

Third Conference of the European Labour History Network (ELHN)
Amsterdam, 19-21 September 2019

Factory History Working Group
Call for Papers

This call for paper aims to bring together historians and social scientists of different hues who study the factory in a historical perspective to discuss new research focused on the factory as a unit of analysis. The focus is on thematic and methodological perspectives that engage with dimensions such as gender, race, the spatial and transnational turn, the discourse analysis etc. that have cross-fertilised with the perspective of class that was traditionally adopted by the labour history of the factory.

Monographs on the factory were once frequent, and some were models of their genre, but they sometimes adopted an overly narrow industrial relations lens (or, worse, the hagiographic tone of a company history) that obfuscated what could be gained from an integrated, interdisciplinary and multi-focal gaze. We aim to foster a novel research agenda on the factory that would be located at the intersection of different disciplines and sub-disciplines, looking at a variety of agents, and crossing the boundaries of national historiographies of industrialization and de-industrialization.

While this perspective argues for a history of the factory that is interdisciplinary, labour historians have much to gain from it. As a field labour history has widened in scope in the past thirty years: the history of everyday life, of communities, of urban space, of gender and the reproductive sphere are now part and parcel of labour histories. These methodological and theoretical developments have had a tremendous influence on labour history. We look for contributions that build upon these developments and further encourage a dialogue between labour history and other fields. As a complex organization employing large number of workers the factory is a point of convergence of different social phenomena, some transnational in scope such as resources, employees and circulation of commodities. Studying a factory in all its aspects encompassing the transnational flows of capital and trade, internationally shaped investment decisions, the interactions between international and national regulation, national and international labour migration could move our research questions from the fallacies of a narrowly national focus.

We also recognise that the definition of factory is open to interpretation as models of organisation of production have been arguably adopted in the service sector (call centres) or in logistics and distribution (warehouses) where workers are highly regimented and constantly gauged against statistical performance standards, primarily speed. These workplaces adopt Taylorist practices that once characterized factory production, such as the strategic use of technology to control the pace of working and the fragmentation and mechanization of tasks to deskill workers. The onus is on the researcher to argue why a particular workplace should be considered a “factory” and benefit from intellectual dialogue with the papers of this working group.

We are calling for papers that focus on a factory or a coherent group of factories from any aspects, but in particular from an integrated, interdisciplinary and multi- focal gaze. Papers that deal with the politics of the working-class in general, not linked to a particular factory, are better suited to other working groups in the European Labour History Network.

We invite proposals for papers and roundtables addressing one or more of the following themes:

- Social Relations of Production and the Workplace (technology, work groups, economic cycles and factory, working class formation, managerial models); Industrial Relations and The Workplace (Industrial conflict, working-class resistance, wages, the relevance of workplace politics and the connections between the workplace-based, 'economistic' forms of resistance and more explicitly political forms of rebellion)
- Factory Cultures (competing cultures within factory, cultures of work, factory and memory); factory and the production of difference (ethnicity and race, religion, gender, migration, generations, tasks and skills)
- State, Factory and Labour (intervention of political regime, legislation, policing and surveillance, institutions, citizenship and integration, state crisis and regime change)
- The Capital Side of the Story (financing, factory ownership patterns, investment decisions, rates of profit, socialist vs capitalist accumulation and the factory)
- The Factory and The City (neighbourhood, community, de/industrial landscapes, Social reproduction and factory labour, the relationship between a factory as built environment to its physical surrounding)
- The Factory and the Community (the political, social and cultural interaction between the workplace and the community it is embedded in, the actual and symbolic borders of factory as an industrial workplace)
- The Factory across Change and Continuity within Capitalism (Fordism and post-Fordism, and industrial and post-industrial capitalism, and deindustrialization on the level of the factory)
- The Factory in Various Levels of Analysis (the ways in which the local, regional, national and global connect to each other at the level of factory, global commodity chain, global production networks and global assembly line)

Please send your proposal (400 words max.) to both coordinators until 1st October 2018.

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(Please let the co-ordinators know if you want to join the ELHN Factory History Working Group email list)

Program

Session 1

Representing the Factory and its Workers: Texts, Images, Discourses

Organizers: ELHN working group "Factory History" (Görkem Akgöz, re:work; Nicola Pizzolato, Middlesex University)

Chair: Lars Christensen

Accounts of the factory and the lives of its workers at the point of production have taken a variety of forms, both visual and textual, intelligible only within an analysis of the discourses they produced. The papers in this panel explore, from a broad range of perspectives, the links between techniques of representation (textual or visual) and scientific discourses on the one hand and, power relations and

self-identity on the other in the composite world of factories with multiple actors such as workers, mechanics, engineers, and managers.

The papers in this panel range from former Yugoslavia, to the United States to early twentieth-century China to reconstruct the meaning of workers and managers' biographies; to understand photography as means of workers' agency on the shopfloor; to retrace the scientific discourses that enabled engineers to constitute themselves as a new professional group, and to challenge conventional wisdom about "unskilled" workers at the dawn of the factory system in China.

Paper 1:

Stefan Gužvica (Central European University)

Model (Self-) Managers: A Comparative Analysis of Worker and Manager Biographies in a Yugoslav Factory Newspaper

The 1950s were a time of profound changes for workers in socialist Yugoslavia as their role in the factories was becoming increasingly important due to the introduction of the system of self-management. All over the country, significant efforts were made in order to increase worker participation, not only in decision-making at the workplace but also in the social, cultural and political life of the community. One of the primary vehicles through which the managers and the party rank-and-file hoped to facilitate greater worker participation was the introduction of factory newspapers. Although clearly inspired by the Soviet ideas of workers' education, these were used as a tool for the construction of the unique Yugoslav road to socialism and encouraged workers to understand and actively partake in the creation of this alternative model. Many of them featured workers' biographies, which sought to glorify achievements of individual workers and make the newspaper more appealing to its audience through the use of personal stories about their co-workers. This essay will compare and contrast the biographies of Janko Členek and Gliša Pejak, a model worker and a model manager, which were published in the November 1954 issue of *Tekstilac*, the factory newspaper of the Mihalj Šamo textile factory in Bačka Palanka, in Yugoslavia's northeastern region of Vojvodina. By looking at the prioritized aspects of their respective biographies, we can understand the historical events and processes which were considered significant for the ideological legitimation of the young socialist state. At the same time, the biographies can reveal a typical life trajectory of both skilled and unskilled laborers in Yugoslavia in the pre-war and post-war eras. Finally, these biographies confirm and help better illustrate the findings of the already existing literature on labor and society in early Yugoslav socialism, namely those of social stratification and the party's struggle to gain ground among its proclaimed class base, the industrial proletariat.

Paper 2:

Rick Halpern (University of Toronto)

Camera Work: Shop Floor Photography in the United States Photography made an early appearance in the American industrial landscape.

As a tool of management in the early twentieth century, cameras were used for surveillance, to document technological innovation, and to study the labour process with an eye towards realizing greater efficiencies of time and movement. Ultimately, these uses of photography aimed to control workers and extend the power of management at the point of production. Another photographic tradition, also reaching back to the early years of the last century, sought to document unhealthy conditions, child labour, and the depredations of the industrial workplace with an eye towards galvanizing public opinion behind reform. Both of these traditions treated workers as objects, either as employees to be monitored or as victims in need of rescue.

This paper explores another, less well documented tradition, one in which labouring people exercised photographic agency, securing cameras to capture images of their fellow workers on the shop floor

and in social settings. Their aims in creating these pictures were mixed – they certainly included a drive toward documentation, but a documentation that hoped to capture the dignity of work and the conviviality of the workplace. Focusing first on the camera clubs that formed at a rank---and---file level during the CIO upsurge of the 1930s, and later on the “fine art” photography of Milton Rogovin in Western New York steel mills and other sites, the paper suggests ways in which the study of workers’ photography can illuminate the social relations of production, restore a sense of agency to people who otherwise remain historically mute, and suggest avenues of exploration for future research into the importance of visual culture to an understanding of shop floor dynamics.

Paper 3:

Adelheid Voskuhl (University of Pennsylvania)

The Factory as Engineers’ Life-Worlds and Philosophies in the Second Industrial Revolution

This paper uses methods from intellectual and cultural history to trace how the work of influential “philosophers of the factory” such as Andre Ure, Charles Babbage, Karl Marx, Arnold Toynbee, Henry Ford, and Frederick Winslow Taylor inspired philosophical and political reflection on the part of engineers in the later 19th and early 20th centuries. Engineers found in particular that philosophical accounts of the factory resonated with the realities of their daily work, their social status, and their political theories of technology. This was a time when engineers were also struggling to constitute themselves as a new professional and social group and elite. As part of this process, they developed increasing interest in philosophies of the factory and industrial production, and contributed to the popularization of such philosophies. These accounts influence to this day our utopias/dystopias of mass production and consumption.

In the United States in the 1910s and 1920s, for example, engineers were involved in the “efficiency movement,” a phenomenon referenced by F. W. Taylor in the Introduction to Principles of Scientific Management. The movement provided the intellectual foundation for the Technocracy Movement in New York City in the early 1930s, and it is here that Taylor’s, Ure’s, and Marx’s perspectives on the organization and governance of the factory in industrial modernity culminated. In Germany, around the same time, engineers experienced resistance from traditional, pre-industrial academic elites as they were trying to constitute themselves as a new social and professional group. Partly as a response to that, engineers increasingly engaged questions about the relationship of the factory to such abstract entities as art, culture, and the state.

Temporary and permanent migration of engineers across the Atlantic Ocean connected such phenomena with each other: it engendered sustained international exchange of ideas and resources among engineers. Well-known and lesser-known work by German- and English-speaking factory theorists and practitioners, and their visions of society, were part of this cross-Atlantic migration.

This paper analyses the production and consumption, as it were, of philosophies of the factory through regional, national, and international engineering periodicals, tracing engineers’ practical and theoretical work in and of the factory in conjunction with their understandings of the factory as their “life-world.”

Paper 4:

Yuan Yi (Columbia University)

The Skills of “Unskilled” Workers: Factory Work in Early Twentieth-Century China

This paper revisits Chinese labor history from the perspective of skill and technology. Through a case study of Dasheng Cotton Mills, one of the most successful enterprises in Republican China, it examines the *skills* of the allegedly “unskilled” factory workers, arguing for their significance in the making of the factory system. An epitome of modern industrial workforces, factory workers was once a popular topic among social historians and feminist scholars in the China field. Inspired by E. P. Thompson’s seminal work on the English working class, scholars have investigated the fragmented nature of the Chinese working class in terms of gender, skill, and native places, with detailed accounts of the

workers' daily lives. In their narratives, however, the majority of cotton mill workers have been categorized as "unskilled laborers", regardless of their work experience. The arbitrary boundaries between "skilled" and "unskilled" based on wages, gender, and education rather than the actual degree of skill, have remained unchallenged and thus been perpetuated.

This paper seeks to rectify this neglect partly as a response to a recent call for attention to technology-in-use or, more specifically, the study of maintenance. By avoiding the conventional invention-centered approach to technology studies and by focusing more on sites where machines were used, repaired, and maintained, we can bring back the often neglected technical experts such as mechanics for a better understanding of the history of the factory system. Moreover, if we broaden the boundaries of maintenance from the narrowly defined machine work such as lubrication and gear change to any human activities to keep machines and systems properly working, it becomes obvious that the machine operative's role as a maintainer was no less important than that of the mechanic, as the spinning machines could never perform their function—to produce long, continuous yarn—without the handwork of experienced operatives, which required not only delicate and agile movements but also a technical understanding of the given machines. Their assistance was even more critical in financially-strapped factories, in which capital investment in the equipment remained minimal. By making up for the mechanical defects of aging machines with their Sisyphean labor, the mechanics and operatives virtually sustained the old machines whose official life had already come to an end, defying the myth of the factory as a system where humans were subjugated to machines.

Session 2

What Happens in the Factory does not Stay in the Factory: Shop Floor Politics and the Political Economy of Capitalism

Organizers: ELHN working group "Factory History" (Görkem Akgöz, re:work; Nico Pizzolato, Middlesex University)

Chair: Gülhan Balsoy

The central theme of this session is the link between workplace politics and the national and international politics. These papers eschew the temptation to look at factory-level developments as a reflection of macro political and economic decisions treating the politics at the point of production as a sub-plot of the 'big picture.' Instead, they look at factories of political significance at national level during turbulent times to analyse the role of shop floor struggles in shaping industrial conflict and working-class politics. The shop floor becomes a point of articulation in the wider society to observe the connections between workplace transformation, political economy and shifting regimes of accumulation. Finally, they point to the ways in which the developments in these factories affected the industrial and class relations both when they occurred and later, through their legacy in public memory and historiography.

Paper 1:

Robin Muhammad (Ohio University)

The Shoreline Factory: Shipbuilding in the San Francisco Bay Areas During World War II and the Rise of Maritime Pre-Fabrication

This paper will demonstrate how traditional shipbuilding on the West Coast of the United States became the venue for a new kind of factory: the "emergency shipyards" of World War II modelled on pre-fabrication and assembly-line methods used in other industries. By using faster welding techniques and abandoning the more time-consuming riveting work, shipbuilders and union leaders hoped to bring shipbuilding in line with mass production breakthroughs in other industries such as automobile and aircraft manufacturing. Joining one steel plate of a hull to another was done in a

fraction of the time it took to do so by riveting. Instead of building a ship on the ways (ship scaffolding at the waters' edge), sections were prefabricated then sent to whatever ship was ready, and hoisted into place by gigantic cranes and joined to the hull by welding and/or riveting. More than any other shipbuilder, Henry Kaiser was associated with pre-fabrication methods in shipbuilding applied to cargo vessels. The shipyards his company built in the San Francisco Bay Area and in other West Coast cities became venues for social disruption and cooperation. Groups that had been denied opportunities in the shipyard, women and African Americans in particular, before the war were now employed in larger numbers. This paper will argue that the shipyards' work culture altered these new workers' expectations of what could and could not be achieved during wartime. Seizing the opportunity to press for change, African American and other workers formerly excluded from the master narrative of shipbuilding could and did voice their demands for social and political change.

Beyond the shipyards and in the surrounding neighbourhoods the "manufacturing" of a new urban working-class emerged during this critical period. Although the emergency shipyards were built relatively quickly with significant federal investment, the interconnected cities and towns around the bay could not "pre-fabricate" housing, transportation and other structural resources at the same pace. Consequently, shipyard workers became leaders in political movements during the war to demand fair and adequate housing, healthcare, and education. Not relying on exclusive federal aid, shipyard workers welded together state and business interest into a necessary, if sometimes unwieldy, alliance for progress.

Paper 2:

Matthew Myers (University of Oxford)

"Adieux au prolétariat immigré? Immigrant workers, deindustrialisation, and the crisis of Fordism in France, Britain, and Italy seen through three factories in the long 1970s"

'To consider his [sic] life' – John Berger wrote in *A Seventh Man* of the migrant worker in Europe – 'its material circumstances and his inner feelings – is to be brought face to face with the fundamental nature of our present societies and their histories. The migrant is not on the margin of modern experience – he is absolutely central to it.' This paper will follow Berger's lens to focus on the undervalued centrality of migrant workers to three key turning points in the history of the labour movement in Western Europe: the failed strikes at Fiat (Mirafiori) in October 1980, Citroen (Aulnay) from 1982-1984, and Grunwick (a factory in West London) in 1976-1977. The paper will show that in Italy, France, and Britain, the industrial defeats suffered in these labour disputes were critical in bringing a halt to the 'forward march of labour', in the words of Eric Hobsbawm. In all three cases, migrant workers were crucial to their development and conclusion. The struggles were quickly perceived by contemporaries as having significance much further than the bounds of the factory walls, calling into question traditional left strategies and imaginaries, forcing a transformation in state management of the economy, and signalling the swan song of the vanguard of the industrial proletariat given new life from the struggles after 1968. The paper will show that although all three struggles were produced by specific conditions unique to the factory and its labour process, as soon as the struggles developed in the context of a generalised economic and political crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s, its implications for the wider labour movement became critical.

The paper traces the unique history of each factory and their significance for understanding the wider political economies of Britain, France, and Italy – especially the role of migrant labour in the construction of the labour force. It will show how the factories and their struggles became symbolic of the wider crisis of the Fordist mode of production, as acted as crucial turning points in the crisis of left wing politics in each country. It will also show how a gendered and racialised workforce was a constituent part of the factories and its labour process, all overdetermined by the post-imperial histories of all three countries (represented by the apt 1970s slogan in Britain: "We are here because you were there"). I will show how struggles of the workers, even though defeated, represented – in their own way – the high water mark for working class struggle in each country which had crucial symbolic and cultural significance in the later years. In taking the three factory case studies, I will try

to show the centrality of the factory to the left's own social imaginary and its transformation as the long 1970s enters the 1980s.

Paper 3:

James Nealy (Duke University)

The Shchekino Method: Late Soviet Labor Relations in a Chemical Combine

Historians once viewed the second half of the Soviet century (1953-1991) as an era defined by the "stagnation" of socioeconomic and cultural progress. In recent years, scholars have challenged this perception and instead stressed the persistence of change in Soviet history. To date, however, labor relations have not been included in these reappraisals. Consequently, scholars are left with an image of Soviet labor relations that fails to evolve between the early and late twentieth century. This paper interrogates this vision by focusing on the history of the enterprise where the most enduring of late twentieth century efforts to transform Soviet industrial relations was first initiated: The Shchekino chemical combine.

During the late twentieth century, many national economies restructured industrial relations to improve labor productivity and grow the rate of profit generated by individual enterprises. Though typically associated with the capitalist West, the policies spearheaded by Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin in 1965 show that these goals were also important in the socialist world. Reforms at the Shchekino combine—located in Shchekino, a small town in Tula oblast—began in 1967. Designed to rationalize the production process, the so-called "Shchekino Method" permitted industrial leaders to reassign workers to perform multiple jobs or dismiss them outright while maintaining the entirety of the wage fund afforded to the factory by state planners. By 1970, 1,039 of the 6,800 workers at the combine had been dismissed, labor productivity had risen by 226 percent, and average wages had grown by 36 percent. These results prompted the Communist Party to endorse the method's dispersal. By the mid-1980s, the Shchekino method had been implemented at over 11,000 enterprises in numerous industries employing over 21 million workers in the USSR. Relying on macro-level analysis, scholars have fixated on the Communist Party's reluctance to abandon its commitment to industrial workers and heavy industry to explain the Soviet system's inability to adapt to late twentieth century socioeconomic conditions. By focusing instead on the enterprise this research reveals that many of the characteristics—multi-task labor, the elimination of clear job demarcations, and the division of the workforce into groups of high and low job security—typically associated with late twentieth century capitalist industrial relations were present in the USSR by the mid-1960s. In doing so, it reveals a dynamic Soviet social structure that belies the stagnation thesis and, in stressing similarity with the West, reconfigures scholarly interpretation of industrial modernity.

Paper 4:

Mariana Stoler (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

The construction of an identity: workers' collectivism in a metallurgical factory in Argentina

In the decade of 1970s, Argentina lived moments of great effervescence and labor conflict. The Santa Rosa metallurgical factory, located in the suburbs of Buenos Aires, became a center of workers' struggle and resistance not only against the management and the state, but also against certain union practices. From this factory, a union recovery (reconstitution) movement was promoted that, in constant dialogue with the neighborhood and other factories in the area, disputed not only the leadership of the regional union, but also the meaning of the union organization and of being a worker and a Peronist. In this paper we propose to analyze the process of construction of this workers' collectivism that took place from the experience in the workplace.

This process must be understood in the international context of the change of the capital accumulation model. The changes in the productive processes and in the national legislations were manifestations of a new way of facing class, labor and industrial relations. In Argentina this change was also facilitated by a strong state repression carried out by the military dictatorship that came to power through a coup on March 24, 1976.

For this analysis, we start from understanding the factory not just as a space but also as a process, as a social construction of a relational type. In this way, the factory space is fundamental to determine the construction of the workers' collectivism, reflecting forms of belonging and solidarity among the members of this collective that are more than just the sum of individualities. We will analyze this process of construction of the workers' collectivism studying four specific conflicts that these workers carried out during the decade. In them we will see how the factory space determined the constitution of an original working culture in constant dialogue with the trade union organization and with the other actors of the environment, focusing on the different responses that this collective of workers gave in the different socio-political contexts. Finally, we will make a brief analysis from the field of memory on the current significance of those struggles carried out by its protagonists, the union and the current workers of La Matanza.

Session 3

Beyond the Factory: Transforming Spaces and Scales

Organizers: ELHN working group "Factory History" (Görkem Akgöz, re:work; Nicola Pizzolato, Middlesex University)

Chair: Asli Odman

Factories are eminently spatial entities. Their layout and architecture is intertwined with the relations of productions and, as built environment and productive facilities, they leave a lasting material and symbolic legacy on their surrounding communities and environment that outlasts their demise. Four papers in this panel are looking at this theme from vastly different geographical locations (Hong Kong, Italy, Central and Eastern Europe) and from a diversity of vantage points: the interaction between the local and the global flow of commodities in a sugar factory in Moldova; the transformation of industrial space in Bohemian cotton mills; the repurposing of a Hong Kong textile factory into a post-industrial hub; the production and circulation of industrial waste from a nuclear factory in Italy.

Paper 1:

Zdeněk Nebřenský (German Historical Institute Warsaw)

Spaces of Work and Industrial Capitalism on the Edge of the Empire: The Case of Cotton Mills in the Bohemian Lands during the Gründerzeit

This paper focuses on the transformation of industrial capitalism in the second half of 19th century, investigating the case of cotton mills in the Bohemian Lands that intertwined with allocation and production sites from India, across Central and Western Europe to America. Here, a new commodity and the global exchange of goods and interregional trade were related to the layout of local factories on the imperial periphery. The paper examines the structure of factory buildings and shop floors, in relation to the efforts to increase production capacity and rationalize factory operations. The transformation of factory buildings together with the differentiation of industrial space and the rise of new production places and locations was not crucial only in the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s, as have been pointed out recently.

Factory itself was an invention of the cotton industry. Cotton factories towered above all other forms of European and North American manufacturing. It was in cottons that new modes of manufacturing first came about. The preconditions for these new modes of manufacturing were favourable environmental conditions, the tradition of textile manufacturing and accumulation of capital. Without these preconditions, the new ways of producing cotton would have been impossible: buildings had to

be erected, streams diverted, machines built, workers hired, raw materials secured, and experts, often from long distances and across national boundaries, recruited. It has to be added that all of these preconditions were reflected in the factory layout and in the division of labour between the various groups of employees.

The paper argues that the transformation of internal layouts and settings of factory buildings resulted from the long-term capitalist development and it was connected with new commodity, acquisition and transport of raw materials, their manufacture, and distribution of goods. In this respect, the transformation caused by new commodity influenced the organization of work processes, labour relations and social conditions in factories. Moreover, boundaries between the domestic and the working environments as well as the daily life of the workers' families changed fundamentally giving rise to new forms of governance and loyalties.

Paper 2:

Sandra Lourenço [affiliation missing]

From textile manufacturing to a post-industrial future: an insight into Hong Kong's workplace "The Mills" and its European partners

Since the early 1980s, the effects of the process of deindustrialisation have impacted Hong Kong, where the 'factory' as a site of production cannot be dissociated from the city's transnational condition. A direct outcome of the process of deindustrialisation was the relocation of several factories to mainland China and Southeast Asia, where costs were considerably lower. However, in recent years there has been a process of 'reindustrialisation' as a way to diversify Hong Kong's economy. Together with the service industries, business and information technology are two of the most prosperous sectors targeted by public and private investors. This led to the conversion of former industrial sites into new locus of creative knowledge production.

This paper focuses on "The Mills", a former textile factory in Hong Kong, recently converted into an art and design hub, a textile industry museum, and a multifunctional incubator of startups connected to European cities, such as Lisbon and London. "The Mills Fabrica" epitomises the changes from a traditional manufacturing to an industry that combines high-tech, advanced analytics, and collaborative ecosystem innovation, thus creating a young workforce for a new phase of industrial production.

This paper investigates the cultural and socioeconomic dimensions of "The Mills" both locally and transnationally. In so doing, its compound nature opens to a set of questions related with the urban particularities of Hong Kong and the international bridges it aims to maintain. To what extent do the costs of "The Mills" conversion in the context of Hong Kong's real estate speculation interfere with the factory's social and symbolic meanings within the city? How to assess "The Mills" as a site of intersection between economic value and cultural significance? While attempting to answer these questions, this case study allows us to understand the extensiveness of capitalist modes of production as a universal but not homogenised condition.

Paper 3:

Alexandru Lesanu, IRES (Uppsala University)

State Bureaucracy and Commodity Flows at a Transnistrian Sugar Factory (1898-2003)

This paper traces the interaction between the local and global flows of commodity production at the Rybnitsa Sugar Factory in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova. This carefully chosen location offers a different kind of transnational history. From its founding in 1898, the Rybnitsa Sugar Factory never moved, but found itself consecutively subject to the authority of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union's Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the World War II Romanian occupation regime, the post-war Soviet Union's Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, and today's contested Transnistrian region in the independent Republic of Moldova.

Consequently, by focusing on the interaction between the local infrastructure of sugar production with the various political and economic regimes throughout the twentieth century, this paper will

analyze the capacity of the local infrastructure to adapt or resist against the pressures of the multiple state formations. The research also recovers the lives of factory personnel who were far from passive witnesses to the frequent changes of the socio-political and economic regime. Factory management and employees both influenced and were influenced by each successive socio-political and economic regime.

In 1898, the Rybnitsa Sugar Factory was founded as one of many sugar factories in the Russian Empire. Then, local workers were trying to force their way into the imperial sugar industry. By the 1960's, the factory experienced a golden age, being praised as the first Moldavian factory and as the cradle of the Moldavian industry. Local workers were called upon domestically to assist in the construction of all subsequent Moldavian sugar factories and internationally to reshape the sugar factories of Fidel Castro's Cuba. The factory would not cope so well with the fall of the Soviet Union, as the same workers now had to come to terms with the loss of social benefits and the change in the status of workers on the post-Soviet labor market.

Paper 4:

Elena Dinubila (affiliation missing)

Dangerous Transactions: Controversies related to the disposal of radioactive waste at the Trisaia-Itrec of Rotondella (South of Italy)

The reprocessing centre of radioactive nuclear fuel elements Trisaia-ITREC was built between 1965 and 1970, about 16 kilometres from the small town of Rotondella. Since the activities at the centre have been interrupted following a referendum against nuclear energy production in Italy (1987), the town of Rotondella faces the problem of nuclear waste still stocked into the ITREC plant. In 2003 the SOGIN company was delegated to reprocess and remove the waste. The decommissioning of this significant nuclear waste storage has run into serious problems after the Italian magistracy accused the company of contaminating the sea and the Ionian coast. This paper traces the process of production and circulation of the waste engendered by the decommissioning phase, in order to understand how they enter a complex socio-economic space where they are measured, qualified, standardised, valorised and understood by different actors. Such a perspective allows us to understand the industrial transformations in Rotondella by taking in account the relationships between the nuclear centre and the territory, the workplace and the external community.

Through these theme, this paper focuses on moments of crisis, conflict and inversion of practices which affect the perceptions of different actors whose life stories and experiential narratives related to the nuclear industrial centre. Notably, this paper explores the perception of risk at both levels of the workplace and civil community. In doing so, it compares the workers' perceptions with those of other social actors such as environmental activists and local political representatives. Furthermore, contrary to some accounts on social movements, this paper suggests a reading of the oppositions to the nuclear industry in Rotondella that goes beyond the boost of the ecology movements of the 80s, and that include socio-economic factors which go far beyond the construction of an ecological consciousness. Finally, this paper argues that social actors give different values to nuclear waste and that this can change over time. Indeed, the uranium-thorium bars imported in the 70s from the USA (Elk River) in Rotondella were the symbol of energetic development for some actors, but uncomfortable and dangerous material for others. Nowadays, they represent a commodity without a specific geographic identity, which makes it more difficult to identify who is responsible for it

Session 4-Plenary Session

Factory History: Past Achievements, Current Relevance, Future Potential

Organizers: ELHN working group "Factory History" (Görkem Akgöz, re:work; Nicola Pizzolato, Middlesex University)

Chair: Rick Halpern

In this plenary session a roundtable discussion will bring together the themes that the working group has developed in the past years. Two presentations will spur the discussion. The first is on the centrality of the factory to the 'apartheid workplace regime', its demise in South African labor sociology and historiography and a re-evaluation, in that specific case, of what constitutes factory work. The second one will present some consideration about the state of the field, drawing on the special issue on factory history that will be soon submitted to *Labor History*, to appear in 2019, to which some of the members of the working group have contributed. The two papers will be circulated in advance of this session and only briefly introduced before opening the floor to the discussion. The session also aims to expand on the research themes of the group and consider the possibility of further publications and research network funding.

Paper 1:

Bridget Kenny (University of the Witwatersrand)

Servicing the 'workplace', producing nation: Retail labour in Johannesburg, South Africa across its 20th century transitions

South Africa's labour history has been told through the story of mines and manufacturing, where cheap black (male) labour was bound to 'the factory', with its racialised control, through a systematic and despotic migrant labour regime to characterise that which was central to capitalist relations here. Such an 'apartheid workplace regime'—definitive to the factory-- in turn, explained organised worker and union response, a key component of the liberation movement from 1973. South African labour sociology, with its tradition of labour process analysis, has centred on 'the factory' as unit of analysis to explain not only forms of mobilising and organising, but also the social relations constituting political economic 'transition' under democracy and neoliberalism, often through engaged scholarship with the labour movement. In the more recent period, this focus on wage labour and the workplace has been critiqued, partly following expanded precarious labour, and partly, through global Southern critiques of work, to other sites most notably informal workers and non-wage forms of work, and to other questions, e.g., unemployment, social welfare provisioning, and livelihoods linked to debt, hustling and transactional sex, etc., and partly as social services-based social movements erupted in the post-apartheid period. As such, 'the factory' has been displaced as definitive 'place' of South African study.

This paper seeks to re-evaluate the 'workplace' (understood conceptually as 'the factory', or the specific place of the organisation of value extraction and power, constituted through 'relations in production', as understood by Michael Burawoy, 1985) as a site of analysis and as a conceptual lens. Based on archival, interview and ethnographic research in greater Johannesburg, it tracks the longer history of *retail work* (from the 1940s to today) to argue that retail, paradoxically, offers a strong case for the continuing relevance of studying the 'factory' (conceptually understood), while it problematises nation as bounded unit.

Paper 2:

Görkem Akgöz, Nicola Pizzolato, Richard Croucher

Factory history: past achievements, current relevance, future potential

In a global perspective, the factory has been and remains a significant site of employment, one crucial to capitalism, and whose history is of political import. Gaining access to this “hidden adobe of production”, scholars have produced a long historiography that has registered a range of achievements, but that, since the late 1980s, and for a generation, had lost impetus within labour history. Meanwhile, insights continue to accumulate as the scholars in disciplines adjacent to labour history have developed and influenced research, continued to accumulate insights helping it remain highly relevant. Although the factory has not featured on the agenda of 'transnational' and 'global' labour history, we suggest that it can and should contribute to developing the broader global project, reinvigorating labour history, not least by contributing a dimension still close to workers' everyday experience.