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BOOK REVIEWS

Women's ILO. Transnational Networks, Global Labour Standards and Gender Equity, 1919 to Present. Edited by Eileen Boris, Dorothea Hoehntker, and Susan Zimmermann. [Studies in Global Social History, Vol. 32.] Brill, Leiden [etc.] 2018. xxx, 414 pp. €198.00; \$228.00.

As part of its centenary celebrations in 2019, the International Labour Organization (ILO) invited scholars of labour history or the history of work as well as political actors and social activists to reflect on the long history of the ILO and its struggle for more inclusion, enhanced social justice, and a greater voice and empowerment for workers. The changing concept of “workers” itself reveals a century-long struggle for more inclusion. Traditionally, it covered wage-workers in formal (usually lifelong) employment, who happened to be mostly men, and it was linked with the patriarchal family model, which was based on the supremacy of the male breadwinner regardless of the actual contribution of women. Leading labour historians, such as Jürgen Kocka and Marcel van der Linden, have long argued for a more inclusive concept of work and workers, one more relevant for countries of the Global South, former socialist states, and, indeed, most of the world outside the Global North. Central to this reconceptualization of labour was an increased sensitivity – or increased awareness – of the gender inequalities embedded in traditional labour movements, and, indeed, the traditional labour historiography itself. At the same time, of course, the gendered history of labour is also a history of women “fighting back” and finding their voice – albeit often in the face of great social and institutional difficulties or in a hostile or, at best, “gender-blind” environment.

The edited volume *Women's ILO* is a crucial contribution to this newly conceptualized or global labour history. It takes account of unequal development, the processes of colonization and decolonization, and the surviving or newly formed global inequalities between countries of the Global North and South. At the same time, it raises awareness of gendered inequalities, which are fundamentally interrelated both with the development and the *unequal* development of capitalism. The ILO's involvement in the initiative to publish *Women's ILO* is indicative of the enormous conceptual, political, and social changes that call for a reconsideration of the history of the ILO from a gendered perspective that also takes account of the class, race, and citizenship-based inequalities that shape the new world of work both in the North and the South. Indeed, this book sets out to provide an *entangled* history of global inequalities and unequal access to work (and hence, other resources), which partly determined the history of the ILO, including the composition of its leading organs (long male-dominated), and were partly challenged or undermined *from within* – by scholars, politicians, and activists, who used the ILO as an instrument that could bring about important changes in national legislation and the ways in which people conceptualized gender and family politics in local contexts. As the editors put it: the book “uncovers a history far richer and engaging than previously recognized – a history that is central for thinking about the boundaries of feminism, the uneven advancement of gender equity, and the significant role that women experts and activists have played in creating a more human world” (p. 1).

The fourteen articles collected in this volume all fulfil the promise, first, that a *common* story is being narrated – the reader is not merely confronted with individual chapters; the texts are in a close dialogue with each other and nicely work together to tell us a history of colonization, labour struggle, and the struggle for women’s rights both alongside the ILO and within the ILO. Secondly, we get a picture much richer than a mere institutional or political history; indeed, the book engages with the *whole* history of capitalism, unequal development, the increasing or omnipotent commodification of work, and the complex interrelations of class, race, and gender – all from a theoretically highly sophisticated *and* gendered perspective. This is a remarkable – and rare – achievement shared among the editors and the other fifteen authors (two editors also contribute an individual chapter to the book), and testifies to meticulous and far-reaching collaboration to put together a common (her)story that talks to all of *us*.

There is obviously no space here to introduce all the chapters in the book. Instead, I want to pick up three more general issues with which the articles are engaged. Firstly, the important and original gendered contributions to the history of labour movements, which range from the women’s activists and advisors, who fought for women’s rights and representation right from the start of the ILO’s foundation in 1919, through the sad fate of German women activists and social scientists in the Nazi era, to the organization of informal women workers and the recognition of informal work as work. Gertrud Hanna, Alice Salomon, and Erna Magnus all experienced persecution in Hitler’s Germany; only Erna Magnus succeeded in building a new life and a successful career in the United States. In this respect, I would like to single out the historical perspective for special recognition; all chapters are context-based and refuse to generalize beyond the borders *without* a substantial knowledge of entangled histories and the local contexts.

The second issue is the long struggle for the official recognition as work of unpaid domestic work and caregiving, which is “traditionally” performed by women. The struggle over definition bears much more significance since the question is how far the ILO should intervene in the regulation of the working hours and conditions of domestic workers or migrant domestic workers, who often lack any official protection. Once more, the individual chapters offer various entangled histories, be it the struggle for equal remuneration (which was an issue that sharply divided even feminists), the organization of rural women in Ghana, Italian women’s struggle for equal pay, or the sad story of migrant women caretakers, who often have to leave their own children behind in order to work. Again, a common thread running through all the chapters is the complex interplay between class, gender, and race and a rethinking of the crucial question of how international labour policy, for a long time determined by the Global North, could or should shape gender relations in the Global South or challenge the structures of unequal development through a gendered lens of labour policy. Today, when the massive migration of women caretakers from the Global South to the Global North is leading to the formation of what Arlie Hochschild called “global care chains” (p. 319), it is imperative to address global inequalities triggered by the unequal development of capitalism when we want to better understand the forms and causes of the exploitation of these women, which not only influences the life of migrant mothers, but also severely impacts dependent children and spouses who stay in the home country, and the family structure and caregiving work in the Global South. As Susan Zimmermann shows, the labour policy of the ILO towards the Global South has been subject to many controversies and debates, which also divided the feminist movement. As she argues: “While paternalistic strategies of gendered protection undoubtedly coloured these policies, they also considered the question of gendered labour law as part of and related to the quest for

reducing overall economic inequality” (p. 253). In other words, women-specific protection aimed to curb extreme exploitation of *all* workers in the Global South, even if it was rooted in the modernization paradigm, which conceived of development in the Global South as modelled on the historical progress the West had undergone earlier (p. 251).

The third theme, which underlies most of the articles, is the increasing commodification of labour, which leads to the “outsourcing” of caregiving work in the Global North. With the state withdrawing from the sphere of social reproduction, working mothers increasingly rely on support from cheap, female migrant labour. The lack of citizenship has become a source of further and often extreme exploitation since not only do these women have no access to labour protection, but as illegal migrants they are dependent on the good will – or more often on the whim – of employees. This extreme commodification of labour is addressed particularly in the last chapter of the book, which raises the highly controversial issue of commercial gestational surrogacy. As Mahua Sarkar argues: “By turning women’s capacity to bear children, i.e. a very special form of labour, into a particular kind of commodity, [...] commercial surrogacy brings the most fundamental and hitherto un-commodifiable aspect of reproductive labour, childbearing, within the ambit of paid work” (p. 353). Instead of presenting an ethical discussion, the author suggests reorienting the discussion on the commodification of reproductive labour, and reconceptualizing surrogate mothers as workers whose rights need to be regulated and protected. If the history of the ILO is also a history of inclusion, as I argue above, one might find this a challenging new paradigm – or a frightening dystopia, depending on what kind of new world we conceive of.

This book, then, does indeed present us with a history far richer than the mere institutional history of the ILO. Indeed, we get a real global history, where the individual chapters are in a constant dialogue with each other and at the same time also reflect on the global story that is being told. *Women’s ILO* deserves to be fundamental reading not only for people interested in gender(ed) history, but also for everybody who is engaged with or seeking engagement with the “global labour history” paradigm.

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SHERWOOD, MARIKA. *Kwame Nkrumah and the Dawn of the Cold War. The West African National Secretariat, 1945–48*. Pluto Press, London 2019. 192 pp. Ill. £50.00. (E-book: £12.99.)

Marika Sherwood’s book, *Kwame Nkrumah and the Dawn of the Cold War* offers a meticulous exploration of the inner workings of the West African National Secretariat (WANS) during the 1940s. The author centers the political activism of Kwame Nkrumah in the organization and his negotiations with other prominent Pan-Africanists across three continents in a much more expansive and dynamic frame than previous studies. Nkrumah was the protagonist of the post-war African independence movement in Ghana and across the continent.