure work relationships later. Some commentators tried to

42 “Arbeitskraft zu vermieten,” *Die Quelle* 6, no. 7 (1955): 322; Report of the Employment Office North Rhine-Westphalia to the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance, August 4, 1957, Attachment two, 4, in BArch, 119/3246 I.

43 Report of the Employment Office North Rhine-Westphalia to the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance, August 4, 1957, Attachment four, 5–6, in BArch, 119/3246 I; “Versand von Muskelpaketen,” *Der Spiegel*, August 7, 1957, 20–21; Report of the Ministry for Labor and Social Welfare North Rhine-Westphalia, September 13, 1957, 2, in BArch, 149/9904.

44 Report of the Employment Office North Rhine-Westphalia to the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance, August 4, 1957, Attachment two, 3, in BArch, 119/3246 I.

45 Sefton Delmer, “What I See Here Looks Like Slave Labour to Me,” *Daily Express*, September 4, 1957, 6; “Wir brauchen 50 Arbeiter, können Sie etwas schicken?” *Metall*, September 4, 1957, 5; “Mitten in der Bundesrepublik: Arbeiter werden verkauft,” *Das grüne Blatt*, September 7–13, 1957, 1.

encourage sympathy for contract workers by placing them in a context of unjust deprivation from the benefits of the “economic miracle.”⁴⁶ Also, the Federation of German Trade Unions⁴⁷ (*Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*, DGB) as well as the media began to apply a terminology of “slavery” by describing the contract workers as “white slaves” and by defining subcontracting as “modern trafficking.”⁴⁸ For the DGB and its member unions, subcontracting contradicted and endangered the only recently established corporatist structure of the Federal Republic with its concept of “social partnership,” which was supposed to entail consensual negotiations of interest between capital and labor.⁴⁹ From their perspective, the semi-institutionalized use of contract work on the employer side blatantly infringed this newly established consensus. Accordingly, they argued that contract work needed to be abolished completely. Otherwise, so they feared, the Federal Republic could relapse into the times of early capitalism or descend into the allegedly backward system of labor relations that existed in the Global South.⁵⁰

With the renewed prohibition on contract work in the amended AVAVG of 1957, amid intensifying public criticism, pressure on the labor administrations was high enough to end informal subcontracting. The aim was to convince the large industrial plants to abstain from using contract workers, whose number for the whole of the Federal Republic was estimated by the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance to be about 30,000.⁵¹ The industrial plants were requested either to employ them on a permanent basis in their core workforce or to conclude “real work contracts” (*echte Werkverträge*) with the subcontractor firms.⁵² As most of

46 Stephan Slupianek, “Die Stiefkinder des Wirtschaftswunders,” *Länder-Informations-Dienst*, August 17, 1957, 3–4; Hans Ueckert, “Eine Wirtschaftswunder-Tragödie,” *Metall*, October 2, 1957, 13.

47 *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (DGB).

48 DGB-Nachrichtendienst, “Sollen Menschen verliehen werden?” October 11, 1956, in BArch, 149/9904; Slupianek, “Die Stiefkinder des Wirtschaftswunders,” 3–4; Kurt Gehrman, “Kein Mittel gegen Sklavenhandel?” *Neue Ruhr Zeitung*, September 5, 1957; Sepp Ebelseder, “Weiße Sklaven,” *Stern*, March 26, 1961, 95–98.

49 Compare Friederike Sattler, “Rheinischer Kapitalismus: Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft der Bonner Republik,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 52 (2012): 687–724; Hans Günter Hockerts and Günther Schulz, “Einleitung,” in *Der “Rheinische Kapitalismus” in der Ära Adenauer*, ed. Hans Günter Hockerts and Günther Schulz (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016), 9–28.

50 “Arbeitskraft zu vermieten,” *Die Quelle* 6, no. 7 (1955): 321–22; “Handel mit Arbeitskräften,” *Der Grundstein*, July 8, 1956, 1; “Schluß mit dem Leiharbeiter-Unrecht!” *Die Quelle* 8, no. 10 (1957): 450.

51 Sheet entitled “Leiharbeiter” (September 1957), in BArch, 119/3246 I.

52 Circular of the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance to the employment offices of the counties, January 16, 1958, in BArch, 149/9904; Report of the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance to the Federal Ministry for Labor, July 12, 1958, in BArch, 149/9904.

the plants had no real interest in abandoning the long-practiced lending system, they showed outer cooperation but tried to hinder the process by putting forth operational reasons.⁵³ Also, the local employment offices took a rather ambivalent stance on the issue. In contrast to the objectives of the higher levels of the labor administration—like the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance or the Employment Offices of the Counties—the employment offices in the vicinity of the industrial plants had benefited from the willingness of the subcontractors to quickly take off their hands unemployed workers deemed “difficult to place.”⁵⁴ Unlike the larger plants, the subcontractor firms had been willing to employ older and handicapped workers as well as so-called “unreliable” or “low performing” workers, thus enabling the local employment offices to keep unemployment low.⁵⁵

As there obviously existed some parties who profited from the status quo, the containment of subcontracting was by no means an easy goal to achieve. Also, the process of abolishing subcontracting did not always prove advantageous for the contract workers affected by it. For those who had not been adopted into the core workforce of the industrial plants, nor who were employed any longer by their subcontractor, unemployment was the consequence.⁵⁶ And for those whose wages had been higher with the subcontractor, a transition to the lower wage levels paid for unskilled work at the industrial plants made such a move less attractive.⁵⁷ With the shortage of labor intensifying from the late 1950s and during the “long” 1960s,⁵⁸ subcontracting resurged regularly despite its prohibition. Consequently,

53 Report of the Employment Office North Rhine-Westphalia to the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance, August 4, 1957, Attachment one, 2–3, and Attachment four, 5, in BArch, 119/3246 I.

54 Report of the Employment Office North Rhine-Westphalia to the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance, August 4, 1957, Attachment one, 5, and Attachment four, 11, in BArch, 119/3246 I; Report of the Ministry for Labor and Social Welfare North Rhine-Westphalia, September 13, 1957, 2–3, in BArch, 149/9904.

55 Report of the Employment Office North Rhine-Westphalia to the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance, August 4, 1957, Attachment one, 5, and Attachment four, 11, in BArch, 119/3246 I; Report of the Ministry for Labor and Social Welfare North Rhine-Westphalia, September 13, 1957, 2–3, in BArch, 149/9904.

56 Paul E. to the Federal Ministry of Labor, December 19, 1957, in BArch, 149/9904; Report of the Employment Office North Rhine-Westphalia to the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance, March 14, 1958, 2–3, in BArch, 119/3246 II.

57 Report of the Employment Office North Rhine-Westphalia to the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance, March 14, 1958, 4–5, in BArch, 119/3246 II.

58 In the following, the “long” 1960s are understood as the period of near or complete full employment stretching in the West German case roughly from 1957 to 1973.

non-German labor migrants appeared increasingly as contract workers, at first mainly from the Netherlands,⁵⁹ then increasingly from those countries with which the Federal Republic had already concluded, or was about to conclude, agreements regarding the recruitment of "guest workers."⁶⁰

Over the course of the decade, the labor administrations, insurance boards, workers' compensation boards, customs authorities, border controls, as well as union representatives, tried repeatedly to combine their efforts in "concerted actions" to improve the circulation of information between them, and to contain subcontracting in their respective areas.⁶¹ Also, in 1969, the coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democrats (SPD) adopted the Law on the Promotion of Employment,⁶² which simplified the prosecution of dubious subcontracting. Instead of lengthy court proceedings to adjudicate on some exceptionally grave cases of subcontracting, punishment could now be enforced by imposing administrative fines through the employment offices.⁶³ Yet, the subcontractors frequently changed their addresses or the names of their companies, and employees of the labor administration were occasionally threatened by criminal subcontractors trying to prevent them from enforcing the fines.⁶⁴ Further, the judgement of the Federal Constitutional Court in 1967 led to the rise not only of allegedly "reputable" firms for temporary work (*Zeit-Arbeit*) but also of the more shady parts of the market for contract work.

59 Federal Parliament, Protocol, January 18, 1961, 7860–61; Ebelseder, "Weiße Sklaven"; Frits Rothgießer, "Seelenverkäufer moderner Zeit," *Welt der Arbeit*, May 19, 1961, 5; Elfrun Jacob, "Für 'Seelenverkäufer' gibt es noch keine Strafe," *Nürnberger Zeitung*, July 29, 1961, 20.

60 Richard Mahkorn, "Mitten in Deutschland," *Quick*, June 11, 1969, 22–23; "Aus der Westentasche," *Der Spiegel*, June 22, 1969, 86–87; Werner Dähnhardt, "Schmarotzer mischen mit," *Welt der Arbeit*, August 1, 1969, 3; Rolf Weber, "Europas Elendsquartiere liefern die naiven Sklaven für den Bauboom," *Die Welt*, April 22, 1970; Rudolf Höch, "Menschenhandel: Geschäfte mit Arbeitskräften," Program manuscript of June 30, 1970, in Archives of the West German Broadcasting (WDR), 2471; "Prämien und Prügel," *Der Spiegel*, April 18, 1971, 98–100; "Der Sklavenmarkt unserer Zeit," *Metall*, June 22, 1971, 11.

61 Report of the Employment Office North Rhine-Westphalia to the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance, July 14, 1961, 2–3, in BArch, 119/3247; State Minister of Bavaria for Labor and Social Welfare to the Federal Employment Office, September 2, 1969, in BArch, 119/3241; "200.000 Mark Strafe für Arbeiter-Verleih," *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, May 22, 1970, 9; "Aktion gegen Arbeiterverleiher," *Industriekurier*, May 23, 1970.

62 *Arbeitsförderungsgesetz* (AFG).

63 Thomas Vielhaber, "Zu den aktuellen Problemen der Arbeitnehmerüberlassung," *Bundesarbeitsblatt* 20, no. 7 (1969), 419–20.

64 Höch, "Menschenhandel: Geschäfte mit Arbeitskräften," 2471; Employment Office Dortmund, Annotation of December 3, 1971, in BArch, 149/102893; Report of the Employment Office North Rhine-Westphalia to the Federal Employment Office, March 30, 1972, Attachment: Annotation of February 25, 1972, in BArch, 149/102893.

Another aspect which helped to keep informal subcontracting flourishing was the agency of the contract workers. During the “long” 1960s, unskilled as well as skilled workers decided more often to work for subcontractors voluntarily. This happened once the subcontractors began to entice the workers from their permanent workplaces by offering them higher net wages. Afterwards, they lent them back to their former employers or to other companies in urgent need of labor power. This practice was especially common in the ship building industry, but also in other industries like machine building and construction.⁶⁵ In contrast to the early and mid-1950s, contract work was now no longer practiced only by workers with no alternative on the labor market but also by skilled workers interested in higher net wages. Whether a particular subcontractor had insured them or not seems to have been only of secondary interest to the worker, as will be illustrated by the following example. In 1968/69, subcontracting flourished, amongst other places, in the metropolitan area of Stuttgart due to a boom in the building sector. In this context, the case of the 27-year-old steel fixer Karl-Heinz B. made public waves when he started working for a subcontractor because of the higher net wages he was offered, without giving much thought to his social security status.⁶⁶ While working on a construction site in Stuttgart, he fell from a scaffold and broke his spine. As a result, he was unable to resume work for almost a year. When interviewed by the South German Broadcasting, B. showed his despair and his eagerness to emphasize that he had worked under the assumption of having been insured by his subcontractor. Yet, he also presented an image of naivete that must have alarmed the advocates of a strong welfare state.

The reaction of both employers and unions towards the phenomenon that even skilled workers were shifting voluntarily to employment with subcontractors changed somewhat, too. While the employer side had long used informal subcontracting as a means of adapting their workforce quickly to changing demands, they disapproved of the new phenomenon of

65 Dieter Lau, “Mit Leiharbeitern machen immer mehr Vermittler lukrative Geschäfte,” *Die Welt*, March 26, 1969; “Auslösungs-Vermittler,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 20, 1969, 17; Federal Employment Office: Protocol of the 12th meeting of committee I of the administrative council, October 25, 1971, 12, in BArch, 149/102841; Manfred Leve, “Das Vermieten von Menschen,” *Soziale Arbeit* 21, no. 9 (1972): 389. See also Sarah Graber Majchrzak, *Arbeit–Produktion–Protest: Die Leninwerft in Gdansk und die AG “Weser” in Bremen im Vergleich (1968–1983)* (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2021), 230–32.

66 On the following, see Höch, “Menschenhandel: Geschäfte mit Arbeitskräften,” 20; Abend-schau Baden-Württemberg of April 29, 1969, in Archives of the South-West German Broadcasting (SWR), A 9014 R.

enticing and then lending back workers, as it drove up labor and production costs.⁶⁷ For the unions of the DGB, the fact that their main interest group (skilled male industrial workers) began to shift to subcontractors was an uncomfortable situation as well. They were frequently confronted with reports about “unrest” in the workshops because permanent workers were complaining about the higher net wages of the contract workers and their supposed unwillingness to support their colleagues with piecework given that the subcontractor was paying them in hourly wages.⁶⁸ Reacting to the problem, the unions wavered between efforts to enlighten the contract workers in a rather paternalist manner about the dangers of working for subcontractors and the occasional denigration of such workers suspected of putting their own, supposedly shortsighted, interests first above those of the working class.⁶⁹

Temporary Office Employees in the 1960s

The “long” 1960s was also the decade during which international companies for temporary work, including Adia Interim (Switzerland), Manpower (United States), or Randstad (the Netherlands) began to enter the West German labor market.⁷⁰ Over the decade, temporary work (*Zeit-Arbeit*) was conceived by them and their German offshoots as the “reputable” (*seriös*) part of the West German market for contract work.⁷¹ As mentioned before, the differences these firms had from subcontractors was mainly a matter of image building and branding, while the business model was basically the same. In contrast

67 “Zwischenhandel,” *Der Arbeitgeber* 22, no. 12 (1970), 511; Federal Employment Office: Protocol of the 12th meeting of committee I of the administrative council, October 25, 1971, 12, in BArch, 149/102841.

68 Transcript of a talk between Hans Berker, Walter Hirrlinger, Helmut Pauli, and Claus Neumann at the South German Broadcasting on March 18, 1969, 3, in BArch, 149/102890; “Stoppt das Übel mit den Leiharbeitern!” *Metall* 21, no. 23 (1969), 15; IG Metall Hamburg to the Federal Employment Office, October 10, 1969, in BArch, 149/102891; Karl-Heinz Briam, “Shanghai-Firmen,” *Der Gewerkschafter* 18, no. 7 (1970), 262.

69 Abendschau Baden-Württemberg of April 29, 1969, in Archives of the South-West German Broadcasting (SWR), A 9014 R; Briam, “Shanghai-Firmen,” 260–62.

70 Report of the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance to the Employment Office Hamburg, January 14, 1963, 4, in BArch, 119/3247; Report of the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance to the Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, March 1968, in BArch, 119/3248 II; Report of the Employment Office Hessen to the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance, November 5, 1968, 3, in BArch, 119/3248.

71 Peter Morner, “Zeitarbeit wird immer aktueller,” *Die Welt*, December 13, 1969; “Zwischenhandel,” *Der Arbeitgeber* 22, no. 12 (1970), 511.

to the subcontractors, though, the temporary work firms intended that their service would become a valid and legally accepted segment of the West German labor market instead of operating permanently in grey areas.

As explained above, the legal conflict between Adia and the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance led to the legalization of contract and temporary work in 1967. When the prohibition on contract and temporary work was annulled, the companies for temporary work expanded noticeably in the West German labor market. In 1969, some of them founded the Business Association for Temporary Employment (*Unternehmensverband für Zeit-Arbeit*, UZA), which was the first interest group for temporary work firms in West Germany.⁷² As in other Western countries, the temporary work firms established themselves in the West German labor market, foregrounding an image of female office work as well as narratives about “more freedom” in an otherwise still-Fordist working world. As a result, younger women and older housewives of the middle classes whom the temporary work firms tried to mobilize for office tasks were especially addressed.⁷³ From the late 1960s on, temporary employment firms in West Germany began to expand from the office sector into the industrial sector. Accordingly, by the middle of the 1970s, the percentage of male temporary employees (70–75%) already clearly outweighed the female share (25–30%).⁷⁴

The Swiss temporary employment company Adia Interim was the first to settle permanently in the West German labor market after 1961/62.⁷⁵ During the 1960s, “work made to measure” (*Arbeit nach Maß*) became Adia's central advertising slogan that was directed at everyone not able or willing to work in a regular full-time job.⁷⁶ Except for women, this included also retirees,

72 *Unternehmensverband für Zeit-Arbeit: Satzung, Richtlinie für die Berufsausübung, Schiedsgerichtsordnung, Mitglieder, Vorstand*, s. l. [1974]; *Unternehmensverband für Zeit-Arbeit: UZA*, s. l. [1974].

73 Lore Schultz-Wild, “Zeitarbeit: Eine Chance für Hausfrauen,” *Die berufstätige Frau*, Supplement of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 21, 1969; Advertisements of several temporary employment firms, in *Die berufstätige Frau*, Supplement of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 18, 1972; Werner Then, *Zeit-Arbeit. Neue Formen am Arbeitsmarkt. Neue Chancen im Beruf* (Düsseldorf/Wien: Econ, 1974), 53.

74 *Erster Bericht der Bundesregierung über Erfahrungen bei der Anwendung des Arbeitnehmerüberlassungsgesetzes*, July 9, 1974, Drucksache 7/2365, 4 and table 1.

75 On Adia's early years in West Germany, see R.W. (Rosemarie Winter), “Bedarfsbeschäftigungen – ein internationales Problem. Deutsche Arbeitsvermittlung auf den Spuren einer Schweizer Firma,” *Die Tat*, August 14, 1962, 3.

76 Adia: Advertisement, *Bild Zeitung*, July 22, 1964; Adia: Advertisement, [1963], in *Staatsarchiv Hamburg*, 224–5/990.

students, or people in-between permanent employment. During the early and mid-1960s, Adia's first branch office in Hamburg lent out mostly female office employees who worked on a freelance basis.⁷⁷ In 1962, the branch office had enlisted about 200 temporary employees,⁷⁸ and by 1967 the branch office had already collected 2,500 potential temporary employees in their files, of whom reportedly 200 to 300 were actively lent.⁷⁹ With Adia, the temporary employees signed a so-called "agreement on free employment" according to which they were only "agents" (*Erfüllungsgehilfe*) of the temporary employment firm.⁸⁰ This meant that they were not regularly employed but sent on assignments of varying duration at different companies for which they received a fee (*Honorar*). The payment of taxes and social security contributions was up to the temporary employees. Also, the "free employees" were not obligated to take on an assignment, just as Adia was not obligated to permanently provide the temporary employees with assignments or to employ them for a minimum period. The Law on Labor Leasing (1972) then forced Adia to actually employ its "free employees."

During the 1960s, working for Adia and other temporary employment companies seems to have been quite attractive to some women. The hourly fees paid to them by the temporary employment companies were often higher than the hourly wages paid by regular employers for casual office work.⁸¹ From the (slightly paternalistic) perspective of the labor administration, working for temporary employment companies was also attractive to some women because they supposedly chose not to make social security contributions, so they could keep more of their earned fees.⁸² Also, the women seem to have liked the central location of the branch offices of the temporary employment companies, which were often situated in city centers next to shopping facilities, as well as for their modern appearance. Accordingly, the Federal Employment Office asked the municipal employment offices to modernize their general appearance and to offer special placement services

77 Adia: Agreement on free employment, [1962], in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 224-5/990; Letter of the attorneys Kreisler, Curschmann and Schubel to the employment office Hamburg, October 29, 1962, in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 224-5/990.

78 "Fehlt dir eine, ruf dir eine," *Revue*, November 25, 1962, 18.

79 "Bürokräfte im Leasing," *Industriekurier*, April 8, 1967.

80 On the following, see Adia: Agreement on free employment, [1962], in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 224-5/990.

81 Federal Employment Office: Statement for the meeting of the directorate, September 11, 1970, 1, in BArch, 149/102757.

82 Statement of the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance to the Social Court Hamburg, October 24, 1963, 5, in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 224-5/990.

for female office employees in the city centers as well.⁸³ Further, quite a few of the temporary employment firms maintained kindergartens in their branch offices or had contacts with private kindergartens.⁸⁴ For a fee, the temporary employees could leave their children in these kindergartens while taking on assignments elsewhere. Sometimes, the temporary employment firms even organized bus or taxi services for the employees and their children.

Along with these more general upsides, the women's reasons for choosing temporary employment could also be quite individual. This will be illustrated by the statements of three women who worked for Adia in the early 1960s. The statements were given in April 1964 in front of the Hamburg Social Court in the context of the first legal proceedings between Adia and the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance. Karin G., a 23-year-old foreign language secretary, reported that she had been working for Adia already in Switzerland and then again in Hamburg to bridge the time until she was assessed for a position as a stewardess.⁸⁵ In between each assignment, she paused her employment for one to two weeks. She lived with her parents (whom she paid a monthly amount) and continued to pay health insurance voluntarily. Helga V., a 30-year-old commercial clerk, showed herself very interested in short-term work and had also used the option to pause work in between assignments.⁸⁶ She used her free time to learn languages, English and Russian, and to take riding lessons. Her aim was to become a foreign language secretary and later a translator. She, too, continued to pay health insurance. Finally, 66-year-old retiree Charlotte B. used temporary work to improve her pension, which was low due to former self-employment, injuries resulting from imprisonment in a concentration camp, and longer periods of unemployment after the war.⁸⁷ As regular companies had refused to employ her further after reaching retirement age, B. began working temporarily for Adia. She also emphasized the benefits of being able to interrupt work on short notice, for example to travel somewhere. Also, the company that had

83 For example, see Maria Keinhorst, "Das 'City-Büro' des Arbeitsamtes Dortmund," *Arbeit, Beruf und Arbeitslosenhilfe. Das Arbeitsamt* 20, no. 10 (1969), 290–92.

84 On the following, see Report of the Employment Office Hessen to the Federal Employment Office, November 5, 1968, 2–3, in BArch, 119/3248; "Auf Abruf," *Der Spiegel*, October 14, 1968, 105; Lore Schultz-Wild, "Zeitarbeit: Eine Chance für Hausfrauen," *Die berufstätige Frau*, Supplement of the Süddeutsche Zeitung, October 28, 1969; "Würde verletzt," *Der Spiegel*, August 10, 1970, 60.

85 On the following, see Witness reports of Karin G. at the Social Court Hamburg, Attachment to the protocol of the court meeting on April 16, 1964, in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 224–5/990.

86 On the following, see Witness reports of Helga V. at the Social Court Hamburg, Attachment to the protocol of the court meeting on April 16, 1964, in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 224–5/990.

87 On the following, see Witness reports of Charlotte B. at the Social Court Hamburg, Attachment to the protocol of the court meeting on April 16, 1964, in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 224–5/990.

borrowed her from Adia agreed to give her individual working hours so that she could work as a lay judge at the Hamburg Labor Court. The rather insecure and non-binding work relationship as temporary ("free") employees, therefore, could suit some women's wishes for more leisure time (which they used for further education, hobbies, traveling, or volunteering) but also align with their "duties" as housewives.

For the labor administration, in contrast, the concept of "free employment" was not acceptable in the case of office employment, which from their perspective had to be carried out in a standard employment relationship.⁸⁸ They suspected that Adia used the agreements on free employment to evade its employer duties and to avoid establishing an actual employment relationship to gain higher profits. From the labor administration's viewpoint, Adia's business model went against the principles of a "social democracy" (*sozialer Rechtsstaat*) and might eventually bring down the West German social security system. The Federation of German Trade Unions (DGB) supported this position and argued, too, that the labor and social rights of temporary employees as well as employees in general were gravely endangered.⁸⁹ The DGB, therefore, supported the Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance's model lawsuit against Adia. In the public perception, and according to many commentators, in contrast, the temporary work firms were met with rather a positive response. They were assessed as innovative and modern agents in the West German labor market, and as more efficient than the seemingly bureaucratic state employment offices.⁹⁰ Also contrary to the position of the labor administration and the DGB, the German Salaried Employees' Union (*Deutsche Angestellten-Gewerkschaft*, DAG), which was not a member of the DGB, accepted the Business Association for Temporary Employment (UZA) early on as a "social partner" by concluding a collective agreement for the temporary employees as well as the permanent employees of the temporary employment firms organized in the UZA for the first time in 1970.⁹¹

88 On the following, see Federal Office for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance to the Employment Office Hamburg, January 14, 1963, in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 224-5/990; Report of the Employment Office Hamburg to the Social Court Hamburg, March 20, 1963, in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 224-5/990.

89 "Leih-Stenotypistinnen im Büro," *Wirtschaft und Wissen* 14, no. 4 (1963): 20.

90 Rosemarie Winter, "'Leihdamen' auf Abruf," *Die Zeit*, April 6, 1962, 36; "Fehlt dir eine, ruf dir eine," 16-18; Hanns Meenzen, "Zweiter Arbeitsmarkt," *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, July 7, 1969, 3; Rudolf Weschinsky, "Sie arbeiten, wann und wieviel sie wollen," *Welt am Sonntag*, October 26, 1969, 24; Heinz Heininger, "Mädchen auf Abruf," *Die Zeit*, December 5, 1969, 51.

91 "Collective agreement between UZA and DAG in the version of October 1, 1972," in Then, *Zeit-Arbeit*, 263-72.

Conclusion

This chapter has described and analyzed several informal practices of the lending of labor power (contract work, temporary employment) in the (West) German labor market from the late 1920s to the early 1970s. During these decades, contract work and temporary employment were not yet formalized and were either forbidden or subject to an unclear legal situation. However, as the chapter has demonstrated, they were practiced in the industrial sector as well as in the service sector during the middle of the twentieth century. Contract workers in the industrial sector first became visible in the publications of German labor lawyers in the late 1920s, which tried to categorize the observed work relationships. A special focus of the National Socialist labor lawyers was on the so-called *Unternehmerarbeiter*, who were working above and below ground in coal mining. They were lent informally by smaller construction firms to the larger coal mines where they often worked for lower wages than the workers employed directly by the mines.

Depending on the general tendencies in the labor market (high unemployment or high labor demand), contract work could seem more or less attractive to particular workers. In the early and mid-1950s, when unemployment was still an issue in the Federal Republic, industrial contract work was an option for workers with no other prospects in the labor market such as older, handicapped, or supposedly “anti-social” workers, but also for refugees from the German Democratic Republic who wanted to enter the West German labor market. Here, informal subcontracting served as a semi-institutionalized arrangement between smaller construction companies and the larger plants of the West German coal, steel, and chemical industries for the testing and eventual placing of workers. Informal subcontracting, therefore, was also an example of informal placement methods which continued to exist in parallel to the formalized labor exchange controlled by the state-run employment offices.

During the “long” 1960s, when the situation in the West German labor market had reversed, unskilled and even skilled workers began to shift voluntarily to join subcontractors because of the higher net wages offered by them. Thus, they accepted the insecurity and instability accompanying this form of work through personal choice and no longer just as a last resort. The high demand for labor and the agency of the workers themselves, therefore, made the containment of subcontracting difficult, even though the motivation of the contemporaries to subdue the practice was high. The “long” 1960s was also a period during which transnational temporary employment companies like Swiss Adia Interim began to settle in the West German labor

market. During the early and mid-1960s, temporary work (*Zeit-Arbeit*) was mainly directed at female office employees, as it was supposedly particularly compatible with female care and reproductive work. In the case of Adia, the women worked on a freelance basis and received a comparatively high fee (*Honorar*) from the company. Also, the flexible duration of the work assignments was readily compatible with these women's lives: not only with care work but also with other activities like volunteering, traveling, further education, or hobbies.

When formalized in 1972, contract work and temporary employment were shaped by the legislator to resemble as much as possible the so-called standard employment relationship (duration over single assignments, social security) with the aim of making the status of the contract workers and temporary employees more stable and secure. Yet, this process of formalization was not only state-driven but also marked the self-formalization of an emerging service industry (the temporary employment industry). As the chapter has shown, from the late 1960s some of the temporary employment firms began to organize themselves into a business association, to adopt codes of conduct, and to conclude initial collective agreements with the German Salaried Employees' Union. With this, they distanced themselves from the more clandestine lending practices of the subcontractors in the industrial sector and tried to build trust by acting as reliable "social partners." Whether or not the Law on Labor Leasing of 1972 was successful in protecting contract workers and temporary employees is a question for further analysis. Obviously, there continued to exist informal practices and moonlighting in the market for contract work in the decades after the boom, too. Also, by formalizing contract work and temporary employment in 1972, this type of "atypical" employment relationship became a valid segment of the West German labor market and, from the mid-1980s, a tool for "neoliberal" labor market policies aiming to make the labor market "more flexible."

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12. “Agriculture is Female”: Informality, Exploitation, and Modernization in the Lives of Italian Rural Women, 1950–1970

Eloisa Betti

Abstract: The Golden Age was not just a phase of industrial and economic growth in Southern Europe. Women in agriculture struggled to be recognized as real workers, campaigning to secure the status of wage workers and earn the right to run the farm. Informal and precarious labor arrangements and the patriarchal regulations that persisted in the agricultural sector were exposed by women's associations and trade unions between the 1950s and 1960s, when women workers became the majority of the workforce. Combining archival documents produced by women's associations, trade unions, political parties, and the cooperative movement, the chapter reveals both the persistence and development of informal work in the Golden Age of the twentieth century and rural women's fight against it.

Keywords: Italy, agriculture, women workers, precarity

Golden Age Europe was not only a period of economic and industrial growth but one of great transformation in Western countries and Southern Europe. Italy experienced an impressive level of industrial growth in the 1950s and 1960s, with industry becoming the leading sector in terms of both GDP and employment in less than a decade. By the early 1960s, Italy had joined the ranks of Europe's leading industrial nations, competing with

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Germany and France.¹ In the 1960s, agriculture remained important in terms of employment and GDP, particularly in the less industrialized regions of the south, and also in the central regions of the country. In the 1950s–1960s, unlike other Western European countries, Italy was also a country of emigration for thousands of male and, to a lesser extent, female workers who, unable to find work in their own country, emigrated to Belgium, West Germany, Switzerland, and France, and across the Atlantic to the United States, Canada, or Latin America.² The country also experienced massive internal migration, from the south to the north and, to a lesser extent, from the east to the west of the peninsula. Italy in the Golden Age can, then, be considered fully part of Western Europe, politically contributing to the birth of the European Economic Community, and economically becoming a major industrial power in the Western world. Yet the country was also part of Southern Europe, as conceptualized recently by labor historians, who have pointed out the similarities with Greece, Spain, and Portugal in terms of family structure, demographic behavior, migration patterns, and models of women's paid/unpaid work.³ The diversity of the Italian regions, and in particular the divide between southern and northern Italy, is crucial in understanding why Italy can be considered in between Western Europe and Southern Europe. While the so-called industrial triangle of Italy became the industrial core of the peninsula,⁴ the southern regions struggled with emigration, unemployment, and underdevelopment. This dual nature of Italy, together with the regional divide, may explain the complex situation of the labor market and women's working and social conditions in this period, characterized by a mixture of modernization, backwardness, and new forms of exploitation, especially in agriculture.

Labor arrangements in Italy and elsewhere in the West can no longer be assumed to be stable and formalized according to a supposedly standard model of employment, even though the period between the 1870s and the 1970s has been considered the era of labor formalization and protection. Feminist and postcolonial scholars have shown that such a model did not

1 Valerio Castronovo, *Storia economica d'Italia: dall'Ottocento ai giorni nostri* (Torino: Einaudi, 1995), 40–41.

2 See, for instance, Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: 1943–80* (London: Penguin, 1990); John Foot, *The Archipelago: Italy since 1945* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019); Michele Colucci, *Lavoro in movimento: l'emigrazione italiana in Europa, 1945–57* (Rome: Donzelli, 2008).

3 Leda Papastefanaki and Nikos Potamianos, "Introduction," in *Labour History in the Semi-Periphery: Southern Europe, 19th–20th Centuries*, ed. Leda Papastefanaki and Nikos Potamianos (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 1–40.

4 Commonly defined as the area outlined by the cities of Milan, Turin, and Genova.

extend far beyond the core heavy industrial sectors and white adult male workers.⁵ Research in various countries, including Italy, on the so-called Golden Age of the twentieth century has shown that precarious and informal work still existed both in the industrial sector, in the form of industrial homework, and in the service sector, where most domestic workers used to work informally.⁶ Work arrangements in agriculture have been less studied for Western countries of the 1950s to the 1970s, while new attention has been paid to the so-called periphery of the world of work, where agriculture was still the most important sector at that time.⁷ When the newly coined concept of the informal sector became popular in the 1970s, women working in informal and subsistence agriculture became the subject of studies under the ILO's Programme on Rural Women.⁸

The aim of this chapter is to bring back into the discussion the condition, role, and struggle of Italian rural women, examining the formal/informal tensions closely linked to the concepts of precariousness and exploitation in their own working experience. The analysis of agricultural work, and of rural women in particular, can help to reveal the existence of informal work in a period considered to be the most stable and regulated of the twentieth century. It underlines that the development of informal work and formal wage labor were intertwined. The trajectory of rural women in the 1950s and 1960s also shows the extent to which women were left behind in the process of formalizing labor arrangements, but also their struggle to achieve more regulated working conditions and proper employment

5 For an overview of these approaches, see Eloisa Betti, "Historicizing Precarious Work: Forty Years of Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities," *International Review of Social History* 63, no. 2 (2018): 273–319.

6 See, e.g., Anne-Sophie Beau, *Un siècle d'emplois précaires* (Paris: Payot, 2004); Saffia Elisa Shaukaut, "Emigrer et travailler en Valais au rythme des saisons: une histoire d'exclusion," in *Mémoire ouvrière*, ed. Luc Van Dongen and Grégoire Favre (Sierre: Éditions Monographic, 2011), 79–91; Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Gender, Labour and Precarity in the South East European Periphery: The Case of Textile Workers in Štip," *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 1, no. 2 (2014), 7–23; Eileen Boris and Leigh Dodson, "Working at Living: The Social Relations of Precarity," *University of California at Santa Barbara, Department of Feminist Studies* (2013), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6bk5xoj5>; Erin Hatton, *The Temp Economy: From Kelly Girls to Permatemps in Postwar America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011); Eloisa Betti, "Gender and Precarious Labor in a Historical Perspective: Italian Women and Precarious Work between Fordism and Post-Fordism," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 89 (2016): 62–83.

7 For an overview of informality in labor history, see Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Jan Lucassen, eds., *Workers in the Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History 1800–2000* (New Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd, 2005).

8 See Eileen Boris, *Making the Woman Worker: Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919–2019* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019): 122–27.

contracts. Labor in the agricultural sector was less and differently regulated by labor law and long-term regulations, while rural workers, especially women, were often excluded from the provision of the welfare state. In the complex transformation of agriculture, which also reduced its added value in economic and employment terms in Southern European countries such as Italy, rural women became both protagonists and embodiments of the changes taking place in the rural landscape. Informality persisted in the lives of rural women after the economic boom that accompanied the most profound transformation and modernization of agriculture.

The first part of the chapter deals with the issue of women's employment in the years of the so-called "great transformation," highlighting the limitations of the official statistics on women's work and the issue of informal work that emerged from specific research in the late 1950s to the early 1970s. The second part examines cases of informal work, and the degree of exploitation experienced by rural women and their struggle to improve their working and living conditions. In order to contextualize these cases, the third part provides a broader overview of rural women's mobilization in the 1950s and 1960s, taking into account the major demands of those decades, such as equal pay and a fair evaluation of women's work and for a new role within the farming family. The final part addresses the intertwined phenomena of the feminization, modernization, and mechanization of agriculture, looking at the new position of rural women and their demands for recognition and education. The conclusion draws on the case study of Italian rural women to explore the relationship between informal and precarious work, the agency of informal women workers, and their organization in the agricultural sector.

Women's Employment in Agriculture in the Years of the "Great Transformation"

Between the 1950s and 1960s, the mass exodus from the Italian countryside led to a reduction of more than 3 million people employed in the agricultural sector between the beginning of the economic boom and the early 1970s, according to official Italian statistics.⁹ The drastic reduction in the number of people employed in the agricultural sector affected almost exclusively

9 ISTAT, *Sommario di statistiche storiche 1861–1975*, Sezione Lavoro e retribuzioni, Forze di lavoro, tav. 107 (Rome: 1976); ISTAT, *Sommario di statistiche storiche 1861–1975*, Stime per la contabilità nazionale, tav. 108: Occupati presenti in Italia per settore e ramo di attività economica.

the self-employed,¹⁰ i.e., sharecroppers, tenants, leaseholders, and small farmers (90% of the total), while the number of farmhands fell much less.¹¹

From a geographical point of view, the rural exodus and consequent decline in agricultural employment affected the whole of Italy, although in different ways and at different times, in various regions of the country. It was in the northern regions that there had been a significant reduction in the agricultural population already in the 1960s, one that had been even more pronounced in the most rural regions of northern Italy, such as Emilia-Romagna and Veneto.¹² The decline of the agricultural population in central Italy came later but was just as severe, leading to the abandonment of large rural areas characterized by sharecropping. In the southern regions, on the other hand, the decline in the agricultural population was undoubtedly slower and inextricably linked to the process of migration, which saw large sections of the population, especially men, move to the industrial triangle and to the countries of Northern Europe. The complexity of the rural world and the diversity of rural landscapes became clear in both quantitative and qualitative terms in the 1950s and 1960s.

These dynamics show significant gender differences. Firstly, a large proportion of the female workforce was displaced from the agricultural sector between 1959 and 1971; around 1,200,000 did not find new employment in the industrial or tertiary sectors and seemingly vanished from the labor market.¹³ Yet the decline in the number of women employed in the agricultural sector was less than that of men, leading to an increasing "feminization of the agricultural sector," a phenomenon that was particularly pronounced in the southern and island regions.¹⁴ This is not surprising, since southern regions were most affected by the emigration of male workers to the Italian capitals, home to the economic miracle, or to the industrial regions of continental Europe. In order to supplement their husbands' remittances,

10 Pier Paolo D'Attorre and Alberto De Bernardi, eds., *Studi sull'agricoltura italiana: società rurale e modernizzazione* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1994); Giuseppe Barbero and Giuseppe Marotta, "Mobilità e mercato del lavoro agricolo dal dopoguerra ad oggi," in *Storia dell'agricoltura italiana in età contemporanea*, vol. 2, *Uomini e classi*, ed. Piero Bevilacqua (Venezia: Marsilio, 1990), 857–81; Franco Scaramuzzi and Paolo Nanni, eds., *Sviluppo recente e prospettive*, in *Storia dell'agricoltura italiana*, vol. 3, *L'età contemporanea*, ed. Reginaldo Cianferoni et al. (Firenze: Polistampa, 2002).

11 ISTAT, *Sommario di statistiche storiche 1861–1975*, Forze di lavoro.

12 Guido Crainz, *Padania. Il mondo dei braccianti dall'Ottocento alla fuga dalle campagne* (Rome: Donzelli, 1994).

13 ISTAT, *Sommario di statistiche storiche 1861–1975*, Forze di lavoro.

14 Maria Grazia Montanari, "Struttura ed evoluzione della forza lavoro femminile in Italia nel secondo dopoguerra," in *Lavoro regolare e lavoro nero*, ed. Pietro Alessandrini (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1978), 111–43.

which were not always sufficient to cover all their needs, women left alone and often with children in their country of origin—the so-called “white widows”¹⁵—continued to engage in subsistence agricultural activities, cultivating the small or very small plots of land they owned or rented, or offering themselves as day laborers.¹⁶ The “great transformation” also led to a reconfiguration of the rural economy and to the family economy itself in rural areas.

Contrary to the expectations of some scholars who argued in the early 1960s that Italy was moving towards full employment,¹⁷ the loss of jobs in agriculture was not compensated by an equally significant increase in employment in industry and/or in the tertiary sector: in fact, these sectors together only managed to re-employ less than half of the workers displaced from agriculture. Thus, when an Italian household moved from agriculture to industry, adult men generally found work in the secondary sector, while adult women tended to stay at home. The prevalence, even among the lower and middle classes, of this socio-economic and cultural model of the male breadwinner,¹⁸ who almost exclusively provided for the family, led to an increase in the number of housewives and, in particular, of what we might call “proletarian housewives.”¹⁹ The data presented so far on the evolution of employment between the 1950s and 1960s leads us to reflect more deeply on the role of women workers in the process of economic-industrial development during those years and on the changes that affected the employment structure itself. In general, women played a secondary role in the labor market of the 1960s.

15 Amalia Signorelli, “Movimenti di popolazione e trasformazioni culturali,” in *Storia dell'Italia Repubblicana*, vol. 2, *La trasformazione dell'Italia: sviluppo e squilibri: Politica, economia, società*, ed. Francesco Barbagallo (Torino: Einaudi, 1995), 589–697.

16 Amalia Signorelli, “Il pragmatismo delle donne: la condizione femminile nella trasformazione delle campagne,” in *Storia dell'agricoltura italiana in età contemporanea*, vol. 2, 589–658.

17 Pasquale Saraceno, *L'Italia verso la piena occupazione* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1963).

18 Maria Casalini, “Tra guerra e dopoguerra, donne e uomini nel mondo operaio,” in *Mondi femminili in cento anni di sindacato*, vol. 2, ed. Gloria Chianese (Roma: Ediesse, 2008), 45–97; Alessandra Pescarolo, “Il lavoro e le risorse delle donne in età contemporanea,” in *Il lavoro delle donne*, ed. Angela Groppi (Rome/Bari: Laterza, 1996), 299–345; Chiara Saraceno, *Mutamenti della famiglia e politiche sociali in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003), 53–54; Daniela Calanca, *Storia della famiglia italiana: ruoli e passioni nel XX Secolo* (Pesaro: Metauro, 2005), chapter 4; Deborah Simonon, *A History of European Women's Work: 1700 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1998); Marzio Barbagli and David I. Kertzer, eds., *Storia della famiglia in Europa*, vol. 3, *Il Novecento* (Rome: Laterza, 2005).

19 ISTAT, *IX Censimento generale popolazione*, 4 novembre 1951, vol. 7, Dati riassuntivi generali, Sezione Professioni; ISTAT, *X Censimento generale popolazione*, 15 ottobre 1961, vol. 9, Dati riassuntivi generali, Sezione Professioni; ISTAT, *XI Censimento generale della popolazione*, 24 ottobre 1971, vol. 10, Dati riassuntivi generali, Sezione Professioni e attività economiche.

However, many women classified as housewives in statistical sources were in fact engaged in casual work of various kinds, both in the agricultural sector and in the secondary and tertiary sectors. This casual work was not formalized but was completely informal and therefore not officially recorded. The phenomenon of informal casual work performed by housewives was identified at the beginning of the economic boom. The 1959 Labor Statistics Yearbook pointed out that almost one million housewives were engaged in "casual work" (*lavoro occasionale*), more than half of them in agriculture, with the rest divided between industry and services.²⁰ The same source shows that in 1959, two-thirds of housewives with casual jobs worked between 15 and 32 hours a week and more than 65,000 worked between 33 and 48 hours. The existence of a significant number of women registered as housewives, who more or less regularly performed non-domestic (paid) work, is an indication that statistical sources tended to underestimate the number of women workers, as many of them only took into account women's regular work, formalized by a labor contract, and not informal work. Thus, they generally overlooked unregulated forms of domestic work, seasonal work, and/or work entrusted to traditional relationships, as well as the whole range of informal jobs in the service sector, which was booming at the time, especially in the large cities of the industrial triangle. They also ignored the forms of part-time agricultural work practiced throughout the peninsula by women, including older women.²¹

Moreover, the frequent self-identification of Italian women in the 1950s and 1960s with the figure of the housewife can also be explained by the fact that the condition of housewife was desired by many; it also corresponded to the social role traditionally assigned to women at that time. Surveys carried out between the 1950s and 1960s²² "seem to reveal [...] a general

20 ISTAT, *Annuario di statistiche del lavoro 1959* (Rome: Stabilimento tipografico Fausto Failli, 1960); ISTAT, *Annuario di statistiche del lavoro e dell'emigrazione 1963* (Rome: Stabilimento tipografico Fausto Failli, 1964).

21 Renato Zangheri, "Caratteri dell'economia emiliano-romagnola," in *Atti dell'Accademia delle scienze dell'istituto di Bologna*, vol. LXVI (Bologna: Tipografia Compositori, 1978); Franco Tassinari, "L'evoluzione delle strutture agrarie nel secondo dopoguerra," in *La Ricostruzione in Emilia-Romagna*, ed. Pier Paolo D'Attorre (Parma: Pratiche, 1980), 35–56; Roberto Fanfani, "Il rapporto agricoltura-industria tra passato e presente," in *Distretti imprese classe operaia*, ed. Pier Paolo D'Attorre and V. Zamagni (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1992), 33–74.

22 Luigi Volpicelli, *La famiglia in Italia* (Rome: Armando, 1960); Società Umanitaria di Milano, *La preparazione professionale della donna* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1959); Milla Pastorino, "Ogni giorno in gara con l'orologio," *Noi Donne*, January 11, 1958, 24–25; "Le ragazze vogliono lavorare ma," *Noi Donne*, June 12, 1955, 9; Anna Garofalo, *L'Italiana in Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 1956); R. Rovi, "Ragazze d'oggi," *Il Tempo*, 1950.

desire on the part of women to be housewives.”²³ This desire seems to have been determined by the influence of traditional cultural models and by the difficult working conditions they experienced,²⁴ aggravated for those married women with children by the burden of the so-called “double shift.”²⁵ The Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) yearbooks show that casual work undertaken by housewives was mainly motivated by economic reasons.

1971 saw the publication of the results of a special ISTAT survey on persons not in the labor force,²⁶ which focused again on the phenomenon of the casual work of housewives, work that was not counted as such because of its non-standard, irregular, precarious, and surely informal nature. The survey was followed by a debate on the contradictory nature of the figure of the housewife, sometimes termed an industrial homemaker by statisticians such as Luciano Bergonzini.²⁷ Bergonzini carried out fieldwork in a number of municipalities in the province of Bologna, which showed that most of the women registered as housewives in the census actually worked 8–10 hours a day as homeworkers.

The problem of representing women's work in statistics, precisely because it often eludes the standard employment model, was taken up in the debate on the decline in women's employment that intensified in the 1960s and 1970s. Since the 1960s, many scholars have questioned the reasons behind the decline in female employment. A first thesis, supported by the then ISTAT president Giuseppe De Meo, saw the exit of women from the labor market as a subjective choice made possible by economic development. An opposing thesis, put forward by economists Giorgio La Malfa and Salvatore Vinci, attributed it to the dynamics of the Italian production system. The system was seen as incapable of absorbing all the available workforce in an unfavorable economic situation, thus expelling female workers earlier than men.²⁸

23 Casalini, “Tra guerra e dopoguerra,” 81.

24 Maria Luisa Righi, “Il lavoro delle donne e le politiche del sindacato: dal boom economico alla crisi degli anni Settanta,” in *Mondi femminili in cento anni di sindacato*, 123–62; Anna Di Gianantonio, “Calze di seta o calze spaiate? La condizione operaia femminile dal secondo dopoguerra ad oggi,” in *Operai: Figure del mondo del lavoro nel Novecento*, ed. Stefano Musso (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2006), 203–42.

25 Laura Balbo, “La doppia presenza,” *Inchiesta*, March–April, 1978.

26 ISTAT, “Indagine speciale sulle persone non appartenenti alle forze di lavoro, febbraio 1971,” in *Supplemento straordinario al Bollettino mensile di statistica*, 1971.

27 Luciano Bergonzini, “Casalinghe o lavoranti a domicilio?” *Inchiesta*, April–June, 1973.

28 Salvatore Vinci, ed., *Il mercato del lavoro in Italia* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1974); Enrico Pugliese, “Gli squilibri del mercato del Lavoro,” in *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, vol. 2, 421–75.

The gender perspective is crucial to understanding the emergence of "standard work" and its conceptualization, as well as the proliferation and definition of "non-standard" or "precarious" work. The relationship between women's employment, underemployment, and precariousness was the focus of a number of pioneering studies in the 1970s by scholars and economists such as Luigi Frey, Renata Livraghi, and Michele Salvati,²⁹ while numerous analyses have been carried out in relation to highly feminized industrial sectors such as the garment industry.³⁰ In the 1950s and 1960s, the term informal work was not used in the debate, while "precarious," "casual," and "unstable" were often used to describe the conditions of informal workers in all economic sectors. As reconstructed elsewhere, women's work provided an excellent vantage point for understanding the significant level of instability of the Italian labor market when the process of formalization reached its peak in the decade before the oil shock, as women's working conditions were often described as more precarious and unstable than men's.³¹

Informality and Exploitation in the Fields: Women Workers Fighting for Job Stability and Decent Work

To sum up: the labor of the woman worker has become decisive, but because it is seen as a function of income and profit, it must be underpaid and temporary. This is the modern employers' line of exploitation of women's labor.³²

Informal labor arrangements in agriculture were still the norm in Italy in the 1950s–1960s. Women were the most exposed to informal and precarious work, which often was related to seasonal production. According to the left-wing Italian union of farmhands, Federbraccianti, women were under-represented among permanent farm workers and over-represented in the most precarious jobs. In 1951, women accounted for 38.4% of daily farm

29 Luigi Frey et al., eds., *Occupazione e sottoccupazione femminile in Italia* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1977).

30 Luigi Frey, ed., *Lavoro a domicilio e decentramento dell'attività produttiva nei settori tessile e dell'abbigliamento in Italia* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1975).

31 Betti Eloisa, *Precarious Workers: History of Debates, Political Mobilizations and Labor Reforms in Italy* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2022).

32 FLAI Archive Rome, Federbraccianti Archive I, s. 3a, b. 238, f. Commissione femminile 1963, "Temi di dibattito in preparazione della conferenza nazionale sui problemi delle lavoratrici braccianti" (Rome, June 1963).

laborers, but only 6.1% of permanent farm workers. With the transformation of agriculture in the 1950s, the number of women increased, but especially in temporary jobs: in 1960, more than 43% of daily farm workers were women, while only 5.3% of permanent farm workers were women. According to the rural registers, there were 811,870 women working as farmhands, compared with 2,111,339 in total.³³ However, when looking at the number of days worked, there was gender discrimination against women daily farm workers: they worked less than their male counterparts, were paid less, and were excluded from the provision of the welfare state.

As underemployment was the main issue for agricultural workers, it is not surprising that women also demanded a fairer distribution of working days. In the early 1960s, women agricultural workers worked 85 days a year, while men worked 124 days.³⁴ Federbraccianti complained that the process of modernizing agriculture was hampering women's employment, even though the sector was becoming increasingly feminized. According to the union, women were often replaced by machines for the simplest tasks and had difficulty getting hired for more complex jobs because they lacked vocational training. Even within the left-wing union, the issue of women's underemployment was almost taboo, as in Italy in the 1960s women's employment was not even included in the national discussion on economic planning.

Women olive harvesters received a lot of attention in the 1950s and 1960s, due to the harsh working conditions in the landscape of southern Italy. In general, women working seasonally as harvesters were the most precarious, and were most of the time employed with informal labor arrangements. In Calabria in October 1962, a national conference was organized by Federbraccianti and the Istituto Nazionale Confederale di Assistenza (National Confederated Institute of Assistance), a workers' support agency of the left-wing trade union Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (Italian General Confederation of Labour, CGIL), to examine the situation of women olive harvesters. The latter were about 200,000 at the time, concentrated in Calabria and Apulia. The conference highlighted several issues: persistent underpayment, despite the contractual improvements of 1962 which had brought seasonal workers under collective bargaining; the widespread use

33 FLAI Archive Rome, Federbraccianti Archive I, s. 3a, b. 221, f. 4/2.3.2, "Note per la lezione: i problemi e i compiti nuovi del sindacato verso le lavoratrici salariate, braccianti e compartecipanti."

34 FLAI Archive Rome, Federbraccianti Archive I, s. 3a, b. 238, f. Commissione femminile 1963, "Temi di dibattito in preparazione della conferenza nazionale sui problemi delle lavoratrici braccianti" (Rome, June 1963).

of the street market to find work; the extreme exploitation of harvesters through piecework systems; and exhausting working hours. The complaint also concerned the still appalling backwardness of the social structures and, in particular, the inadequacy or lack of sanitary facilities, housing, nurseries, dormitories, and food.³⁵ It should be kept in mind that 74% of the houses in the area were no more than hovels and 90% of the population was illiterate. A few months later, a local conference was held in Rossano, in the province of Cosenza in the Calabria region, attended by more than 2,000 workers, to discuss the situation of olive harvesters in the area. Fair pay and proper contracts were key demands, along with day care, as many women working in olive production were mothers with very young children, who were often brought into the olive groves.³⁶

In the same year, women who worked as jasmine pickers also took up the struggle, as they did not have a contract and were simply paid on a piecework basis, in practice receiving a sum of money for every kilo of jasmine flowers they picked. As a result, they were both highly exploited and deprived of a decent wage due to the informality of their work. The struggle, led by the Federbraccianti of Reggio Calabria, was aimed at obtaining a proper contract; in particular, the union demanded the following wages for both men and women: 1,600 lire/day for ordinary workers, 2,000 lire/day for skilled workers, and 2,200 lire/day for specialized workers. At the same time, they wanted a fair piecework system: 400 lire per kilo of jasmine, 500 lire per kilo of gaggia, and 200 lire per kilo of tuberose.³⁷ At the time, a kilo of pasta cost 211 lire, while a kilo of meat cost 1348 lire.³⁸ In addition, Federbraccianti demanded the power to control job placement and to employ female jasmine harvesters for at least 90 working days. Welfare was no less important, and the union fought for food, transport, dormitories, adequate protection against accidents, kindergartens, and holiday camps for the harvesters' children. After a strike in 1962, they achieved a higher price per kilo of jasmine flowers and a fixed daily production bonus.³⁹

35 FLAI Archive Rome, Federbraccianti Archive I, s. 3a, b, 237, f. 12-15.1/2.4.0, "Mozione conclusiva del convegno di Reggio Calabria (19-21 ottobre 1961)."

36 FLAI Archive Rome, Federbraccianti Archive I, s. 3a, b, 237, f. 12-15.1/2.4.0, Letter from Irea Gualandi (female section) to Secretariat of Federbraccianti of Cosenza, December 22, 1962.

37 FLAI Archive Rome, Federbraccianti Archive I, s. 3a, b, 237, f. 19.1/2.4.0/4, Cgil Federraccianti Reggio Calabria, Conquistare un contratto organico per i Lavoratori addetti al Gelsomino.

38 ISTAT, *Sommario di statistiche storiche 1861-2010*, tav. 21.3, 886.

39 FLAI Archive Rome, Federbraccianti Archive I, s. 3a, b, 237, f. 19.1/2.4.0/4, Cgil, Le gelsominaie hanno vinto.

Rural women in the early 1960s experienced a clear tension between combining agricultural work with seeking new opportunities for employment in the informal economy. More and more peasant women worked part-time in the fields and at the same time as homeworkers in the growing garment industry. In fact, homeworking increased in rural areas as agricultural work decreased, partly due to mechanization. Despite struggles and protective legislation, home-based industrial workers, mainly women based in rural areas, worked without contracts and therefore had no labor or social rights. The level of exploitation was very high due to the difficulty of bargaining on behalf of invisible and isolated workers, which can be considered similar to the system experienced by rural women. Many adult rural women who had previously worked exclusively in agriculture opted for informal industrial homework because they could not combine productive formalized work in the factory with their reproductive work at home. This is something that has clearly emerged from the women's voices. *Noi Donne* (We Women), the magazine of the left-leaning women's association Unione Donne in Italia (Union of Italian Women, UDI), mainly formed by communist and socialist women, clearly portrayed the effects of the expansion of industrial homeworking in rural areas:

I am Manon Muzzi, a sharecropper from Val d'Elsa. I am thirty-two years old, my husband is Ivan and my daughter is Oretta. You see me by chance at the sewing machine: I usually have little time to make a dress or a blouse for my little girl. But for many sharecroppers, the sewing machine has become indispensable. They steal hours from their sleep to sew or embroider tablecloths and sheets that are not really needed for the dowry: they serve to supplement the meagre family budget. For many of them, homeworking seems to be a way out of the crisis that is affecting the countryside and making our lives difficult. So much extra work and, as always, so little money. I have said to the women I know: there are other ways to solve the crisis. Working at home just adds the exploitation of the industrialist to that of the landowner, and you can't last long. I have seen their eyes ruined, I have seen them lose their health, and I have seen them still in misery. They can't go on.⁴⁰

Informality was a common feature of women's lives in rural areas, whether they worked exclusively in agriculture or part-time as agricultural laborers and as home-based industrial workers.

40 Luisa Melograni, "Tempo d'estate tempo di parità nelle campagne," *Noi Donne*, July 27, 1958, 14–17.

Rural Women's Mobilization in 1950s–1960s Italy: The Struggle for Recognition

In the first decades of republican Italy, rural women were particularly active in demonstrations and in making demands, having "discovered" politics at the end of World War Two, when thousands joined the Resistance movement, and in its aftermath, when they finally voted in political elections in 1946 for the first time in Italian history.⁴¹ Thousands of rural women across Italy joined agricultural trade unions such as Federterra, Federbraccianti, and Federmezzadri, all affiliated to CGIL.⁴² Rural women have had a long tradition of political mobilization since the early twentieth century, when rice pickers were the protagonists of the crucial struggles in northern Italy that became part of the tradition of industrial conflict in the labor movement itself. Moreover, the first general secretary of the agricultural union Federterra was a socialist woman, Argentina Bonetti Altobelli, who became an icon of the Italian labor movement in the twentieth century.

Strongly unionized and politicized, they took part in the so-called "reverse strikes" of the early 1950s and made a significant contribution to land occupations during the struggle for the implementation of the so-called "Labor Plan" launched by CGIL General Secretary Giuseppe Di Vittorio and the passing of the 1950 agrarian reform law.⁴³ In 1959

41 On women and Italian trade unions in the second half of the twentieth century, see Maria Paola Del Rossi et al., *Sindacaliste: La storia della Cgil e delle sue protagoniste* (Bologna: Bologna University Press, 2022); on women and activism, Eloisa Betti et al., *Women, Work and Activism: Chapters of an Inclusive History of Labor in the Long Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Ceu Press, 2022).

42 The trade union organization of Italian farmers was reborn in Bari on March 23, 1944 under the name of *Nuova Federterra* (later *Confederterra*) as a continuation of the National Federation of Agricultural Workers (*Federterra*), which had been suppressed by Fascism. The first congress of *Confederterra* created two main branches: the National Federation of Farmers and Sharecroppers (*Federmezzadri*) and the National Federation of Farm Laborers and Agricultural Workers (*Federbraccianti*).

43 In the second half of the 1940s, as a form of political mobilization, unemployed farm workers and other unemployed people began to do work that was not required or even forbidden by the employer. In agriculture, this led to the occupation of land, which the unemployed cultivated to demand a wage or to reclaim the land itself. This strategy took place in the years when the CGIL, the largest Italian trade union federation, launched its political program, the "Labour Plan," which aimed to reduce the high rate of unemployment, even through reverse strikes. As a result of the massive mobilization of farm workers and land occupations, the government passed a law in 1950 that attempted to resolve the situation by expropriating 740,000 hectares (29% of the arable land) concentrated in Calabria, Sardinia, Delta Padano, and Sicily. By the end

there were 400,000 women in Federbraccianti,⁴⁴ 40% of the total number of union members, with female union activists concentrated in the Centre-North.⁴⁵

Improving working and living conditions in the countryside has been one of the main and most recurrent demands of rural women workers since the late 1940s, as shown by the numerous demonstrations they took part in throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Rural women had to work three shifts: on the land as farmhands, in the home as housewives, and often, in sharecropper families, in the barn as “ranchers”:

My husband and my father share five hectares of land in Viro Monsummano. I am Dena Pagni from Bonfanti, I am 24 years old and I have two small children. I work the land from morning till night. It's hard work, especially for me, because I have to stay close by and look after the children and then do everything around the house. If anything, I will work more than my husband, not less.⁴⁶

At the beginning of the 1950s, *Noi Donne* collected rural women's voices in the aftermath of the *Assise nazionale delle mezzadre* (National Conference of Female Sharecroppers). At the conference, the miserable life of the sharecropper family emerged in full detail:

“There's the problem of the farm, the school, assistance, disability, old age, maternity.” [...] “Well,” continues Jenny, leafing through a pile of files, “you see, out of 27 municipalities in our province, there are 9400 farmhouses, 4071 have no water, the others have water from wells, 4578 have no electricity, 4170 have no toilet, in 6621 there is a mixture of livestock and workers. There are families whose doctor is 10 km away, 1688 families over 3 km and 3089 families within 3 km. The same goes for schools. Thousands of children have to walk 3 km every morning.”⁴⁷

of the reform, about 500,000 people had received land. See Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy*.

44 Elisabetta Palumbo, *Se otto ore vi sembrano poche: donne nel sindacato agricolo in Italia (1904–1977)* (Rome: Ediesse, 2012).

45 The rate of unionization was Milan 39%; Rovigo 65%; Verona and Padua 30%; Ravenna 53%; Caserta 47%; Brindisi 42%; Bologna 45%; Mantua 47%. FLAI Archive Rome, *Federbraccianti* Archive I, s. 3a, b. 235, f. 23.1/2.4.0/2, *Situazione femminile nel sindacato Federbraccianti* (1959).

46 Valeria Ottolenghi, “E il mio non è lavoro?” *Noi Donne*, March 1956, 28–29.

47 Ezio Taddei, “La campagna è stata tradita,” *Noi Donne*, May 3, 1953, 6–7.

In addition to the trade unions, the UDI set up a special branch for rural women, called *Donne della campagna* (Women of the Countryside).⁴⁸ The latter, together with women's sections of trade unions and, to some extent, small farmers' associations and the women's branch of the cooperative movement, have been particularly active in the struggle for recognition of women's new role in agriculture and in promoting the issues of equal pay; promoting a fair valuation of rural women's work; advocating vocational training, childbirth care, and maternity leave for female farm workers, sharecroppers and small farmers; and calling for hospital care, and sick leave.⁴⁹ It should be mentioned that the progressive laws advancing women workers' rights, which were approved between the 1950s and 1960s, most of the time excluded rural women. The latter did not benefit from the labor laws created by the state, as rural workers did not experience the same process of formalization as did industrial workers. Agriculture was not included in the so-called industrial norms reproduced by the state: rural women, for instance, were not fully entitled to paid maternity leave established by the 1950 law on the working mother.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a woman's contribution was still underpaid and undervalued, while access to vocational training programs was almost non-existent. Thus, in the early 1960s rural women demanded equality between men and women in land ownership and a law on joint ownership of land and farms between spouses. Since the head of the family was often also a member of the cooperative, women lobbied for changes in the statutes to allow the female component to participate in the assemblies.⁵⁰

On 17 October 1962, the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives organized a conference in Rome on "The role of women in the farming family and in the production for a modern transformation of the countryside" (*La funzione della donna nella famiglia coltivatrice e nella produzione per una trasformazione moderna delle campagne*), the result of two years' work by women's cooperatives and women from the Farmers' Federation and Federbraccianti.⁵¹ From this conference it emerged that the rural family was still living in a backwards state, suffering from a lack of economic

48 Maria Michetti et al., *UDI: laboratorio di politica delle donne* (Rome: Cooperativa libera stampa, 1984).

49 FLAI Archive Rome, Federbraccianti Archive, b. 237, f.158.1/2.4.0/4, Unione Donne Italiane, Documento conclusivo della conferenza regionale emiliana "Donne della campagna" (Ferrara, January 28, 1962).

50 Bruna Bellonzi, "Vogliono essere cittadine dei campi," *Noi Donne*, July 16, 1961, 28–31.

51 Lorena Cerasi and Tito Menzani, "La mostra Cooperazione in Campo e le fonti della Fondazione Barberini su donne e lavoro," *Clionet* 6 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.30682/clionet2206ab>.

progress, which in the countryside was accompanied by the disintegration of the family structure and an increase in tasks and responsibilities, which had led women to a new awareness.

The mobilization of women workers was also particularly important in Emilia-Romagna, where the Communist and Socialist parties were in power and ran most of the municipalities, including the capital, Bologna. Rural women's unionization in the region was the highest in the country, where they had joined the left-wing CGIL and *Federbraccianti*. At the beginning of the 1960s, in the wake of the national mobilization, the various UDI of Emilia-Romagna promoted the regional conference "Women of the Emilian Countryside," held in Ferrara on 28 January 1962.⁵² At the time, women made up more than half of the agricultural workforce. A few years later, Lola Grazia, president of the UDI of Bologna, stressed that "women who work the land, who struggle with the double work of the field and the home" felt "an overwhelming need for help" that should have come to them "from a modern society."

Equal pay and a fair evaluation of women's work were closely related in the debates of the 1950s and 1960s and were considered of pivotal importance for determining the new role of women in agriculture as well as for the modernization of the sector as a whole. Women's struggles for equal pay in agriculture peaked in the boom years from 1958 to 1963 following the ratification of the International Labour Organization's Equal Remuneration Convention (adopted in Geneva in 1951) by the Italian parliament in 1956. In 1957, women farmers took part in the national demonstrations for the implementation of the ILO Convention, which were held throughout Italy on 8 June.⁵³ The fair valuation of women's work was crucial to achieving equal pay in agricultural labor: at the end of the 1950s, women's work was still only valued at 60% of men's wages due to the Serpieri coefficient, named after the agronomist Arrigo Serpieri. During the Fascist period, Serpieri had established a system for evaluating agricultural work based on gender and age, which de facto devalued women's work simply because it was done by women.⁵⁴

52 FLAI Archive Rome, Federbraccianti Archive, b. 237, f.158.1/2.4.0/4, Unione Donne Italiane, Documento conclusivo della conferenza regionale emiliana "Donne della campagna" (Ferrara, January 28, 1962).

53 Aida Tiso, "Le lotte per la parità e la questione del coefficiente Serpieri," in *Società rurale e ruoli femminili in Italia fra '800 e '900. Atti del convegno: Le donne delle campagne nella storia sociale d'Italia, 1860–1960*. Annali dell'Istituto Alcide Cervi 13/1991, ed. Paola Corti (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), 293–302.

54 Tiso, "Le lotte per la parità e la questione del coefficiente Serpieri," 293–302.

UDI presented a popular initiative bill for the fair evaluation of the working day of women in agriculture, proposing the abolition of the Serpieri coefficient. It was the first time since the Italian constitution came into force in 1948 that this procedure was used. 50,000 signatures were collected throughout Italy and were symbolically handed over during a public event at the International Agricultural Fair.⁵⁵ Thanks to an important mobilization led by the women of UDI, together with trade unionists and peasant women belonging to agricultural organizations, the law they had lobbied for was passed in 1964, marking an important turning point.⁵⁶

Rural Women in the Modernization of the Agricultural Sector: Between Expectations and Disillusionment

Agricultural mechanization was a reality in Italy in the 1950s and 1960s, but the degree of mechanization varied greatly across the country. Large farms could use tractors and other mechanical tools, while small farmers and sharecroppers in several parts of Italy could only dream of them. Nevertheless, the feminization, mechanization, and modernization of agriculture were intertwined phenomena. Mechanization, according to several sources, made it possible to employ women in former men's jobs, which became increasingly common.

The phenomenon of the "feminization of agriculture" was immortalized by an iconic reportage of the magazine *Noi Donne* in 1961, which celebrated tractor drivers and pruners as emblems of gender redemption. Advertising agencies also discovered the new role of women in agricultural production in the early 1960s. SAME, one of the main Italian tractor manufacturers, at the 1962 Agricultural Fair in the Veneto region showed a tractor stopped in the middle of a field depicting five women of different ages sitting one after another at the wheel.⁵⁷ From the early post-war years, figures of workers from socialist countries, such as tractor drivers in agriculture, became popular in the left-wing women's and political press, which published articles showcasing models of working women from the USSR and Eastern Europe.

55 UDI National Archive, Thematic Section, Docam 61.1, Delegazione di Donne contadine in occasione della consegna delle 50.000 firme; "Mille donne oggi a Roma con cinquantamila firme," *La Nazione*, October 25, 1962.

56 Tiso, "Le lotte per la parità e la questione del coefficiente Serpieri," 293–302.

57 Giovanni Cesareo, "L'agricoltura è donna," *Noi Donne*, April 2, 1961, 18–21.

Indeed, in the 1960s, more and more women found themselves in charge of a farm after the men had left to work in the northern industrial towns or to find a job in the nearest factory or in the construction industry. The report published by *Noi Donne* in 1961 gives a clear picture of this phenomenon:

Today things have changed. Men go to work in the city or emigrate, and women take their place. Not only in the fields, but also in farm management. In addition, agricultural machinery makes farm work less strenuous, so women can do it as well as men. Sometimes even better than men: this is the case with specialized crops (vegetables, fruit, vines), which require dexterity and agility, typically female traits. At the same time, industry produces almost everything that peasant women used to make with their own hands (think of clothing and underwear): it is therefore more convenient for women to work in the fields than at home.⁵⁸

As anticipated in the previous paragraphs, the new position of women, despite their emerging concrete role, was not fully recognized. For the most part, they were still referred to as *coadiuvante familiare* (family helper), a term that emphasized the complementary, secondary role of women, who were also included in the census as family support workers. Both women's associations and trade unions advocated the full recognition of women's role in the farm family, and agricultural work was still seen as an opportunity because of the decline in male employment. In the less industrialized parts of Italy, women had no alternative but to find another job in agriculture if they wanted to stay in rural areas. Most of them had been trained to carry out traditional activities in rural families, and they continued to do so, asking to be fully recognized.

"Women want power" was the beginning of an article published by *Noi Donne* in the early 1960s, following two conferences of rural women organized by the UDI in Apulia in southern Italy and in Veneto in north-eastern Italy. In the letter, farm women demanded:

- 1) a fair evaluation of women's work in the countryside and therefore the approval by Parliament of the bill presented by the UDI women deputies to this effect; 2) the extension of the right to vote to women in farmers' mutual societies and in all other economic and associative bodies operating in the countryside; 3) qualification courses for women's work; 4) the extension of health and economic protection during maternity to all

58 Cesareo, "L'agricoltura è donna," 18–21.

women agricultural workers; 5) the transformation of the agricultural environment with the construction and renovation of rural houses, the widespread distribution of schools, the modernization and development of services.⁵⁹

Women's voices explained their role in the peasant family. Sometimes women were the main and sometimes only breadwinners, yet they did not have the right to vote in farmers' mutuals (*mutue contadine*) or cooperatives, as Lia, 25 years old, testified. Dina, 45 years old, was the only adult working in her peasant family, but because of the structure of the system of representation she was not recognized as a family head (*capofamiglia*).⁶⁰ As a result, she was not entitled to health insurance or hospital care, even though she worked full-time in the fields. Even childbirth care was not a right for rural women, who still gave birth at home in the early 1960s because they could not afford the cost of hospitalization.

In the late 1950s, women began to lobby for access to technical schools, as girls were largely excluded from vocational training. In the 1946/47 school year, the first female student enrolled in an agricultural technical institute in Calabria. In the school year 1955/56 alone, 10 girls from several Italian regions enrolled in agricultural technical schools: Piedmont (1), Veneto (1), Emilia-Romagna (3), and Sicily (5). In the school year 1956/57, the first girl passed the qualifying examinations and graduated as an agricultural technician.⁶¹ Between the immediate post-war period and the end of the 1960s, the proportion of female students enrolled in these institutions rose from 0.02% in 1946–47 to 6.6% in 1969–70⁶². That year, around a thousand girls, mainly from the south of Italy, graduated as agricultural technicians.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, peasant women took to the streets to demand a new agricultural policy and full recognition of their role in overcoming the economic crisis that followed the 1973 oil shock in Italy and across the globe. In the region of Emilia-Romagna, and in Italy as a whole, women became active in the cooperative movement and founded women-only cooperatives of agricultural workers, as happened in the countryside of Bologna, where a report on their working and retirement conditions was published thanks to a series of interviews conducted by the Italian journalist and writer

59 Cesareo, "L'agricoltura è donna," 18–21.

60 Cesareo, "L'agricoltura è donna," 18–21.

61 Alessandra Cantagalli, *Istruzione e tecnica. I periti industriali dall'Ottocento a oggi* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2012).

62 ISTAT, *Annuario statistico italiano*, Rome, Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1944–1948, 1971.

Maria Rosa Cutrufelli.⁶³ Creating or belonging to a cooperative was a real alternative to formalizing women's work in agriculture beyond the capitalist system. Cooperatives have an important and long tradition in Italy and women have played an important role in their development, especially in the period after 1945. For the labor movement and the Communist Party, joining a cooperative was seen as a way of escaping exploitation. Female members of agricultural cooperatives usually received a salary, but they could also decide how to run the cooperative, which some of them tried to do in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the mid-1970s, women were at the forefront of demonstrations against the stagflation crisis following the 1973 oil shock, which had a profound impact on the Italian economy and labor market. As the photographic archive of the Ivano Barberini Foundation shows,⁶⁴ agriculture was also a key issue in several protests that took place in Italian cities such as Bologna. Rural women took to the streets, chanting and carrying banners with messages such as “United for modern working conditions, for employment, for a new agrarian policy” (Uniti per una moderna condizione di lavoro, per l'occupazione, per una nuova politica agraria). A woman driving a tractor and wearing pants held up a very clear sign: “We emerge from the crisis by also making full use of the ‘woman resource’” (Si esce dalla crisi anche con il pieno utilizzo della ‘risorsa donna.’)⁶⁵ The slogan associated with the image was a powerful symbol of the modernization of the rural woman, who used machines and wore trousers, demanding to be at the center of the agricultural sector.

Conclusion

The chapter has analyzed women's work in agriculture in Italy in the 1950s and 1960s, the years of the “great transformation.” Rural women played a very important role in the modernization and mechanization of the sector, which was becoming increasingly feminized. Women in agriculture performed a wide variety of tasks and embodied the different labor contracts that existed at the time. However, the situation of rural women was precarious,

63 Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, ed., *Le donne protagoniste nel movimento cooperativo: la questione femminile in un'organizzazione produttiva democratica* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978).

64 Ivano Barberini Foundation preserves various photographic archives, including some related to women workers in agriculture, <https://fondazionebarberini.it/archivi/>.

65 Ivano Barberini Foundation, Photographic Archive Coop Emilia-Veneto, “Donna alla guida di un trattore durante una manifestazione sull'agricoltura,” 1970s.

characterized by informal and unfair labor arrangements. The issues of equal pay and a fair development of women's work were a constant demand during the years of economic growth between 1958 and 1963, but were very difficult to achieve, despite the joint struggle of trade unions and women's associations. The demands were not fully resolved until 1977, when a law established full equality between women and men in the world of work. Nevertheless, the abolition of the Serpieri coefficient in 1964 was a crucial milestone in achieving more equality in agriculture.⁶⁶

Women's work was undervalued, both statistically and in practice, even if they were day laborers or sharecroppers. The latter were completely invisible, as they did not receive a salary, were not entitled to social benefits, and could not participate in the institutions that regulated them. Statistics and estimates from trade unions and women's associations show the extent to which informal work was widespread throughout the period under consideration. Women worked informally in agriculture when they were registered as housewives; moreover, they worked informally in seasonal production as harvesters. Informality and precariousness were very much intertwined in women's seasonal work; women workers were simultaneously exploited, forced to work hard for low wages when they did work, and precarious because they were asked to work for a limited number of days. The piece-work systems still used in the agricultural sectors reinforced the link between precariousness, exploitation, and wage instability.

Rural women, through their organizations, were at the forefront of the struggle for new legislation that fully recognized the value of women's work and equal pay. Thus, they mobilized within and beyond the capitalist system, demanding not only labor rights but also social rights, and more equal vocational training to improve their skills and chances of stable employment. At the same time, thanks to the role of women trade unionists, Federbraccianti put forward differentiated demands according to the different types of women workers throughout Italy. One of the main demands was the formalization of informal work through union action. UDI also played a key role in promoting the campaign for equal pay and the abolition of the Serpieri coefficient, a milestone in achieving decent wages for rural women. Together with other rural and cooperative organizations, UDI also lobbied for a change in the way the rural family functioned as an economic structure in the case of sharecroppers or small farmers. As

66 Eloisa Betti, "Equal Pay and Social Justice: Women's Agency, Trade Union Action and International Regulations: Italy, the ILO and the EEC in the Global Context (1951–1977)," *The International History Review* 44, no. 3 (2022): 577–94.

rural women became the majority, they sought to gain more power and undermine the traditional gender structure, which had been particularly resilient until the 1970s.

Women's associations and agricultural unions never pushed women workers to leave the countryside, as agriculture was still an important source of employment for Italian women. Their joint struggles showed that there was also a tendency towards formalization in the rural world of work. This chapter's study of gender dynamics has shown the extent to which informality persisted in the lives of rural women, and that only a decisive change in the role of women in society helped to reduce informality and exploitation.

About the Author

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13. Informal Work and Labor Struggle: Domestic Workers' Private and Public Conflicts during the Franco Era in Spain, 1960–1975¹

Diego Latorre Manglano

Abstract: The 1960s and 1970 in Spain were defined by the labor movement's struggles for better working conditions and against Franco's dictatorship. However, informal and precarious workers, such as domestic workers, did not develop effective tools of collective political and social protest. Nevertheless, the notion of conflict as an inherent element of labor relationships forces us to pay attention to those forms of conflict that arise even when everything seems to be peaceful. With this aim, the chapter studies labor struggles in Spanish informal work using domestic service as a case study. It analyzes both private and public conflicts, broadening the debates to encompass the capacities and limitations of conflict in feminized, informal, and precarious jobs.

Keywords: Domestic workers, labor struggle, everyday resistances, Young Christian Workers, Francoism

The twentieth century has generally been understood as the century of labor formalization, at least in the Global North. The idea that labor was increasingly regulated in order to strengthen workers' social protection is

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quite popular.² But studies on non-regulated or barely regulated labor allow us to focus on those features associated with informality that were widely retained even in post-war Europe.³ Spain during the Franco Era is a telling example of this. The Spanish post-war economy did not keep up with most European countries' pace of growth. The 1940s and 1950s were marked by a prolonged period of economic stagnation and a deterioration in living standards following the Civil War (1936–1939). Informal work relationships remained widespread in many sectors of the economy. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that economic development and social modernization began to approach the levels of democratic European countries.

Furthermore, the 1960s and 1970s in Spain witnessed major labor struggles, and so this has been a fertile topic in Spanish labor history written over the last few years. Moreover, the great importance of the labor movement in the political democratization of the country has encouraged this kind of historiographical approach. The large-scale strikes called between 1975 and 1977 were able to halt the top-down non-democratic political projects which tried to maintain the dictatorship after Franco's demise, meaning that the labor movement was the main champion of a post-Franco democracy. This has led most studies to focus on strongly mobilized sectors, such as metallurgy or mining, which helped push forward the country's democratization process, but has also restricted research within the confines of a narrow conception of politics.⁴ There are no studies on those labor sectors where

2 Nicholas Crafts et al., eds., *Work and Pay in 20th-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Daniel J. Gifford, "Labor Policy in Late Twentieth Century Capitalism: New Paradoxes for the Democratic State," *Hofstra Law Review* 26, no. 1 (1997): 85–160; Claudia Goldin, "Labor Markets in the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States*, vol. 3, ed. Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); James R. Green, *The World of Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998); John T. Dunlop and Walter Galenson, *Labor in the Twentieth Century* (London: Academic Press Inc., 1978).

3 Sibylle Marti, "The ILO, the Politics of Statistics, and Changing Perceptions of Informal Work, 1970–Present," *Labor* 21, no. 1 (2024): 98–116; Sibylle Marti, "Precarious Work-Informal Work: Notions of 'Insecure' Labour and How they Relate to Neoliberalism," *Journal of Modern European History* 17, no. 4 (2019): 396–401; Eloisa Betti, "Historicizing Precarious Work: Forty Years of Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities," *International Review of Social History* 63, no. 2 (2018): 273–319; or Dominique Boels, *The Informal Economy: Seasonal Work, Street Selling and Sex Work* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

4 Álvaro Soto Carmona, *Clase obrera, conflicto laboral y representación sindical: la evolución socio-laboral de Madrid: 1939–1991* (Madrid: Ediciones GPS, 1994); José Babiano, *Emigrantes, cronómetros y huelgas: un estudio sobre el trabajo y los trabajadores durante el franquismo (Madrid, 1951–1977)* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1995); Carme Molinero and Pere Ysàs, *Productores disciplinados y minorías subversivas: clase obrera y conflictividad laboral en la España franquista* (Madrid:

collective mobilization did not reach sufficient intensity to influence the political development of the country. This is also why this chapter focuses on the analysis of conflicts that were generated around domestic service and how these confrontations were shaped by informal work. The lack of either a labor contract, a common shopfloor, or well-established working hours made solidarity and collective responses much more difficult to establish. Even so, the idea that no historical process is free of conflict forces us to consider what kinds of resistances were developed in feminized and informal professions like domestic service. As social agents combine formal and informal strategies in their political activities and in the management of conflict, this chapter not only focuses on public collective action but also on varieties of individual, spontaneous, and private resistances, with the aim of understanding the main opportunities created by domestic workers and the limitations they faced.⁵

The chapter also explores the Spanish case in the light of international historical approaches that look at how domestic workers have struggled for better living standards in different places and times.⁶ This does not mean ignoring the national and contextual features, which will be mentioned and developed throughout the chapter, but it does mean considering how these workers' struggles have been incorporated into post-war capitalism. These are important features such as racialization and migrant backgrounds, feminization, all-day work, or workers' control over their own bodies and not just their labor power—all of which can be seen in many post-war democracies such as France, Britain, or the United States.⁷ Although

Siglo XXI, 1998); Xavier Doménech Sampere, *Lucha de clases, franquismo y democracia: obreros y empresarios (1939–1979)* (Madrid: Akal, 2022).

5 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Westminster: Penguin, 2013); E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 2015); James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); James Scott, "Everyday Forms of Resistance," *Copenhagen Papers* 4 (1989): 33–62.

6 A major example in volume 88 of the *International Labor and Working-Class History* which introduces the subject is Eileen Boris and Premilla Nadasen, "Introduction: Historicizing Domestic Workers' Resistance and Organizing," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 88 (2015): 4–10.

7 Alizée Delpierre, *Servir les riches. Les domestiques chez les grandes fortunes* (Paris: La Découverte, 2022); Maria Arondo, *Moi, la bonne* (Paris: Témoigner, 1975); Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Bridget Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour* (London: Zed Books, 2000); Cecilia Rio, "On the Move: African American Women's Paid Domestic Labor and the Class Transition to Independent Commodity Production," *Rethinking Marxism* 17, no.

Spain was a dictatorship at this time, a fact which undeniably played a role in their lives, most domestic workers did not struggle for democracy but fought daily for higher wages, shorter working hours, and the opportunity to leave domestic service, like their European and American counterparts.

The chapter begins with a brief section that develops the idea that domestic service was the most common job among working-class women in Franco-era Spain. Even though Franco's regime promoted a national-Catholic model for women based on morality and law, most working-class families could not be financially sustained exclusively by the head of the family. So, although women were supposed to avoid work and devote themselves entirely to household work and childbearing, this was not possible most of the time; and even though formal labor was usually inaccessible to female workers, this was not the case with informal work, such as textile piecework at home or domestic service. The data from state mutual societies like Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico (National Assistance Society for Domestic Servants) and the Mutualidad Nacional de Empleados de Hogar (National Mutual Society for Domestic Employees) are useful here for providing a quantitative approximation of the importance of domestic service as a means of survival for a large number of working women. The Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico and the Mutualidad Nacional de Empleados de Hogar were state institutions created with the purpose of ensuring that a minimum of social protection was given to affiliated domestic workers because they were excluded from the social protection of formal labor. This quantitative approximation can be complemented with data from the publications of non-state organizations such as *Cáritas*, as well as with surveys, to construct a sociological profile of domestic workers.

Following this, the second section covers the daily autonomous survival strategies adopted by domestic workers and how these generated daily private conflicts which can be read from a class and gender perspective. Letters written by domestic workers and sent to Elena Francis's radio program, now archived in the Local Archive of Baix Llobregat (Arxiu Comarcal del Baix Llobregat) and the court files of the Judicial Regional Archive of Madrid (Archivo Judicial Territorial de Madrid, AJTM), are useful for analyzing the kinds of conflicts and strategies that developed in the private space. Elena

4 (2005): 489–510; Inés Pérez and Santiago Canevaro, "Languages of Affection and Rationality: Household Workers' Strategies before the Tribunal of Domestic Work, Buenos Aires, 1956–2013," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 88 (2015): 130–49; Victoria Haskins and Anne Scrimgeour, "'Strike Strike, We Strike': Making Aboriginal Domestic Labor Visible in the Pilbara Pastoral Workers' Strike, Western Australia, 1946–1952," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 88 (2015): 87–108.

Francis was on the air for almost forty years, and throughout these years thousands of women wrote to her about their personal problems. These documents cannot be dismissed, because they show the workers' point of view about their relationships with their mistresses and their working conditions free from any kind of censorship, because the archived letters were not necessarily the ones that were broadcasted. The criminal court files of the AJTM have also been vital in understanding a practice that has not received much attention in research on domestic service, although it was deeply embedded in the collective imaginary, namely pilfering. Pilfering was especially important because it meant gaining some economic profit in everyday life without doing more work, which was generally considered a threat to labor discipline. As only 25 records of judicial sentences for pilfering are available for these years,⁸ it has been necessary to complete the data with reports from the widely read newspaper ABC to approach an understanding of the forms and meanings of this type of crime. Pilfering was prosecuted through the ordinary courts because domestic workers were not considered regular workers for legal purposes.

A third section examines the main organization that tried to mobilize domestic workers in Spain at this time—the Young Christian Workers (Juventud Obrera Cristiana, JOC)—and looks at how domestic workers faced several problems as they were pushed into new repertoires of contention. The JOC is a Catholic workers' organization founded in Belgium in the twenties with the educative aim of spreading Catholic values among workers. It gained popularity in the 1950s in the context of the Second Vatican Council. In Spain, the economic and industrial development of the country and the emergence of a new working class favored the strengthening of Catholic workers' organizations and opened the way for an active social doctrine. In this context, the JOC was the main spearhead of young Catholic class unionism, which soon became one of the main anti-Franco forces in the country. Throughout the 1960s, the JOC increasingly became strongly critical of the dictatorship and of capitalism. This democratic radicalization, the importance given to young workers, and the appreciation of women's work, led to the JOC becoming deeply focused on domestic service as one of the main opportunities available to young female workers.⁹ That is why this section analyzes the large amount

8 The AJTM only holds some Penal Code's files for the years 1962, 1963, and 1964 for the chronology of interest to this paper (1960–1975).

9 Francisco Martínez Hoyos, "Cristianos contra Franco en Cataluña (1939–1975)," *Historia del presente*, no. 10 (2007): 61–80; Enrique Berzal de la Rosa, "Cristianos en el 'nuevo movimiento obrero' en España," *Historia Social*, no. 54 (2006): 137–56; Feliciano Montero García, *La Iglesia: de la colaboración a la disidencia (1956–1975)* (Madrid: Encuentro, 2009); Eider de Dios Fernández y

of sources on the JOC available in the General Archive of Salamanca's Pontifical University (Archivo General de la Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, AGUPS) on household employees' materials. This makes it possible to study domestic workers' collective action, paying special attention to the cultural frameworks and repertoires of contention.¹⁰

Domestic Service: A Working-Class Women Experience

The official number of domestic service workers between 1961 and 1969 was recorded by the Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico, and from 1970 to 1975 by the Mutualidad Nacional de Empleados de Hogar, as part of the financial accounts of these state institutions. The average number was 264,525 per annum for the whole period, with a maximum of 343,940 in 1961 and a minimum of 203,392 in 1970.¹¹ But the official data is completely unreliable because of the informal nature of this work. According to non-state institutions the figures are likely to have been much larger. The Cáritas foundation put the number of domestic workers in 1970 at around one million—almost five times more than the number of affiliated women in the same year—while various reports by the JOC put the figure at 600,000

Raúl Mínguez Blasco, "Del obrerismo *naífal* al Cristo revolucionario. Género y clase en el discurso de la JOC (1955–1975)," *Historia, Trabajo y Sociedad*, no. 11 (2020): 121–40; Francisco Javier Torres Barranco, "Los movimientos obreros especializados de Acción Católica de la diócesis de Cádiz: JOC y HOAC: una aproximación histórica y apostólica," *Trocadero*, no. 27 (2015): 101–21; Francisco Martínez Hoyos, *La JOC a Catalunya els senyals d'una església del demà, 1947–1975* (Barcelona: Edicions Mediterrànea, 2000); Jesús González de la Cruz, "Del compromiso social al obrerismo nacionalista: la JOC durante el franquismo en el País Vasco," *Vasconia*, no. 30 (2000): 273–81; José Babiano, "Los católicos en el origen de Comisiones Obreras," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, no. 8 (1995): 277–93.

10 Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Boulder-London: Paradigm Publishers, 2004); Doug McAdam et al., *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement. Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

11 Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico* (Madrid: INP, 1962), 10; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Montepío ...*, 1964, 13–14; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Montepío...*, 1965, 15–16; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Montepío ...*, 1966, 18–19; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Montepío...*, 1967, 15; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Montepío...*, 1968, 12–13; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Montepío...*, 1969, 9; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Montepío ...*, 1970, 9–10; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Memoria, Balance y Cuenta de Gestión de la Mutualidad Nacional de Empleados de Hogar del Ejercicio 1970* (Madrid: INP, 1972), 9; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Memoria ... 1971*, Madrid, INP, 1973, 9; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Memoria... 1972*, Madrid, INP, 1973, 9; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Memoria ... 1973*, Madrid, INP, 1974, 10; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Memoria... 1974*, Madrid, INP, 1975, 8; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Memoria ... 1975*, Madrid, INP, 1976, 9.

to 800,000 for the first half of the 1970s.¹² Therefore, domestic service was one of the main forms of subsistence for a considerable part of the Spanish working women population during those years.

In addition, these women had a social background that connected them with proletarian experiences, such as entering the labor market at a very early age, internal migration, low-income families, and lack of alternatives due to their poor formal education. The vast majority had migrated from rural areas to big cities, and/or were from large and low-income families and needed to start working at a very early age to help their parents. A survey of 165 domestic workers in Madrid in 1967 mentions that most of them started working between the ages of 14 and 17.¹³ The priest Jesús María Vázquez's 1958 study—published in 1960 by the state social protection organization Instituto Nacional de Previsión (National Welfare Institute)—also shows that a third of all women interviewed had started working at that age. A proportion of 64.4% began working between 11 and 20 years old, while only 22.5% had started working after the age of 20.¹⁴

A study of family origins in July 1960 collected the testimony of six maids from a JOC group in Madrid. There were seven siblings and no money in Lourde's household, while Carmen's family needed her to work but there was no occupation for her in her village. These examples were not exceptional.¹⁵ The survey carried out by Jesús María Vázquez showed that 94.4% of these maids' fathers had low-income jobs, such as small-livestock farmers and farm laborers, unskilled workers, and day laborers; or the women were directly linked to marginalizing social factors such as fatherlessness (18.7%) or unemployed fathers (3.1%).¹⁶ Another survey of 1967 in Madrid gave similar data: 57% of the women surveyed recognized that their family's economic situation influenced their decision to go into domestic service and, when asked about their father's occupation, 33% answered farmer and 20% worker, and 12% had no father. Furthermore, 70% had between three and six siblings.¹⁷ Moreover, rural migrant women were engaged in

12 Fundación FOESSA, *Informe sociológico sobre la situación social de España 1970* (Madrid: Euramérica, 1970), 1064; Archivo General de la Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca (AGUPS). Archivo Acción Católica Española (ACE)-Juventud Obrera Cristiana (JOC). 59-1-ff-67; AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 58-2-ff-10.

13 AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 59-1-ff-85.

14 Jesús María Vázquez, *El Servicio Doméstico en España: situación real y propuesta de resolución para sus problemas* (Madrid: INP, 1960), 104.

15 AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 58-4-ff-6.

16 Vázquez, *El Servicio Doméstico en España*, 102-44.

17 AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 59-1-ff-85-86.

domestic labor, driven by economic necessity and the lack of alternatives due to poor formal education. A JOC report of June 1976 entitled the “Situation of Domestic Workers in Madrid” revealed that 69% acknowledged that they chose the job because “they have no other professional preparation” and only 3% “because they like it.”¹⁸ Also, Jesús María Vázquez showed that in response to the question, “what would you have liked to be?” 35.6% answered dressmaker, 31.1% rich, 15.6% mistress, and 10% teacher, while only 5.6% answered maid.¹⁹

Autonomous Strategies and Daily Confrontations: Marriage, Exit, and Pilfering

Domestic workers were controlled within a hard disciplinary and legal framework that ensured their obedience and limited their capacity to challenge it. Furthermore, structural conditions such as living in the same house where they worked, or gender-role determinations such as the desire to leave work after marriage, restricted their capacity to struggle. But they were still able to develop autonomous labor management strategies. Depending on whether the strategies employed were within or outside moral and legal boundaries determined whether they sparked conflict or not. Switching from live-in to live-out work or marriage as a way of leaving domestic service did not usually cause many problems. María, for instance, came from her village to Barcelona and had to start serving. Her mistress did not give her more free time to spend despite her continuous demands. So, María decided to quit her job and find a house where she could serve eight hours a day and move into her own flat.²⁰ But María’s case was unusual. The JOC lamented in 1976 that only 23% of women preferred to work as live-out domestic workers. This was probably because live-in work provided very convenient housing facilities to young migrant women.²¹

Similar to live-out work, maids often had marriage on their minds as an effective strategy to stop serving. One domestic worker in Barcelona wrote to Elena Francis’s radio program complaining that she had been in service since she was fifteen and that the only thing that she wanted

18 AGUPS. ACE–JOC. 98–1 ff–12.

19 Vázquez, *El Servicio Doméstico en España*, 108.

20 AGUPS. ACE–JOC. 58–1 ff–11.

21 AGUPS. ACE–JOC. 98–1 ff–18.

was to get married, stop working, and take care of her own household.²² But marriage usually did not work out as well as expected because lasting romantic relationships were not so easy. Domestic workers suffered from severe social stigma that made it difficult for them to establish relationships with men from a higher social position, which would allow them to stop working. This was the case of a girl from Barcelona who wrote to Elena Francis lamenting that, "I met a boy who since then has always had a little sympathy for me [...] but I am quite sure they [his parents] will be against it as he comes from a family that dresses well and I am the opposite as my job is, as they say, a service girl."²³

So, if they did manage to marry, it was usually with a male worker who was unlikely to have the economic capability to support a family on his own. The breadwinner model during the Franco era had serious practical limitations. Although the regime promoted measures to stop women from working after marriage, increasing prices and lower wages forced most working-class women to keep working. This was the situation of many domestic workers who, after marriage, had to keep working as live-out workers. One former household employee, Juana Navas, suffered in this way, but she also saw many women who went through the same:

The girls really wanted to meet someone they liked, that they fancied and so on, to get married and leave this subject ... it was a way out ... although afterwards they were all very wrong—all of them, I mean me too—because you left, you had your little house, you had your freedom but at the end you had to go back to work in the same job, although not as a live-in worker.²⁴

The conformity of live-out work and marriage to moral and legal norms made these generally non-confrontational strategies. In fact, the Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico promoted live-out work through the so-called Hogares-Escuela (Home-Schools). These living accommodations were built with the aim of helping maids to be housed. Yet the project did not manage to become an effective initiative due to its limited capacity. In 1968, the Hogar-Escuela in Madrid housed only 379 maids, and the

22 Arxiu Comarcal del Baix Llobregat (ACBL). Consultorio para la mujer Elena Francis. ACBL50-19-T2-600430.

23 ACBL. Consultorio para la mujer Elena Francis. ACBL50-19-T2-600247.

24 Archivo Historia del Trabajo (AHT). Biografías obreras y militancia sindical en CCOO. BIO 63. CD 1.

one in Barcelona housed only 255. These figures did not even reach 1% of the total number of affiliates of the Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico in those regions, according to the 1960s data. The Montepío also promoted leaving jobs through marriage by offering a bonus payment. If an affiliated domestic worker stopped working when she got married, the state would pay her an amount of up to 6,000 pesetas.²⁵ This dowry was available to all working women, but in domestic service it was especially important because of the strong desire women had to leave work through marriage. This kind of leaving work was supported by the state because it aligned with the dictatorship's Catholic values, and it improved the stability of the labor market by expelling a large part of the Spanish population.

But switching from one house to another to secure better working conditions was different. These cases did cause confrontations with employers, because workers resorted to this method as an effective strategy to improve their labor conditions. Juana Navas remarked that she usually left a house where she had been for some time because the families would begin to treat her worse.²⁶ In fact, Jesús María Vázquez's study shows that 64.4% of surveyed women had changed house between one and four times, despite their youth. The main reasons given were that they wanted to earn more (23.1%) or that they were unhappy (18.8%).²⁷ This is the case of a woman from Barcelona who wrote to Elena Francis's radio program asking for a less demanding job:

I have to be serving and I have to work a lot and I would also like to thank you if you knew of a suitable job for me, of course it would be better to serve in a marriage if there was less work than where I am now, I have a lot of work and three children [from the employing family] and there is a lot to do.²⁸

So, switching from one house to another without fear of unemployment could be useful when labor conditions became unbearable thanks to a labor market defined by high demand. Furthermore, in an undesirable situation it could be more attractive than other kinds of conflict because of the lower

25 Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico* (Madrid: INP, 1970), 8; INP, *Nuestra casa. Revista del Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico*, no. 10 (September 1960):

24.

26 AHT. Biografías obreras y militancia sindical en CCOO. BIO 63. CD 2.

27 Vázquez, *El Servicio Doméstico en España*, 110–11.

28 ACBL. Consultorio para la mujer Elena Francis. ACBL50–19–T2–630044.

risk, especially if the employee's family was not willing to improve her working conditions—as was usually the case.

This kind of exit may have been an effective individual bargaining tool due to the concern it generated among families in need of domestic servants. It was common to see alarming news stories about the high negotiating power of maids with titles like “Requiem for former domestic service” (*Requiem por el ex servicio doméstico*)²⁹ or “Couplets on the deaths of maids” (*Coplas a la muerte de las chachas*).³⁰ These articles mention how easily domestic workers were able to change house as soon as they were unhappy with any issue. In this way the press and other mass media developed a discourse about a supposed crisis of domestic service that was not true. According to the narrative of this alleged crisis, maids had such a great capacity for negotiation, and wielded such power in households, that the welfare of respectable bourgeois families was in danger. But as labor historians such as Eileen Boris have already shown in other contexts,³¹ we cannot speak of a real crisis of domestic service in the Spanish case. As clearly emerges throughout this chapter, not only did domestic service continue to be the main job for women workers, but the labor control exercised by mistresses was kept very tight. Although wages grew, they did not grow at the same rate as in other sectors, working hours remained extremely long, and the tasks remained particularly hard.

With the aim of preventing maids from switching households, the Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico also created economic loyalty awards. Maids who had been working for five or more years in the same home were financially rewarded. In the 1965 annual report of the Montepío, more than 50,000 *premios a la constancia* (constancy grants) were awarded. This means that almost 20% of the affiliates had been working in the same house for at least five years.³² Moreover, if we pay attention to documentation that brings us closer to the workers' point of view, switching households was not always so easy, due to coercion. In fact, letters to Elena Francis concerned cases of domestic workers who found it difficult to leave their current job. A maid in her early twenties asked Elena Francis to write back as soon as possible because she wanted to leave her position, but her employers would

29 Luis Martínez Kleiser, “Requiem por el ex servicio doméstico,” *ABC*, June 2, 1968, 3.

30 Rafael García Serrano, “Coplas a la muerte de las chachas,” *ABC*, October 10, 1966, 3.

31 Eileen Boris, “Never Obsolete: Private Household Workers and the Transaction of Domestic Work,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 102 (2022): 7–22.

32 Aritza Sáenz del Castillo Velasco, “En el limbo. El servicio doméstico durante el franquismo en España,” *Historia Social*, no. 84 (2016): 88; Ministerio de Trabajo, INP, *Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico* (Madrid: INP, 1966), 5.

not let her go. This was similar to the story of two friends who used to work in the same house and asked Elena Francis not to mention their names because their mistress listened to the program too; they feared that if the mistress found out their intentions she would cry and prevent them from going.³³

Another kind of daily confrontation could relate to pilfering. Although pilfering featured prominently in the public image of domestic service, its real implications have not been studied in Spain. In fact, this chapter argues that it could be understood as a “weapon of the weak,” in James Scott’s terms, because it was a bottom-up action with the aim of deriving some kind of economic benefit without increasing the time devoted to work or to its intensity.³⁴ It is true that it is not possible to know domestic workers’ points of view based on these sources, but even if we cannot ascertain their intentions, domestic workers certainly knew the illegality of their actions and developed strategies to avoid punishment.

This is the case of a woman who had been working in the same house for long time, but who waited until the summer of 1962 before she took advantage of the family holiday to steal some jewels. Family holidays were a prime time for pilfering when employers’ surveillance was absent.³⁵ Another live-out domestic worker also waited for the family’s two-week holiday to Marbella, while a similar situation occurred in August 1961 in the Madrid neighborhood of Guindalera. A resident left his keys with his neighbor to look after the house during his vacation. But the neighbor’s domestic worker got the keys and pilfered his cutlery and clothes.³⁶ The choice of holiday-time to steal reflects a conscious and wise strategy to avoid sanctions.

We can recognize other examples showing decisive choice of the right time and situation. Another domestic worker in Madrid was prosecuted for theft because she kept part of the money that the mistress gave her to buy clothes for the employers’ son.³⁷ Although this act clashed strongly with moral conceptions of gender linked to care, the situation may also seem appropriate as a way to steal and avoid the consequences. Despite the praise

33 ACBL. Consultorio para la mujer Elena Francis. ACBL50–19–T2–580709; ACBL. Consultorio para la mujer Elena Francis. ACBL50–19–T2–631223.

34 Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*; Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*; Scott, “Everyday Forms of Resistance,” 33–62.

35 Archivo Judicial Territorial de Madrid (AJTM). Libro Sentencias. Legajo 11119. Sección 7. Orden Penal. Año 1963. Sentencia 169.

36 AJTM. Libro Sentencias. Legajo 11120. Sección 7. Orden Penal. Año 1963. Sentencia 369; “Sirvienta detenida por robo de joyas” ABC, August 12, 1961, 42.

37 AJTM. Libro Sentencias. Legajo 11121. Sección 7. Orden Penal. Año 1963. Sentencia 438.

her work had earned her thus far, another worker took advantage of a visit to the mistress's elderly mother to steal 96,000 pesetas.³⁸ The theft probably was planned because the domestic worker knew that being alone with an old person would make it easier. Moreover, the apparent contradiction between her excellent behavior in public and the theft in private is particularly interesting in this case because it shows that disciplined behavior does not always have to be the result of conviction but can be used as a way of avoiding punishment.

The strategies not only involved the moment of committing the crime but also the choice of stolen object. If the aim was to avoid punishment, the object had to be accessible and not of high value. This was the case of a sixteen-year-old maid who pilfered objects accessible to her and that were without excessive value, such as sheets, tablecloths, towels, and a pair of scissors.³⁹ Moreover, technique was also important and was not left to chance. After three months working in a house, a woman in Madrid took advantage of the fact that the keys to the wardrobe were always accessible. After a few weeks she had already stolen 7,000 pesetas worth of items, bit by bit.⁴⁰

Like switching households, pilfering created some concern among mistresses, too. But newspapers focused mainly on the cases of those women who pretended to be domestic workers to enter homes to steal. In fact, while in the criminal files of the AJTM only 30% of the files are from women burglars posing as domestic servants, they featured in almost 60% of the news stories in the most widely read newspaper, the ABC.⁴¹ This shows an over-representation of these cases, especially if we consider that it is very likely that they were also over-represented in criminal court compared to genuine domestic workers' pilfering, which may have been more difficult to detect. If domestic workers' pilfering was usually characterized by taking low-value objects or money because of their wish to remain undetected, the fake domestic workers' cases had different characteristics: 1) the amounts stolen were much higher because the perpetrators did not return after the robbery, so anxiety about detection disappeared; 2) the false domestic workers usually stole in collaboration with partners, fleeing the scene of the crime or hiding the stolen objects; and 3) it was common for these burglars to have a background of previous thefts, so they often used false names.

38 "Café con talego" ABC, May 15, 1968, 87.

39 AJTM. Libro Sentencias. Legajo 11122. Sección 7. Orden Penal. Año 1963. Sentencia 613.

40 AJTM. Libro Sentencias. Legajo 11122. Sección 7. Orden Penal. Año 1963. Sentencia 789.

41 Francisco Javier Davara Torrego, "Los periódicos españoles en el tardo franquismo. Consecuencias de la nueva ley de prensa," *Revista Comunicación y Hombre*, no. 1 (2005): 136.

Although these women were not domestic workers, it is important to mention them because these thefts were used to generate a certain stigma to intensify control over domestic service as a whole. An ABC article entitled “Thieving maid” (*Sirvienta ladrona*) blamed the mismatch between supply and demand for the ease with which some women were able to break into other people’s houses to steal.⁴² According to the author, ladies were forced to hire any available domestic worker, and this was a threat to family security. The mistresses’ fears about having a burglar in their homes would also increase the control over domestic workers. The above-mentioned Juana Navas advised women that, contrary to the press reports, the most common reason why nobody hires you is if you do not have references attesting to your good behavior. In addition, she mentioned how usual it is that employers even set traps to see if a maid pilfers:

I’ve always had dirty hands, but from working, never from doing things I didn’t have to do, that’s true. But many times they set traps for you so that if you fall into temptation or don’t fall into temptation. [...] Or throw things under the bed to see if you clean up, in short, even throw jewelry. [...] They’ve done that many times to check [...].⁴³

In fact, these worries would lead to false accusations. A neighbor in Barcelona forgot where he had put some money and denounced the domestic worker. The money was eventually found in a drawer in her employer’s office.⁴⁴ Another domestic worker was also denounced in Madrid in 1961 for stealing from the house where she was working. After being proclaimed not guilty, the magistrate mentioned the possibility that the denunciation was made in revenge against the worker for leaving the house.⁴⁵ Whether by mistake—as in the first case—or intentionally—as in the second—the stigma attached to domestic workers as potential thieves encouraged them to be reported and was even used to prevent them from leaving their jobs.

Collective Action’s Failure: The Young Christian Workers (JOC)

The JOC was the only workers’ organization that tried to mobilize domestic workers during Franco’s dictatorship. Until the mid-1960s, the tone regarding

42 “Sirvienta ladrona” ABC, November 23, 1961, 32.

43 AHT. Biografías obreras y militancia sindical en CCOO. BIO 63. CD 2.

44 “Olvidó dónde puso el dinero y denunció a la sirvienta” ABC, April 14, 1966, 78.

45 AJTM. Libro Sentencias. Legajo 11118. Sección 7. Orden Penal. Año 1962. Sentencia 348.

domestic service was charged with a strong defense of the model of the woman housewife even by the JOC. But this gradually started to change, and the Christian organization replaced it with the model of the working-class woman.⁴⁶ The change was gradual, but at the JOC's national council of 1965 it had become noticeable. The fact was, getting married and stopping work was no longer perceived as the ideal or main aspiration of domestic workers but an attitude that distanced them from the demand for better labor standards. The JOC's press organ did not deny that most household workers wished to find a partner, get married, and leave domestic service, but now it considered this to be an individual choice that limited the real independence of these women workers. Indeed, they considered that this individualistic exit strategy should be replaced by a socialist and democratic collective struggle against the exploitative conditions to which domestic workers were subjected.⁴⁷ Therefore, in the decade from 1965 to 1975, the JOC developed activities that focused on domestic workers, generating cultural frameworks and repertoires of contention of a socialist, anti-Francoist, and democratic nature with the intention of integrating domestic workers into the wider labor movement.

The main intent of the JOC's activities concerning domestic workers was to carry out surveys to get closer to the life experiences of these women. The JOC developed its own method, which it called *revisión de vida obrera* (Workers' Life Review), focused on analyzing the experiences of everyday life through mass interviews. It aimed to gain an insight into the situation of domestic workers, judge how this could be changed, and act accordingly. Although the JOC's activities rarely reached the point of direct action, thousands of surveys were filled out through personal interviews, usually in parishes or by word of mouth.⁴⁸ As a result of these surveys, the JOC published a public manifesto in 1970 about the situation of domestic workers, their living conditions, and their main demands. This manifesto was positively valued by the organization, but its social impact would never become significant because it did not appear in the press and the JOC's activities did not change after 1970.⁴⁹

Other repertoires of contention that the JOC developed were of a formative and recreational nature. Formative activities were intended to generate

46 Mónica Moreno Seco, "Jóvenes trabajadoras cristianas: compromiso social y aprendizaje ciudadano en la JOC," *Ayer*, no. 102 (2016): 103.

47 AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 58-4 ff-1-4; AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 5-j-2/2 4; AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 58-8 ff-1.

48 Eider de Dios Fernández, *Sirvienta, empleada, trabajadora de Hogar. Género, clase e identidad en el franquismo y la transición a través del servicio doméstico (1939-1995)* (Málaga: Umaeditorial, 2018), 257; Moreno Seco, "Jóvenes trabajadoras cristianas," 101.

49 AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 59-1 ff-24-40; AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 6-2 ff-10.

shared ways of seeing the world and of training militants. Topics such as the psychology of the domestic worker, the objectives of the struggle, and the synthesis of educational and political work were common. Recreational activities had the aim of making it easier to attract women domestic workers to interact and make first contact with the organization. These activities were most commonly excursions to the countryside, Christmas parties, spiritual exercises, or visits to the cinema and theatre. But there were also talks on topics that might be of interest, like book exhibitions or women's sexuality. The interest they generated is proved by the fact that, while it was usual for surveys, assemblies, and demands to take place only in most organized regions, recreational activities took place everywhere. Moreover, in Barcelona, the JOC's domestic service groups published a newsletter named "Household workers' bulletin" (*Boletín de empleadas de hogar*). It is not possible to know how many people read it, but twenty-four issues were published between March 1970 and October 1973. So, during those years the JOC had a press organ used to disseminate its ideology and to give a voice to sympathetic domestic workers.

Therefore, the JOC developed cultural frameworks based on social justice and radical democracy in line with the political changes that other Catholic workers' movements were also undergoing.⁵⁰ It was not until the second half of the 1960s that the organization's approach to domestic service began to distinguish itself from Sección Femenina de Falange—the women's section of the Spanish single-party Falange Española de las JONS (Juntas Ofensivas Nacional-Sindicalistas) (Spanish Falange of the Councils of National-Syndicalist Offensive). The state organization made great efforts from the late 1950s onwards to organize and promote the professionalization of domestic workers. But, although this professionalization was characterized by a defense of women's professional pride and educational improvement, it was also marked by a strong paternalism that reinforced the ties of dependence on mistresses, and the education initiatives were aimed more at improving women's productivity than their living conditions. So, the JOC, in the process of radicalization in moving towards adopting socialist, democratic, and anti-Francoist positions, did not support Sección Femenina de Falange's professionalization. Although in 1967 a JOC report in Madrid still defended the need for professional training to enable workers to become household specialists,⁵¹ this was soon to change, and the critics of Sección Femenina de la Falange and of the Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico and

50 Enrique Berzal de la Rosa, "Católicos en la lucha antifranquista. Militancia sindical y política," *Historia del presente*, no. 10 (2007): 8–16.

51 AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 59–1 ff–110–111.

its training courses was harsh. In 1972, an editorial of the JOC's domestic workers' newsletter opened with:

[The Sección Femenina de la Falange] talks about "professionalizing" domestic service. They seem to be asking for more control over our work and our persons. They ask for training courses to have "girls for everything" and "documents" to prove our ability and our "good conduct" and all this without it being too expensive for them.⁵²

The change in tone is clear from previous years, because of a turn to workerist positions that can be detected in the criticism of training courses as generators of labor discipline. According to the JOC, these courses were no longer beneficial to workers, and the productivity increase only benefited the employers, whose concern was not the cultural development of their employees but only the delivery of more efficient service. Moreover, the Montepío was not only criticized for its training courses but also for being a conciliatory institution whose aim was to avoid conflict. For that reason, if the Montepío could not be considered a means of defense for the worker, the only alternative was the autonomous organization of domestic workers represented through the JOC.

This radicalization involved establishing definite dividing lines in terms of class to intensify the conflict. The constant use of the term *empleada del hogar* (household employee) shows a strong interest in generating class consciousness and disassociating workers from strongly stigmatized appellations such as *chacha*, *sirvienta*, or *miñona*.⁵³ But efforts to include domestic workers in the labor movement went further. Special focus on this issue can be observed from the late 1960s. Mentions of the conditions of workers, the working class, or proletarians can be read in almost all reports and materials about domestic workers from those years. Moreover, the aspiration to include domestic workers under the umbrella of working-class identity and the workers' movement was strongly connected with the main demand of the JOC's domestic service groups: inclusion in labor legislation. The main labor law—Ley de Contrato de Trabajo de 1944—excluded them from the standards of formal labor.⁵⁴ This meant that most domestic workers did

52 AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 5-j-2/2 6.

53 Although it is difficult to translate, the key point is that these words had a derogatory tone like "skivvy," "servant," or "maid."

54 BOE. DECRETO de 26 de enero de 1944 por el que se aprueba el texto refundido del Libro I de la Ley de Contrato de Trabajo (24 de febrero de 1944): 1628.

not earn the minimum wage, had no limits on their working hours, and could be dismissed without any reason. It was at least from 1968 onwards that the need for legislation began to be continuously referred to as a way of improving their living conditions and as a strategy for integrating them into the labor movement:

Today the working class has a minimum platform of rights which is the basis for its struggles; the majority of struggles are raised through negotiating the agreement. Legislation today is a function of having that base from which we can start and on which we can coordinate as household employees and with the rest of the working-class.⁵⁵

However, the anti-Franco and socialist political features of the JOC made it difficult for legislation to be the ultimate political goal of domestic service. Legislation was understood as a necessary step towards an emancipatory horizon: the disappearance of domestic service. An example of this is the JOC's national meeting of domestic workers in March 1973. In that meeting it was assumed that legislation was a short-term objective because achieving it would not mean putting an end to workers' exploitation. Therefore, as a long-term objective, they aimed at ending domestic service because it was considered a luxury. The problem was not serving those in need, like the sick and the elderly; the problem was serving wealthy families who lived leisurely lives. A household employee answered, in the JOC's domestic workers' newsletter, a mistress who wished for good coexistence between maids and mistresses, stating that, "the mistresses have an interest in our existence" whereas she did not, because "we know that there will always be those who have to wash dishes, make beds, scrub floors, etc. What we do not agree with [...] is that it is exclusively at the service—and comfort—of a family and not for the benefit of society."⁵⁶

Furthermore, this political objective had some influence in publications close to Christian anti-Francoism. In *Household Employees: Third Class Workers (Empleadas de Hogar: trabajadoras de 3ª clase)*, a book written by journalists close to the organization, the influence of the JOC is recognized, which is why the disappearance of domestic service runs through the book from beginning to end. It begins with a prologue written by domestic workers who consider that their job has no reason to exist, and ends with the belief that it is necessary to put an end to

55 AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 58-3 ff-7.

56 AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 58-2 ff-11; AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 5-j-2/2 6.

this destructive and degrading work.⁵⁷ Another example is *Domestic Service Workers (Trabajadoras del servicio doméstico)*, edited by a Catholic workers' organization close to the JOC and written by domestic workers. The disappearance of domestic service is one of the main ideas here, too. The book does not consider it a useful service for those in need, but a service for wealthy people who are able to afford it. That is why it argues that "one way of fighting for a more humane society is to fight for this work to disappear."⁵⁸

But despite how things might seem, a careful reading of the sources shows that in most cases the organization's efforts were in vain. Throughout these years, the same objectives and the same problems were repeated at all the councils and meetings because they never succeeded in resolving them. The lack of militant domestic workers, the problems in developing their class consciousness, and the difficulties of going beyond carrying out surveys, were recurring themes. The lack of involvement in Madrid's group was lamented because this limited its effectiveness. This problem was repeated at the JOC's national meeting of domestic workers in 1973 and at the JOC's national councils in 1975 and 1976. Moreover, it was recognized that the organization was unable to reach many domestic workers; and, when it did manage to do so, it did not know how to tackle their concerns.

In addition, the growing tensions within the Church hierarchy—a supporter of Franco—and the subsequent movement of Catholic militants to other anti-Franco organizations, also damaged the JOC's activities at all levels.⁵⁹ As far as domestic service was concerned, all these external and internal problems were not ignored and indeed were widely acknowledged, yet they were generally blamed on external and structural factors. The lack of militant discipline was considered to be the result of structural problems: lack of education; mistresses' influence; lack of leisure time; or lack of class consciousness. If there were few domestic workers participating in the JOC, it was because of the sum of these factors—according to the organization's point of view. In fact, the report on domestic workers at the 1976 national council summed up the objectives from 1968 to 1976, and they were the same every year: the need for surveys to discover the reality of domestic workers' situations and to improve the organizational structures to be able

57 Miguel Bayón and Gregorio Lázaro, *Empleadas de hogar trabajadoras de 3ª clase* (Madrid: ZYX, 1976).

58 Consuelo Gómez Ruiz, *Trabajadoras del servicio doméstico* (Madrid: Ediciones HOAC, 1976).

59 Feliciano Montero García, "La Iglesia dividida. Tensiones intraeclesiales en el segundo franquismo," in *De la cruzada al desencanche: la Iglesia española entre el franquismo y la transición*, ed. Manuel Ortiz Heras and Damián A. González (Madrid: Sílex, 2011), 60–66.

to carry out protest actions that never happened.⁶⁰ Despite all of these organizational issues, self-critique was not common, and it is rare to find reflections on how to improve.

So, although the JOC tried to unite, mobilize, and organize domestic workers along democratic and class lines for its political projects, it encountered limitations that were severe enough to prevent progress. It was not possible to carry out actions beyond conducting surveys in most regions; including domestic workers in labor legislation was impossible, and it was not even close to achieving the end of domestic service.

Conclusion

Domestic service was essential for female workers' survival during the 1960s and 1970s in Spain. But still, it has been ignored by studies on labor struggles because of its informal and feminized nature. Post-war historiography in Spain has mostly been defined by approaches that focus on the democratization process. These studies, despite their undoubted usefulness, have also led to the neglect of those actors who were not influential enough to prevail in public political confrontation. Nevertheless, as this chapter has shown, this does not mean that class-based political conflicts were not generated in private spaces, too.

Domestic workers resorted to a wide range of well-known private resistance practices. Although some of these practices—such as live-out work or getting married to stop serving—did not generate confrontations because they were acceptable in moral and legal terms, others did. Switching houses to look for better working conditions, or pilfering from houses, were common enough practices to leave a trace. Among these daily practices, strategies like leaving homes in secret or using family holidays to pilfer show that domestic workers were deliberately defying some rules or breaking the law. It is difficult to know the real impact of these resistances. However, the efforts of state agencies, the mainstream press, and mistresses to fight them prove that they were not harmless. Control over the workforce and the degree of exploitation involved were both at stake. With these goals in mind, the dissemination of discourses such as the domestic service crisis or the stigmatization of domestic workers as thieves could be extremely effective in increasing labor discipline and control over these women. If we look at its public struggles, the reasons for the failure of the JOC's attempts to

60 AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 58–2 ff–7; AGUPS. ACE-JOC. 6–2 ff–4–19.

mobilize and organize domestic workers seem clear. Short-term objectives were never realized, lack of militancy remained an unsolved problem, and key goals, such as the inclusion of domestic workers in labor legislation or the end of domestic service, remained out of reach.

The failure of collective action in domestic service and the prevalence of daily forms of confrontation force us to approach labor struggles from a broader political perspective. Although Spanish domestic workers did not participate in collective political struggles, they were not passive subjects dealing with labor exploitation and so cannot be considered alienated from politics. Economic and political struggles cannot be conceived as self-contained spheres under capitalism. If domestic workers' pilfering, used as a way of increasing income without increasing work, or switching households as a way of negotiating employment conditions, are understood as challenges to the labor relationship, they must also be seen as challenges to politics that persisted beyond the Franco dictatorship. This defiance was not revolutionary, transformative, or public; however, its role in the construction of politics, understood as part of power relations that guaranteed social reproduction, cannot be denied.

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14. The Gender of Informality: Intimate Labors in Transnational Perspective during the Century of Labor Formalization

Eileen Boris

Abstract: This chapter explores intimate labors as informal labors during the century of labor formalization, 1870–1970, when such labors often went unrecognized as work. It charts discourses about as well as struggles over domestic and sex work through international agreements, institutional networks, and national responses that led to exclusions from labor standards, and sometimes incorporation into state agendas through other forms of regulation such as public health or morals. Domestic work retained its private, servile context. Sex work was sometimes regulated for the benefit of customers; at other times it was criminalized. This story is not one of progress or loss but rather of a widening circle of inclusion at different places and times that has remained unstable.

Keywords: prostitution, domestic labor, public health, gender ideology, sex work

Black women congregated on Bronx street corners during the 1930s waiting for white employers to pick them for a day's household labor. Such working "under the table" worried New York City officials, who had pledged to stamp out vice, enforce newly established minimum wages, and catch welfare cheats; that is, those who collected public assistance but earned too much to be eligible for relief checks. Most concerning was the appearance of

Marti, Sibylle, and Christof Dejung, eds. *Informal Work in Europe, ca. 1870–1970*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press / Central European University Press, 2026.

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criminality. What if unemployed Black women were selling not only their brawn but also their bodies? What if they were spreading venereal disease? The markets, authorities believed, were a nuisance and domestic workers deserved to be treated like prostitutes and welfare abusers.¹

To stop informal labor, the state needed to regulate domestic work and stamp out sex work. Labor feminist Frieda Miller, then New York Commissioner of Labor, called together leading civil rights, social welfare, women's, union, and other private and public groups in 1939 to form the Committee on Street Corner Markets. She charged them with investigating the sensationalist-named "Bronx slave markets," establishing alternative employment bureaus, and ending the trafficking in Black women's labor.² For trafficked they were. As one such domestic worker put it, "You can read about how they rope in innocent girls to the city to be prostitutes. Well, it's the same way they do us girls who work out."³ As historian Ariana Alexander has observed, "At the sidewalk sat the image of mammy with the potential of Jezebel." Mammy, the stereotype of the domestic worker who loves her white family, and Jezebel, the stereotype of the sexual temptress, had clung to Black women for over a century. These images shaped responses to the women who stood on street corners looking for day labor.⁴

The Committee recognized how discrimination and lack of training had forced Black women to remain in low-waged and intermittent domestic service, but it offered only cosmetic solutions. New York City's mayor Fiorella LaGuardia had called on the police to remove women from the corners under anti-loitering laws, a form of work regulation similar to the Southern states' vagrancy measures that led to the arrest of the formerly enslaved and paroled them to toil in white people's kitchens and fields after emancipation. Rounding up the street corner denizens became a form of vice control done in the name of health and urban order. The most concrete idea came from the State Employment Services: to establish centers where women could register for jobs and prospective employers could meet them, but without any floor on pay rates, tasks, or hours. By containing the women, rather than setting standards, state-run store-front hiring halls could continue to privatize household labor, but they might drive sex work further underground because only household workers could register. That these new halls failed to attract

1 Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke, "The Bronx Slave Market," *The Crisis*, November 1935, 339–40.

2 For the best analysis, see Ariana E. Alexander, "Soles on the Sidewalk: The Bronx Slave Markets from the 1920s to the 1950s" (PhD diss., New York University, 2017), especially 169–253.

3 Quoted in Esther Victoria Cooper, "The Negro Woman Domestic Worker in Relation to Trade Unionism" (MA thesis, Fisk University, 1940), 47.

4 Alexander, "Soles on the Sidewalk," 208.

job seekers says as much about the informal nature of the sector as it does of the ability of Black women to more successfully bypass occupational racism for other employment when the nation entered World War Two.⁵

I begin this discussion of the gender of informality in New York City during the Great Depression to bring attention to the entwined histories of sex and domestic work as gendered informal labor. We think of sex work as unregulated and domestic work as ignored. But these forms of intimate labor too often went unrecognized as work or, if regulated by law, were surveilled rather than standardized. They stood outside of formalization, either through union organizing or the legal codification of the employer-employee relation. Instead, states and localities subjected sex and domestic workers to health, safety, and mobility regulations in order to police morality, maintain gender, class, and ethnic/race hierarchies, and sustain the social order. Few governments had laws covering domestic workers as workers and they failed to robustly enforce the ones they had.⁶ This chapter thus complicates the usual story of labor formalization by asking us to look at a range of state actions beyond those directly addressing labor standards as shaping the nature of work and the lives of workers.

Intimate labor refers to domestic, care, and sex work in both their commodified and unpaid forms. Such labors “comprise tasks for daily life, including household maintenance (cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping) and personal existence (bathing, feeding, turning over, ambulation). They rely on clean sheets and swept rooms. They involve bodily and psychic intimacy, manipulating genitalia, wiping noses, lifting torsos, and feeding mouths, but also listening, talking, holding, and just being there.”⁷ Their naturalization as women’s duty and their association with servile, class/caste, and racial/ethnic others led to stigmatization and low wages, just as much as the presence of dirt and bodies tended to distinguish such work

5 That is not to say that racial discrimination in war work was not present. Alexander, “Soles on the Sidewalk,” 209–53. See also Vanessa May, *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 121–27, 137–45; Keona K. Ervin, *Gateway to Equality: Black Women and the Struggle for Economic Justice in St. Louis* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2017), 97–120; Megan Taylor Shockley, “We, Too Are Americans”: *African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940–54* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

6 For a short time, the Soviet Union was an exception. See Alissa Klots, “Just Like Any Other Worker? Class and Gender in the Regulation of Domestic Service in the early Soviet Period,” *Journal of Social History* 56, no. 1 (2022): 114–43.

7 Eileen Boris and Rachel S. Parreñas, “Introduction,” in *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*, ed. Eileen Boris and Rachel S. Parreñas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 2.

from more valued occupations. They represent a form of reproductive labor, work that not only sustains daily life and future generations but also, under systems of inequality—for example, racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and imperialism—serves as a mode of economic accumulation as well as a source of labor power.⁸

Drawing upon the rich literature on household labor and commercialized sex, this chapter charts discourses about as well as struggles over domestic, care, and sex work through international agreements (i.e., the International Agreement for the Suppression of the “White Slave Traffic” and later United Nations conventions) and national responses that led to exclusions from labor standards—and sometimes incorporation into state agendas without well-marked standards or with contradictory coverage and little enforcement. Much care work remained part of the voluntary, often denominational, sector prior to incorporation into post-World War Two welfare states. Yet care work simultaneously persisted as part of the gray or informal economy, especially as a form of domestic work, which retained its servile context as a private relationship with retainers. Sex work—an anachronistic term to be sure, used here as a parallel notion with other forms of intimate labor but also referred to by both its historic name of prostitution and as selling sex or commercialized sex—sometimes was regulated for the benefits of customers, at other times was criminalized, and notably was subject to cultures of protection as a moral or public health question. Under regulation systems, it was, as historian Jessica R. Pliley has explained, “a form of disreputable work,” what Magaly Rodríguez García and I named “indecent work” outside of the “decent work” agenda of the International Labour Organization (ILO).⁹ Regulation restricted women’s mobility, invasively inspected their bodies, and sought to watch over gender norms. Regulation of prostitution has stood as both a counter to the, at best, weak regulation of the hours, wages, and hazards of domestic work and as an example of hyper-regulation in most of Western Europe, Latin America, and the European colonies, where the French or regulation system monitored, if not controlled, women who

8 Premilla Nadasen, *Care: The Highest State of Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2023) provides the best analysis of social reproduction.

9 Jessica R. Pliley, “Ambivalent Abolitionist Legacies: The League of Nations’ Investigations into Sex Trafficking, 1927–1934,” in *Fighting Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking: History and Contemporary Policy*, ed. Genevieve LeBaron et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 107; Eileen Boris and Magaly Rodríguez García, “(In)Decent Work: Sex and the ILO,” *Journal of Women’s History* 33, no. 1 (2021): 194–221; Philippa Hetherington and Julia Laite, “Trafficking: A Useless Category of Historical Analysis,” *Journal of Women’s History* 33, no. 4 (2021): 7–39.

sold sex. Domestic work also has come under other modes of regulation, especially controls over mobility.

This story is not one of progress or loss:¹⁰ there was a widening circle of inclusion into national regimes of labor standards, at different places and at different times over the course of the century, that has not remained stable. It is also a story of reverberations: the very cheapness of much intimate labor allowed others to go into formal employment, enhance their class standing, or gratify themselves. The problem of care and domestic work particularly haunted women's labor-force participation from the (first) century of labor regulation up to the present. While commercial sex still allows for making a living often outside of the law, it is too often unrecognized as work and instead relegated to the social margins and the urban periphery; in the twenty-first century, those employed in the entertainment and tourist sectors who sell sex—even without bodily contact—increasingly have engaged in collective action to demand, like domestic and care workers, rights and recognition.

The observations of historian Laura F. Edwards on home-based textile production in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries underscore the ways that assumptions about gender spill over into valuing the worth and acknowledgement of labor, with a caveat that differences of class/caste and race/ethnicity have further shaped the worth of feminized labors: "What they [women] produced," Edwards noted, "was never entirely their own. The nature of textile production [...] muddled the waters, because the work tended to merge seamlessly with the other, uncompensated domestic chores that were expected of women as part of their duty to husband, fathers, and masters, particularly when they did that labor within their households. The association with domestic labor then followed them outside their households, justifying lower pay than men."¹¹ The same process of devaluation occurred with home-based domestic and care work and sex work in its various venues, including the brothel home. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western Europe and the United States, the home appeared as a place apart from work, with domestic and care work associated with household and family labor performed by women for their own families without pay, or by poor, minority, working-class (often rural) and immigrant women for low wages for other people's families. Such constructions conflated labors of love with home care, founded on the belief that women ought to perform this labor

10 Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

11 Laura F. Edwards, *Only the Clothes on Her Back* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 79.

out of love or obligation for family; that it was not really work. Since any woman could undertake these tasks, the work could not be skilled and thus could not be worth much pay. Similarly, sex was a man's right, an obligation of marriage and the corollary of love, and so could not be labor.¹²

What follows explores the status of sex, domestic, and care labor as work, drawing upon increasingly robust literatures to consider the ways that informality intersects with intimate labor.¹³ Lack of regulation could set working conditions, as could regulation for other ends, such as the health and welfare of the general public, customers, consumers, or clients. Rules of engagement could reinforce hegemonic understandings of the well-ordered home; of proper gender, race, and class relations; or of the right order of things. The wages of informality were fraught both with a concern for dignity and for making a life along with a living. To illuminate the gendered, often racialized and class-based, regulation of intimate labor, the chapter first explores prostitution and then more briefly considers domestic service. Rarely were sex or domestic workers treated like all other workers.

Selling Sex: Regulation for Whom? For What?

A number of regulatory and governmental systems sought to control selling sex over the centuries. While not cast as labor standards, states set the working and living conditions of sex industries either directly or indirectly through a range of laws and ordinances, such as the anti-loitering acts in 1930s New York City that entrapped the street corner domestics, and zoning restrictions like the West German *Sperrbezirk* laws after World War Two.¹⁴ Many states engaged in carceral regimes, confining sex workers even if they tolerated the selling of sex. Toleration allowed women to practice the trade unless they engaged in illegal acts, though ordinances could interfere with soliciting clients when they prohibited street walking or movement

12 For elaboration, see Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); on male need for sex, Elisa Camiscioli and Eva Payne, "Demand: Biological Imperative, Deviant Desire, or Cultural Myth?" *Radical History Review*, no. 149 (2024): 111–32.

13 This discussion is meant to be illustrative rather than comprehensive, to support claims rather than provide a deep global history, with the hope of encouraging such a book-length analysis.

14 Annalisa Martin, "Vice and Immoral Spaces: German *Sperrbezirk*, 1949–1990," *Radical History Review*, no. 149 (2024): 175–99; Annalisa Martin, "Cleaning Up the Cityscape: Managing Commercial Sex and City Space in Cologne, 1956–1972," *European Review of History* 29, no. 2 (2022): 311–30.

outside of designated areas. Such systems usually involved registration and monitoring, establishing state surveillance. Abolition historically referred to the elimination of regulation, but such efforts were also combined with campaigns to end forced labor and underage trafficking to blur statuses in an attempt to halt all commercialized sex.¹⁵

Selling sex could be intermittent and part-time labor done by a range of women from wives and domestic workers to seamstresses and shopgirls, a reflection of precarity as well as a contributor to insecure work. Sex workers often wanted better hours, adventure, independence from fathers and husbands, and money to spend as they wish, whether for finery, to support children, or to send remittances back to the countryside or to households abroad. They would ply their trade beyond brothels and streets in a plethora of places, such as bathhouses, rail stations, taverns, music halls, hotels, and furnished rooms.¹⁶ Whether doing so was criminalized or whether enforcement occurred, whether they owed a madam or a procurer or were bound to a contract, their own age, class, literacy, income, race/ethnicity, and other attributes shaped the labor of selling sex.¹⁷

During the nineteenth century, registration systems proliferated, assessing both persons and premises. The forms of regulation varied, including medical inspection, licensing of individuals and houses of prostitution, spatial and institutional confinement, and policing of venues. All of these interventions helped to shape working conditions even when initiated for other reasons.¹⁸ In theory, regulation of prostitution at various levels of government was intended to shield the public from the spread of venereal disease, while enhancing social order. As one Viennese inspector put it, “the vice police were not there to protect prostitutes, but rather to protect the public from prostitution.”¹⁹ Regulations would further define the

15 Julia Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885–1960* (New York: Palgrave, 2012); Elisa Camiscioli, *Selling French Sex: Prostitution, Trafficking, and Global Migrations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2024) suggest the complex history of regulation for Britain and France and the Americas. See also Eva Payne, *Empire of Purity: The History of Americans’ Global War on Prostitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024).

16 For example, Cynthia M. Blair, *I’ve Got to Make My Livin’: Black Women’s Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

17 For the most comprehensive survey, Magaly Rodríguez García et al., eds., *Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution, 1600s–2000s* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

18 Mara L. Keire, *For Business & Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890–1933* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Katie M. Hemphill, *Bawdy City: Commercial Sex and Regulation in Baltimore, 1790–1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

19 Quoted in Nancy M. Wingfield, *Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 29.

boundaries of gender by labeling one group of women prostitutes to satisfy men's needs, especially those in single sex locations, like military bases, mines, and ports, hence keeping other women pure for marriage. (For this period, same sex selling was either undercover or banned.)²⁰ Upholding the hegemonic gender order was a persistent goal. For example, when Czechoslovakia under state socialism criminalized prostitution, it used the persistence of commercialized sex to reinforce traditional gender norms despite the granting of equal rights to women in the 1950s. It sought to discipline the lives of all women not as workers but as a sex.²¹

Regulation spread from Europe to colonies and beyond. Beginning in 1804, France established *maisons de tolerance* (formal brothels) and then tolerated *maisons de rendez-vous* (rooms for assignations). It instituted moral police to force medical inspections of women selling sex.²² Britain enacted a series of Contagious Disease Acts between 1864 and 1869, repealing them in 1886 for the metropole in response to feminist campaigners led by Josephine Butler, who objected to the singling out of women and not men who bought sex.²³ Japan sold licenses and instituted brothel taxes from the mid-nineteenth century, modeling its system on the French, with police responsible for monitoring. China followed suit.²⁴ The 1902 Bombay Police Act segregated brothels from other businesses. As geographer Stephen Legg concluded for British India between the end of the Contagious Disease Acts and the 1923 Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, "segregation provided the tipping point for the shift towards suppression from 1917 onwards" because the brothel areas had turned into "scandalous sites" where homosexuality and trafficking, including movement of white women to 'up-country'

20 Kamala Kempadoo, *Sexing The Caribbean: Gender, Race, and Sexual Labor* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Joan Flores-Villalobos, *The Silver Women: How Black Women's Labor Made the Panama Canal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023), 53–76.

21 Barbara Havelková, "Blaming all Women: On Regulation of Prostitution in State Socialist Czechoslovakia," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 36, no. 1 (2016): 165–91. A similar dynamic occurred in South Korea under the Park Chung-Hee, see Joeng-Mi Park, "Paradoxes of Gendering Strategy in Prostitution Policies: South Korea's 'Toleration-Regulation Regime,' 1961–1979," *Women's Studies International Forum* 37 (2013): 73–84.

22 Susan P. Conner, "The Paradoxes and Contradictions of Prostitution in Paris," in Rodríguez García et al., *Selling Sex in the City*, 17–200.

23 Judy Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Anne Summers, "The Constitution Violated: The Female Body and the Female Subject in the Campaigns of Josephine Butler," *History Workshop Journal* 48, no. 1 (1999): 1–15.

24 Elizabeth J. Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China: Gender and Local Statebuilding, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 38–41.

locations, flourished.²⁵ In Turkey, which regulated prostitution for public health after the 1923 establishment of the republic, the state claimed “authority over prostitutes as laborers and over all women’s and girls’ bodies and sexualities.” In 1933, it promulgated the right of the state to intervene in brothels and other venues for medical inspection and to redeem women from such a disresponsible life. It set forth conditions under which brothels could operate, such as prohibition of “alcohol, drugs, gambling, or other noisy entertainment,” and forbade their placement near schools or mosques.²⁶ Indeed, regulation could generate greater dangers, subjecting women to more violence, when enforcement of inspections and policing of licenses and other measures prevailed over benign neglect.²⁷

Enforcement often was lax in monitoring what took place within and around brothels. In China and Japan, women mostly labored for managers in brothels; many were under long-term contracts, some from being sold by relatives. In Europe, the state lacked capacity and will to enforce contracts that kept women in brothels. But in France, they could stay outside the brothels if registered.²⁸ Sometimes the regulation of prostitution and related sex acts enhanced state power and modernized police, as in late Qing and republican China and progressive-era United States, where the development of surveillance systems and government bureaucracies grew with the regulation and criminalization of prostitution.²⁹

Even without vigorous enforcement, registration systems created prostitutes as a special class and social identity, even if a “legal” one.³⁰ This system exemplified Foucauldian governmentality in which government designation

25 Stephen Legg, “Stimulation, Segregation and Scandal: Geographies of Prostitution Regulation in British India, between Registration (1888) and Suppression (1923),” *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 6 (2012): 1459–1505, quotes at 1459. For the British empire, see Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

26 Emine Ö. Evered and Kyle T. Evered, “Protecting the National Body: Regulating the Practice and the Place of Prostitution in Early Republican Turkey,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 20, no. 7 (2013): 839–77, quote at 848.

27 Ashwini Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct: Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

28 Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China* compares China and Japan with France. See also Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

29 Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China*; Jessica R. Pliley, *Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the FBI* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

30 Siobhán Hearne, *Policing Prostitution: Regulating the Lower Classes in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 4; Payne, *Empire of Purity* documents this process in zones around the United States military at home and abroad.

of a social group generates the knowledge necessary for control of that group.³¹ Required clothes and hairstyles could mark difference.³² Identification came through standardized mugshots, detailed applications requesting family history, hometown, and other residences, work history, and reasons for prostitution. A passport-like card displayed such information, serving as certificate of occupation and registration of health. It laid out the terms of existence. As such the informal became formal. However, as historian Nancy M. Wingfield shows for imperial Austria, the lines between the registered and the “clandestine”—the name given to those outside the system who worked without formal registration—were fluid as women “moved between the two categories as well as in and out of the trade during their working lives.”³³ Those who feared they had contracted venereal disease or who became pregnant would drop out of the registration system to avoid compulsory health inspection, usually plying their trade away from the brothels.³⁴

Though prostitution belonged to “the economy of makeshift”³⁵ and was picked up for needed cash, workers did not always control their labor. There were constraints in setting labor conditions based on type of service, hierarchies of desirability, and state regulations. Race or ethnicity might overdetermine the workplace, number of clients, or earnings. Location mattered: a massage parlor not offering penetrative sex, for example, exposed workers to fewer health risks than streetwalking. For China from the late nineteenth century to the Communist revolution, historian Elizabeth Remick found that, “The rules forbade owners [of brothels] from abusing prostitutes, forcing them to service clients overnight, confiscating their personal goods, preventing them from marrying by requiring them to pay a high body price, or allowing anyone but prostitutes and servants to sleep with clients.” Other rules enjoined madams “to send prostitutes ill with venereal disease or other communicable diseases for medical attention and to report such incidents to the police.” Brothels were to shut down “to new patrons at midnight” and madams were “to report to the police any

31 Graham Burchell et al., eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

32 Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China*, 25–26.

33 Wingfield, *Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria*, 5.

34 Wingfield, *Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria*, 121.

35 Olwen H. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), quoted in Marion Pluskota, “‘We Use Our Bodies to Work Hard, So We Need to Get Legitimate Workers’ Rights’: Labour Relations in Prostitution, 1600–2010,” in Rodríguez García et al., *Selling Sex in the City*, 653.

deadly or disorderly events.”³⁶ Restrictions on prostitutes, like prohibitions on going out with customers or having a personal servant, defined working conditions as well as status, but so did limits on customer behavior, such as bans on guns. In China, brothels were to refuse service to wearers of student uniforms, youths under nineteen, and government officials. They also were required to provide details of their labor contracts, have set hours, and maintain a minimum age for workers.³⁷

The madam was like a foreman, though she could be the employer or boss. Madams had other responsibilities that might be called protective, which actual interactions could subvert. In imperial Russia, they were to safeguard the welfare of their employees, though they could take three-quarters of each woman’s earnings. “Brothel keepers were fully responsible for providing the women working at their establishments with underwear, clothes, and bed linen, as well as dry, bright, and well-ventilated bedrooms, which could not be located in the cellars of buildings,” historian Siobhán Hearne explains. They were to arrange medical checkups as well as provide records to inquiring customers. They were to enforce rules that forbade the registered from labor while menstruating or pregnant. Other regulations restricted mobility: prostitutes were not to hang out in public with other prostitutes, live outside the brothel with more than one other prostitute, or leave the brothel without permission. In this regard, concluded Hearne, “In brothels, as in factories, strict regulations imposed from above offered workers little agency and saddled employers with paternalistic responsibilities, which in turn reinforced the strictly hierarchical power relationship between the two groups.”³⁸ United States authorities also restricted movement; they also prohibited women from selling sex in or near the Panama Canal, pushing the trade to Colón and Panama City.³⁹

Madams who abused or neglected their responsibilities could generate public outrage over perversions but more so for putting the social order and public health at risk. The 1906 trial of Mrs. Riehl in Vienna led to a guilty verdict and a prison sentence for her failure to abide by the rules of the regulatory system. Some prostitutes charged that Riehl had interfered with their movements, their mail, and their desire to quit their houses; others claimed that she beat them and withheld their earnings.⁴⁰ In fact, madams

36 Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China*, 77.

37 Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China*, 77–79.

38 Hearne, *Policing Prostitution*, 20–22.

39 Flores-Villalobos, *The Silver Women*.

40 Wingfield, *Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria*, 1–46.

often flouted the rules, kept prostitutes' money, hid their clothes, and worked with police against their workers to coerce and discipline them.⁴¹ Women felt forced to work off their debts, contracts, or indentured service. Even when sex workers possessed "the 'right of free cessation,' in other words the ability to remove themselves from the rolls of registered prostitutes," as in Japan after 1900, "few women were able to do so," Remick has observed. Without forgiveness of debts, they were stuck.⁴² Women in Europe, in contrast, had more "autonomy" to leave, but still faced extralegal forms of coercion. With possessions, like clothes, confiscated, many could not leave.⁴³

Protection of prostitutes usually came in the form of saving and rehabilitating them from such labor rather than improving working conditions. Moral reform societies and religious orders established houses of refuge from the early nineteenth century.⁴⁴ In 1910s China, Remick has described the rationale behind the reformatory *jiliangsuo* system: "if the state was going to regulate and institutionalize prostitution, for moral reasons it had to make it possible for women who were being mistreated and abused by their brothel owners/managers to escape. Therefore, women who claimed abuse in brothels, or who claimed that they were in brothels against their will, could be permitted to enter the *jiliangsuo*, voiding their contracts with, and debts to, brothel owners."⁴⁵ In Franco's Spain, the Adoratrices and Oblatas operated houses to rehabilitate prostitutes, a form of confinement that continued with the imprisonment of sex workers after the formal abolition of prostitution in 1956.⁴⁶ These reformatories offered training in what was judged to be real work, the sewing and household service deemed appropriate for women—the jobs with low wages that had driven some women to sexual commerce as a better deal in the first place.

Countries that criminalized prostitution refused to recognize it as an occupation or sector of work, yet they too brought about certain working conditions by default. In the United States, for example, with its authority

41 Hearne, *Policing Prostitution*, 90.

42 Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China*, 40.

43 Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China*, 44, disregards constraints on European or US women. See Julia Laite, *The Disappearance of Lydia Harvey: A True Story of Sex, Crime and the Meaning of Justice* (London: Profile Books, 2021) who explores some of these complications.

44 A classic work here is Carroll Smith Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast and the Militant Women: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America," *American Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1971): 562–84.

45 Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China*, 28.

46 Maria Martinez, "Houses, Reformatories and Shelters: A Genealogy of Women Confinements in Spain," draft paper presented at the Engendering Carcerality Symposium (Santa Barbara: University of California, 2023), in the author's possession.

divided between states and the federal government, locales banned redlight districts or brothels in the first decades of the twentieth century. Historian Mara Keire has noted the consequences: “the disaggregation of services” once found together. On the one hand, individual sex workers had to make deals with local police or, if inside workers, find willing “café and cabaret owners who would allow them to solicit in their venues for at least part of the evening.” Others became more dependent on “pimps,” male partners who found them business and escorted them to hotels and other venues that forbade unaccompanied women from hailing men. If earnings fell, pimps sold drugs as well, escalating the potential for violence.⁴⁷ In 1910, Congress passed the Mann Act to combat the transporting of women and minors across “state lines for the purpose of prostitution, debauchery, or any other immoral purpose.” That same year, a new immigration act made it easier to deport women who sold sex.⁴⁸ Within six years, all the states had passed their own laws prohibiting pandering and third-party profiteering from commercial sex.⁴⁹ At the outbreak of World War One, the American Plan allowed the incarceration of presumed “promiscuous women” near continental military bases disregarding standard legal procedures in the name of military readiness.⁵⁰ The United States was not alone in criminalizing sex work. In the 1920s, the new Soviet Union criminalized brothel keeping, pimping, and giving another a venereal disease, even though it did not outright ban prostitution. Prostitutes would be sent for re-education, as happened in Cuba after Castro’s revolution in the 1960s eliminated earlier zones of tolerance.⁵¹

International agreements only obliquely addressed sex work as labor. Twelve European nations ratified the 1904 International Agreement for the Suppression of the “White Slave Traffic,” with acceptance of its provisions

47 Keire, *For Business & Pleasure*, 100–2; Cristina Carney, “‘The Worse Element’: Black Sex Workers, White Slavery, and Sexual Policing in San Diego,” *Radical History Review*, no. 149 (2024): 133–51, discusses California’s Red Light Abatement Act of 1913 as disproportionately enforced in San Diego against Black, Asian, and Indigenous people.

48 Pliley, *Policing Sexuality*, 73–75; Eva Payne, “Deportation as Rescue: White Slaves, Women Reformers, and the US Bureau of Immigration,” *Journal of Women’s History* 33, no. 1 (2021): 40–66.

49 Jessica R. Pliley, “Prostitutes and Prostitution in America,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Urban History*, Vol. 1, ed. Timothy J. Gilfoyle (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 443.

50 Pliley, “Prostitution in America,” 445.

51 Siobhán Hearne, “Liberation and Authoritarianism in the Early Soviet Campaign to ‘Struggle with Prostitution,’” in *The Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution: Illiberal Liberation, 1917–1941*, ed. Lara Doude et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 231–44; Siobhán Hearne, “Selling Sex under Socialism: Prostitution in the Post-War USSR,” *European Review of History* 29, no. 2 (2022): 290–310; Alyssa Garcia, “Continuous Moral Economies: The State Regulation of Bodies and Sex Work in Cuba,” *Sexualities* 13, no. 2 (2010): 171–96.

by nine other countries, mostly European but also including Brazil, Colombia, Lebanon, and the United States. It was to apply to many colonies and protectorates, with some of these possessions concurring. However, this and subsequent pre- World War One instruments applied only to women brought into a country, not to women already working as prostitutes, in deference to France and other adherents of the regulation system of state-permitted brothels. Nations pledged to police “ports and railroad stations”; investigate “foreign” prostitutes “so as to discover what made them leave their native country (being thus able to send them back, providing meanwhile for their living)”; and regulate recruitment of their own women and girls to travel abroad. In essence, these instruments were a migration measure. A subsequent 1910 accord further criminalized procurers of girls “under age, even with their consent.”⁵² As historian Elisa Camiscioli has concluded, “these agreements ‘distinguished the ‘procuring or kidnapping of girls with a view to prostitution’ from the same coercive practices applied to adult women,” assuming the latter chose sexual labor.⁵³

The League of Nations took over supervision of these pre-World War One agreements and reaffirmed them (while shifting from the racist white slave trade to speaking of the traffic in women and children). It classified sex trafficking along with traffic in opium as criminal activities rather than issues requiring humanitarian consideration or labor regulation. Increasingly, it shifted from efforts to control a practice to the control of women in the practice: their mobility, labor, and sexuality. The characteristics of participating individuals, understood in psychological as well as moral terms, explained a proclivity to prostitution, justifying protective measures.⁵⁴ In 1933, its Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children proposed requiring signatories of the anti-trafficking conventions to prohibit the bringing of any woman, no matter their age, into the international trade. Camiscioli has shown that the Committee was right to worry that an age

52 “International Agreement for the Suppression of the ‘White Slave Traffic,’” Paris, 18 May 1904 at <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/instreet/whiteslavetraffic1904.html>. Here I draw upon Eileen Boris and Heather Berg, “Protecting Virtue, Erasing Labor: Historical Responses to Trafficking,” in *Human Trafficking Reconsidered: Migration and Forced Labor*, ed. Rachel Parrênas and Kimberly Hoang (New York: DEBATE Press, 2014), 19–29. See also Stephanie A. Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

53 Camiscioli, *Selling French Sex*, 105.

54 Magaly Rodríguez García, “The League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women,” *International Review of Social History* 57, no. 20 (2012): 97–128; Jessica R. Piley, “Claims to Protection: The Rise and Fall of Feminist Abolitionists in the League of Nations’ Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, 1919–1936,” *Journal of Women’s History* 22, no. 4 (2010): 90–113.

loophole allowed underage women to obtain false papers, defeating the goal of protecting them.⁵⁵

The ILO, then the sole agency of the League focused on labor standards, viewed prostitution as belonging to those illicit activities outside of its jurisdiction. Eschewing regulation of prostitution as work, it instead considered the practice as one that desperate women entered to escape the low wages and poor conditions of service and factory jobs, an economic rationale for sex work that had been forcefully presented nearly a decade before by anarchist Emma Goldman in “The Traffic in Women.”⁵⁶ The solution became better wages and less precarity, a taming of capitalism; but, just to be safe, the ILO advocated heightened scrutiny of employment and the supervision of workplaces that likely would tempt women. Thus, it warned against contracts for women to travel abroad as entertainers, who might end up in cheap music halls and cross the line from respectable to indecent work.⁵⁷

A number of ILO instruments distinguished sexual labor from work. A 1926 recommendation for the protection of women and children unaccompanied by “a responsible person” on migrant ships projected the migrant woman as a trafficking victim. It called for a woman matron to safeguard their passage, a throwback to the Victorian relegation of moral authority to bourgeois women.⁵⁸ Convention No. 33 on “Minimum Age (Non-Industrial Employment)” from 1932 raised the minimum age for jobs deemed “dangerous to morals,” such as work in hotels, entertainment, places with alcohol (like bars and restaurants), public works, and “the manufacture or sale of immoral publications.”⁵⁹ The ILO also sought to regulate contracts offered by fee-charging employment services, often seen as recruiting prostitutes under other guises. Night work remained an arena of potential moral and physical harm for women, justifying its restriction; jobs supplying housing, like live-in services, also appeared

55 Jo Doezeema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking* (London: Zed Books, 2010), 110–11; Camiscioli, *Selling French Sex*, 122–56.

56 Emma Goldman, “The Traffic in Women,” in Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 2nd ed. (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911), 183–200.

57 Julia Laite, “Between Scylla and Charybdis: Women’s Labour Migration and Sex Trafficking in the Early Twentieth Century,” *International Review of Social History* 62, no. 1 (2017): 46–50.

58 Ro26 – Migration (Protection of Females at Sea) Recommendation, 1926 (No. 26), Withdrawn instrument – By decision of the International Labour Conference at its 92nd Session (2004), https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312364:NO.

59 Co33 – Minimum Age (Non-Industrial Employment) Convention, 1932 (No. 33), https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312178:NO.

inherently dangerous. However, being occupied with work could protect women from waywardness, as would supervised activities for leisure.⁶⁰ In this regard, regulating sex work under labor standards was by definition an impossibility.

Domestic and Care Work: Hidden Labors

Domestic workers shared with sex workers the dismissive attitude of not being real workers, or at least workers who should or could be subject to labor standards. The home location of the job turned domestic service into an exceptional form of work, one subjected to cultures of protection focused on the consequences of its perceived difference as intimate labor in private spaces, but outside of the purview of public interference. While women selling sex appeared as hypervisible, and thus subject to cordoning off to make them invisible, domestic workers were hidden in the home, easily invisibilized. They were servants, not workers, holdovers from a feudal or slavery regime of mistress and maid. Thus many European countries excluded them from general labor laws, including those relating to contracts or which provided limited benefits; a 1926 law in the Soviet Union had the most robust provisions, including limits on hours, time to attend evening classes, and severance compensation, but, as “unproductive” labor, its protections were less than those available to industrial workers.⁶¹ Regulations could perpetuate earlier master-servant laws that benefited masters and disciplined unruly servants instead of setting parameters for decent treatment of such workers.⁶²

In the United States, those who specialized in caring for dependent people appeared as personal attendants, elder companions, or nannies—as specialized domestics whose closeness to those they cared for could designate them

60 Boris and Rodríguez García, “(In)Decent Work,” 199–201; Eileen Boris, *Making the Woman Worker: Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919–2019* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 41.

61 Klots, “Just Like Any Other Worker?” 124–125; for a run-down of European laws, see Erna Magnus, “The Social, Economic, and Legal Conditions of Domestic Servants: II,” *International Labour Review* 30, no. 3 (1934): 336–50, documents exclusions and weak provisions for hours, rest, holidays, wages, social and unemployment insurance, and child labor.

62 Rafaella Sarti, “Historians, Social Scientists, Servants and Domestic Workers: Fifty Years of Research on Domestic and Care Work,” *International Review of Social History* 59, no. 2 (2014): 279–314.

as “one of the family” rather than an employee.⁶³ But this misclassification did not obscure the fact that other forms of regulation had long existed, most notably through immigration policy. The 1917 Immigration Act continued to make an exception by admitting domestic servants (while reinforcing the exclusion of prostitutes), while in the 1920s unrestricted migration from the Americas after restrictions or bans from other countries served to regulate the race and ethnicity of household workers (along with the Jim Crow system of segregation that crowded Black women into the occupation). After the 1965 reforms that sought to curtail immigration from the Western Hemisphere, employers who wished to obtain visas for live-in maids were required both to pay the prevailing wage and to prove the unavailability of local workers. Rather than controlling this workforce, such rules led to employers circumventing them. Workers too maneuvered around various immigration reforms, increasing the undocumented labor force in domestic and care work.⁶⁴

Into the twentieth century, reformers charged that the low wages and confinement of domestic workers led them into prostitution, or found themselves selling sex after suffering sexual abuse from male members or visitors to the household. According to historian Alissa Klots, in the 1920s “Soviet officials were reluctant to ‘throw a female worker out on the street’ because domestic workers’ homelessness was closely associated with prostitution.” They thus would award living space and greater severance pay to private household workers fired by employers rather than to many other workers.⁶⁵ While prostitutes often had been domestic servants, it is not clear that the low wages of service itself led to prostitution. There were too many variables. As historian Julia Laite has noted, it was not surprising that British investigators from the late nineteenth century up until the interwar years found a significant number of prostitutes had been servants: close to half.⁶⁶ But the narrative of the “ruined maid,” like that of the innocent trafficked victim, was available to be deployed by women arrested for selling sex or who needed repatriation after being stranded

63 Western Europe, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, in contrast, incorporated home helps and aides into their welfare states, classifying them as workers—though informal hires persisted outside formalization. See, Boris and Klein, *Caring for America*.

64 Andrew Urban, *Brokering Servitude: Migration and the Politics of Domestic Labor During the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 266–71, 171–76.

65 Alissa Klots, *Domestic Service in the Soviet Union: Women’s Emancipation and the Gendered Hierarchy of Labor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 86.

66 Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, 33–34; Laite, “Between Scylla and Charybdis,” 54–58.

after migrating abroad, as Camiscioli has shown for French women who traveled to Latin America.⁶⁷

Domestic service usually became subject to regulation when seen as a threat to middle class or bourgeois domesticity. Employers would fire those who labored in private homes when pregnancy or venereal disease exposed them as dangerous to their employers; such workers became visible only if unemployment sent them to the street. In fin-de-siècle Vienna, a disproportionate number of “maidservants” (chambermaids and other cleaners of non-residential buildings doing work similar to those laboring in private homes) entered police records as prostitutes, reinforcing the supposition that servants were particularly vulnerable to being ruined and thus cast from respectable society to engage in commercial sex. The regulation of morality served as a substitute labor standard but one that disempowered the worker rather than enhanced her ability to gain better conditions. The 1810 Vienna Servant Code, historian Ambika Natarajan has argued, “mandated strict police supervision of both employed and unemployed servants, and punished servants engaging in or instigating sexual activities outside the context of marriage, especially the sale of sex, procurement, and pandering.”⁶⁸ Like prostitutes, servants carried registration documents that certified their health. Officials conflated the maidservant with the domestic servant in seeking to connect the latter with prostitution as well, and to protect the bourgeois family from venereal disease. Contemporary reports on Paris, Berlin, and elsewhere in Europe suggested similar concerns.⁶⁹

While historians have interpreted the use of identity cards as an attempt to control the mobility of lower classes, historian Sigrid Wadauer has argued that employment passbooks came from more general systems of regulating—and thus formalizing—labor in continental Europe. These papers could mark an individual as a worker rather than a tramp, and, depending on the occupation, eligible for hire and for various occupational privileges and benefits. In 1900, the Habsburg Monarchy extended its system of employment papers to domestic servants, mostly women. Such documents were to contain job history and references; and for servants they could be presented to placement services as well as to individual households. The resulting system was a hybrid one: unlike artisans, servants were both

67 Camiscioli, *Selling French Sex*, 209–20.

68 Ambika Natarajan, “Vagrant Servants as Disease Vectors: Regulation of Migrant Maidservants in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 51 (2020): 154.

69 Natarajan, “Vagrant Servants as Disease Vectors,” 152–72.

“part of the household” and contracted employees. The system, Wadauer has concluded, was imperfect, with workers lacking papers and some possessing more than one type, with employers usually keeping the booklets or refusing to give accurate recommendations. The servant booklet came to designate an inferior status, one “hired to a humble kind of domestic or agricultural labor which goes along with admission in the employer’s household and subordination to his supervision.” Domestic servants more often than employers lodged complaints to arbitrators.⁷⁰ Artisans protested that as free men they should not be subject to registration like servants and prostitutes, i.e., those with less than free status.⁷¹ Restricting mobility would continue into the twentieth century when governments sought to curb the unemployment of citizens by barring the entry of servants.⁷²

Domestic workers were outside of most early international labor standards. The ILO from the start directed its attention towards employment dominated by male workers. Its initial conventions for industrial and maritime sectors were intended to bolster the male family wage. The woman worker, usually reduced to the woman in industry, represented difference, one who needed special protections because of her responsibility for biological and social reproduction and her generally unorganized status. From time to time, delegates raised the conditions of domestic servants, but national governments typically omitted these workers from labor standards. In this context, domestic work, like sex work, entered ILO deliberations obliquely, mentioned in discussions of informal workers that included home-based manufacturers and agricultural laborers. The crisis of the Great Depression led to more attention. The ILO’s 1934 study on “The Social, Economic, and Legal Conditions of Domestic Servants” argued that the stigmatized status of the servant kept unemployed women out of the occupation. The report called for inclusion of domestic workers in general standards “as far as possible,” including social insurance, vocational training, and the right to organize. Living outside rather than living in employer houses also would

70 Sigrid Wadauer, “Papers and Wages: Identity Documents and Work in Habsburg Austria during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century,” in *The Value of Work since the 18th Century*, ed. Massimo Asta and Pedro Ramos Pinto (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 83–103, quotes at 98, 99.

71 Sigrid Wadauer, “Contracts under Duress: Work Documents as a Matter and Means of Conflict in the Habsburg Monarchy/Austria in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *Coercion and Wage Labour: Exploring Work Relations through History and Art*, ed. Anamarija Batista et al. (London: UCL Press, 2023), 53.

72 Erna Magnus, “The Social, Economic, and Legal Conditions of Domestic Servants: I,” *International Labour Review* 30, no. 2 (1934): 194.

serve to eliminate the social distance between domestic and other women workers.⁷³

While the International Labour Conference (ILC) (under the ILO) in the mid-1930s recommended fuller examination of domestic workers, delegates were generally ambivalent and took little action until after World War Two when the ILO's governing body authorized possible consideration. It faced a hurdle from nations that excluded household labor from labor standards. For example, in passing its New Deal legislation, the United States omitted household workers—mostly Black women—from social provision, wages, and hours, and from collective bargaining; the segregated Southern states had retained enough power to block any other outcome. Despite the advocacy of labor feminists in the ILO and their allies in governments, like Frieda Miller (who then was director of the United States' Women's Bureau), the tripartite structure of the ILO remained a barrier to action. In the early 1950s, government delegates to the ILC failed to recognize domestic labor as work; the advocates lacked institutional power; and competing agendas pushed domestic workers off the agenda.⁷⁴ In the 1970s, focus on the informal sector and the household as sites of income generation, facilitated by feminist scholars inside and out of the ILO, expanded conceptions of what counted as work. The domestic worker became the prototypical migrant worker and the ILO finally recognized home-based labor in 1996.⁷⁵ Shifting understandings of work, while necessary, remained insufficient to generate inclusion in labor standards. It would take domestic workers themselves to force the world to consider household labor as employment—and the conditions for that effort would only occur with the new century.⁷⁶

The mobilization of domestic and sex workers at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century was larger than previous efforts, but not unprecedented. In terms of sex workers, Indian women had petitioned against the Contagious Diseases Acts in the nineteenth century, Russian prostitutes had struck against “excessive deductions from earnings” in 1905, and Argentinean ones had used the newspapers to appeal for better

73 Boris, *Making the Woman Worker*, 199–206; Magnus, “The Social, Economic, and Legal Conditions of Domestic Servants: I,” 190, 195; Erna Magnus, “The Social, Economic, and Legal Conditions of Domestic Servants: II,” *International Labour Review* 30, no. 3 (1934): 363–64.

74 Boris, *Making the Woman Worker*, 201–6; Eileen Boris, “The Racialized Gendered State: Constructions of Citizenship in the United States,” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 2, no. 2 (1995): 160–80.

75 Boris, *Making the Woman Worker*, 161–89.

76 Eileen Boris and Jennifer Fish, “‘Slave No More’: Making Global Standards for Domestic Workers,” *Feminist Studies* 40, no. 2 (2014): 411–41.

conditions in the 1930s. Judith Walkowitz has explicated the legal efforts of prostitute rights groups in 1980s Great Britain. In the twenty-first century, strippers unionized in Seattle and Los Angeles, while sex workers created their own NGOs worldwide, launched campaigns for health and safety, and challenged policing of their bodies and work.⁷⁷

As part of larger working-class actions, domestic workers left their jobs to demand better pay and conditions. Notable incidents were the strikes of Black washerwomen during the 1880s and 1890s in the southern states of the United States, the organization of Chilean servants along with other household employees in the 1930s to win labor law inclusion, the walkouts by Aboriginal maids in Western Australia in the late 1940s, and the refusals of Black domestic workers in the United States during the Montgomery, Alabama boycott in 1956 to ride on segregated buses. Domestic Workers unionized before World War One in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and during the 1930s in major US cities like New York and Chicago. A few decades later, throughout the United States, household workers created their own organizations demanding better standards as part of Black civil rights and feminist movements. Catholic-based organizations obtained legislation during the Italian economic boom in the 1950s and 1960s and became part of service sector bargaining. New immigration from Eastern Europe and Africa provided a workforce for increasing re-informalization, however.⁷⁸ Whether migration from Eastern Europe or immigration from Latin America and Africa would disrupt standards elsewhere in Europe remained a question for the new century.⁷⁹

While old attitudes toward selling sex have hindered recognition, household workers have ended some legal exclusions and won an international convention at the ILO. At the end of the twentieth century, more organized groups formed out of the conjuncture of feminist, human rights, and trade union movements, setting the stage for transnational networks and subsequently ILO Convention No. 189, "Decent Work for Domestic Workers," in 2011. The story of Convention No. 189 is by now well-told: how regional

77 Hearne, *Policing Prostitution*, 30–33; Raelene Frances, "Working and Living Conditions," in *Selling Sex in the City*, 681; Judith R. Walkowitz, "The Idea of Sex Work," *Radical History Review*, no. 149 (May 2024): 81–110; Molly Smith and Juno Mac, *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights* (New York: Verso, 2018).

78 Eileen Boris, "Talking Back and Speaking Up: Domestic Workers Resisting and Organizing," in *Research Agenda for Domestic Work and Reproductive Labour*, ed. Lena Näre and Sabrina Marchetti (London: Edward Elgar, forthcoming); Premilla Nadasen, *Household Workers Unite!: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015).

79 Helma Lutz, *The New Maids: Transnational Women and the Care Economy* (New York: Zed Books, 2011); Sabrina Marchetti et al., *Global Domestic Workers: Intersectional Inequalities and Struggles for Rights* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021).

groups from Asia and the Americas joined with South Africa's domestic worker union to push for the convention, aided by European unions with feminist influence, international labor federations, the WIEGO (Women Informal Employment Global Organizing), and ILO staff, who had gained more influence than previously. Unlike sex workers, whose needs some sections of the ILO office managed to incorporate into health and welfare programs, domestic workers gained access to existing labor standards offered to other workers.⁸⁰ That was the catch. If a country failed to ratify the convention or lacked fulsome labor standards, incorporation would be a pyrrhic victory. The United States, which has still not ratified most ILO instruments, again stood as an outlier. Its flourishing domestic worker movement only won weakly enforced domestic worker bills of rights in a dozen or so places, and with distinct limits, such as exclusion from occupational health and safety regulation. National legislation stalled.⁸¹

Looking Forward

Informalization has persisted as the notion that the home is a private sphere; the continued criminalization of selling sex and lack of enforcement of existent regulation has curtailed recognition of intimate laborers as workers deserving labor standards. But so has the conflation of intimate labors with love and obligation. Direct action has emerged as an alternative to standards campaigns among those lacking rights, but street protest also has served as a vehicle to push for labor standards.⁸² In the second decade of the twenty-first century, new challenges have reshaped the playing field for all workers: the rising inequality amplified by the pandemic and developments within capitalism itself. Sex workers found themselves risking exposure to COVID or joining a legion of remote workers whose numbers drove down the prices in various digital spaces.⁸³ Historian Premilla Nadasen has

80 Jennifer N. Fish, *Domestic Workers of the World Unite!: A Global Movement for Dignity and Human Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Boris and Rodríguez García, "(In) Decent Work: Sex and the ILO," 208–12.

81 Eileen Boris, "The California Battle for Health and Safety for Domestic Workers," *International Journal of Care and Caring* 6, no. 1/2 (2022): 283–87.

82 Ethel Tungohan, *Care Activism: Migrant Domestic Workers, Movement-Building, and Communities of Care* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2023).

83 Lynzi Armstrong, "COVID-19 Illuminates Discriminatory Sex Work Policies," *Beyond Trafficking and Slavery*, June 9, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/covid-19-illuminates-discriminatory-sex-work-policies/>.

powerfully analyzed these shifts in the meaning of care work: from an emphasis on its function in social reproduction, to its role in sustaining labor power to its centrality in generating profits from other forms of production, to its becoming “a source of capitalist profit.” Not only does she find “care as a site of economic extraction” as big business, but she faults moralistic rationales for care work as both embodying hegemonic gender, race, and class ideals and obscuring domestic and other intimate labors as work.⁸⁴ The turn from household labor to care work, then, obscures power relations and further dismisses sex work as not real work.

This chapter has offered a longer history of obscuring intimate labors as work, especially through legal regulations promulgated for other purposes. Thus, the century of labor formalization reinscribed the informal character of sex and domestic work even as actual workers within these sectors were subjected to surveillance and gender normativity. The consequences of regulation have varied over time and space, sometimes improving the lives of these workers but more often restricting them. The signaling of those who sold sex and cleaned other people’s homes as distinct, regulatory regimes also constructed worker identities, opening up the possibility for collective action as well as mutual aid.

Nonetheless, in both cases, normative gender conceptions—as well as the patriarchy, racial/ethnic hierarchies, citizenship status, and class/caste power—have informed regulatory regimes. Men’s needs for sexual release have justified cordoning off some women as prostitutes and then inspecting them to protect other women from assault and disease. Men’s right to the household labor of mothers, wives, and daughters has led to the conflation of unwaged family labor with domestic service and home care work. The sexual division of labor between men and women and the class and racialized division of labor between women resulted from racialized notions of gender. Thus, sex work and domestic work seemed unsuitable for labor standards even as surveillance took the form of public health imperatives, mobility restrictions, and the policing of morals.

That the gendering of informal labor through intimate labor increasingly reinforced the social order through precarity challenges us to see how intimate labors have produced labor power, how commodification could sometimes lessen but usually worsened inequality, and how contradictions between ideologies of care and the labors of care led workers to make demands on the state as well on men and employers. For the future, we should continue to chart the variations between nations and groups within nations

84 Nadasen, *Care*, 9–10.

to find the uneven and fraught development of production, reproduction, and gendered work that lives in the material world within and around us, that labor formalization has reflected even while creating new terrains of struggle.

About the Author

Eileen Boris—Distinguished Professor of Feminist Studies Emerita, University of California, Santa Barbara—writes on the home as workplace and on intimate labors. Her books include *Making the Woman Worker: Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919–2019*. She is President of the Labor and Working-Class History Association (LAWCHA).

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