

*A Story of Women's International Endeavor: The Politics of Women's Paid and Unpaid Work in and beyond the World Federation of Trade Unions, 1940s to 1980s*

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Short Description

This ZARAH Component Study explores a key dimension of the politics of women's work pursued by trade unionists associated with the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), and trade unionists active in the state-socialist countries, in the period between the 1940s and the 1980s. Highlighting the contribution of female functionaries and activists, the study discusses how male-dominated, communist-led international and national trade unions construed the relationship between women's gainful employment and paid and unpaid family work. The WFTU addressed problems, interests, and social rights of working women from the beginning of its operation in 1945, i.e., before and after the split in 1949 when the competing International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) was founded. This study focuses on female trade unionists whose activities unfolded on various levels, i.e., at the workplace, within the apparatuses of branch trade unions as well as national and international trade union federations, and in conjunction with other actors within the layered state-socialist state and internationally. It demonstrates that these women played a significant and sometimes contentious role in setting trade unions' agendas and shaping their practical and principal policies regarding social services and benefits related to childcare and maternity issues and other policies aimed at negotiating the tensions between women's paid employment and their family responsibilities as these actors construed them. The activities of the women at the center of this study were routed in strong affirmation of women's full involvement in paid employment, the vision of economic and social development in its state-socialist guise, and Cold War rivalry as translated into the politics of advancing women's emancipation within the ILO, the United Nations, and the competitive relations between WFTU and ICFTU. The study expands our knowledge on communist-led trade unions' politics of women's paid and unpaid work and the role of female trade unionists in shaping these policies. Shifting the scene to Eastern Europe and the world of state-socialism, it contributes to developing a fuller understanding to the evolving international politics of women's work.