

Women's Work and Entangled Organizing in the Tobacco Industry, in Transylvania from the 1890s, and Romania from the 1920s, to the 1990s

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Short Description

My Component Study looks at the evolution of women's paid and unpaid work and labour activism, focusing on the tobacco industry in the Transylvania region of the Kingdom of Hungary until 1918 and in urban and rural Romania (including Transylvania) thereafter, until the early 1990s. The four case studies making up my Component Study, covering the period from the 1890s to the early 1990s, will chart the emergence and long-term evolution of activist claims and actions by women workers, in the tobacco industry, in the above-mentioned areas. They will explain how various forms of women's labour activism countered practices of labour control and shaped the operation of the tobacco industry, through local, national and transnational actions. They will look at how tobacco women's labour activism was linked to the wider, transnational labour movement and other social movements, such as feminism.

The tobacco industry in much of Central and Eastern Europe was state-owned, during but also long before state socialism. In interwar Romania, the tobacco industry was a key component of the state's debt repayment program. Consequently, the industry was historically strongly attuned to waves of globalization and geopolitical reordering, making it a highly suitable vantage point for understanding the role of women's work and women's labour activism in long-term state-mediated processes of regional integration into the world economy and attendant reorganization of social relations. Conversely, the focus on the tobacco industry can reveal how gender relations were shaped by industrialization and forms of coerced agricultural work.

I define the *tobacco industry* as comprising tobacco *cultivation*, tobacco *processing* – sorting, bulk storage of harvested tobacco, and tobacco product *manufacturing* – of cigarettes, cigars and smoking-related products such as matches. As suggested above, I focus on the long-term history of the tobacco industry because of its multi-sector span (covering agriculture and manufacturing), unbroken history of state ownership (tobacco production and sale was a state monopoly in the Kingdom of Hungary and in Romania), historical characteristic of employing, since at least the 1890s, a predominantly female workforce and involving in (paid and unpaid) agricultural work women from rural areas, most of them subordinate members of peasant or landless agrarian households; the latter were often situated in the vicinity of towns and cities.

Differently from previous studies on labour control and women's work in the region covered by the ZARAH project, the case studies making up my Component Study will focus on the development of activist claims and actions of women workers, rather than privileging the investigation of the labour control practices affecting these workers. The scope and chronological range of the project allow for fruitful comparison of agendas and repertoires of labour activism (across borders, regions and sectors of the tobacco industry and beyond), the tracing of medium and long-term tendencies in gendered labour activism, and a more thorough historization of key themes in the historiography of labour and gender in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond.

My Component Study will build on and contribute innovatively to both the historiography on women's work in the tobacco industry and the historiography of gender and labour in state-socialist regimes. The historiography of women's work in the tobacco industry shows that since

the nineteenth century, state ownership sometimes meant better pay and benefits than in other industries. At other times, or simultaneously, it meant more intense exploitation and domination (achieved through both coercive control and non-coercive practices such as industrial paternalism).

Studies on industrial paternalism (in the English context, especially) show that this form of labour control was prevalent in workplaces where women were the majority, with resistance to paternalism also taking highly gendered forms. The gendered specificity of repertoires of activism in paternalistically organized manufacturing merits further research in the context of tobacco factories, especially when considering that they were among the earliest types of industrial establishments in Transylvania and Southern Romania. In fact, the entire industry was the target of great amounts of bureaucratic and various other kinds of state attention (police, judicial) since the 1890s. At the same time, and consistently so, the industry was a very visible site of women's labour activism, from the late nineteenth century onwards. In fact, research on women's labour activism in tobacco manufacturing in Europe emphasizes the intensity of women's labour organizing in this branch (especially through studies on France and the Ottoman Empire before 1914 and on Bulgaria in the first half of the twentieth century).

Research on women's work in various state-socialist countries has emphasized state attempts at altering constructions of gender and gender relations, for ideological reasons but especially in the service of catch-up development projects. Recent studies on labour regimes in Romania focus on the period 1939-1965 and the practices engendered by war economies and postwar reconstruction. They discuss the "deficient paternalism" of "quintessentially male" workplaces such as metallurgies or stress the ineffectiveness of mid-level bureaucrats' attempts at developing paternalistic practices in a shoe factory. As mentioned above, my research will shift the focus on to activism against labour control, thus expanding on the current interest in labour management.

Case studies included in my Component Study will discuss: labour mobilization and labour activism in cigarette and matches manufacturing in the Transylvanian city of Kolozsvár/Cluj (in the Kingdom of Hungary until 1918, afterwards in Romania), and in Bucharest from the 1920s to the 1950s; or Cold War dynamics shaping tobacco women workers' negotiations with their employer, the state and its bureaucrats ("activism within the state") in Romania and transnationally, after 1965.

Across the different case studies I will pursue, with different degrees of emphasis, four major directions of inquiry:

First, I am interested in continuity and change in methods of labour exploitation (particularly rationalization) and labour control (especially paternalism) applied in tobacco processing and manufacturing. What kind of paternalistic welfare initiatives preceded or followed the introduction of more intense or health-damaging work methods in cigarette and matches factories in the Kingdom of Hungary until 1918 and in Romania thereafter? What transnational economic circumstances, genres of social knowledge production, and (post)imperial administrative, legal, cultural legacies mediated these changes?

Secondly, I will analyze how women's agendas and repertoires of activism in tobacco manufacturing changed in response to state-employers' changing practices of labour exploitation and control, but also in connection to the local and transnational socialist, social democratic, communist, feminist and reform currents, and later in relation to the Non-Aligned

Movement and postwar interstate organizations (including the World Federation of Trade Unions and the International Labour Organization). How and how often did women workers involved in the tobacco industry struggle against, resist, shape or adapt to changes in work conditions? How did they relate to and shape broader developments in organized labour activism of all political stripes, in urban centers such as Cluj and Bucharest? The global literature on women's labour activism points to the complicated relationship between women workers and the organized labour movement, as well as with feminists and various social reformers, during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Were women workers integral to left-wing (and right-wing) labour mobilization in Cluj and Bucharest or rather marginal? Were there strategic cross-class alliances with middle-class women's associations, and at which points? What role did ethnicity and religion play in tobacco industry women's labour activism? In what ways was their activism transnational? How did imperial and post-imperial legacies shape such activism, before and after the state-socialist period?

Thirdly, I will examine how state ownership shaped labour relations and labour activism. How did the monopoly status of the tobacco industry influence the agendas and repertoires of women labour activists? How did tobacco cultivation, processing and manufacturing become linked to state-building, nationalization, austerity and catch-up development projects of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Kingdom of Romania (and the latter's subsequent, state-socialist, iteration)?

Fourthly, I will explore how paid and unpaid work in the various branches of the tobacco industry shaped gender relations in the workplace and within households. How did gender constructions and gender norms mold labour activism in the various sectors of the tobacco industry? What role did assumptions about gender and gender relations play in coercive and non-coercive labour control practices? Did women's paid and unpaid work and some women's labour activism destabilize patriarchal arrangements within households, or were outcomes highly variable?

Finally, my research will illuminate key transnational and *longue-durée* developments in women's labour activism. It will contribute answers to two overarching ZARAH questions: How was women's labour activism and its agendas part of or apart from local, national, regional, transnational, and international labour and women's activisms and their histories during this period? And, as emphasized above: To which extent and in what ways was women's labour activism shaped by continuity and change in post/imperial and nation- and state-building policies, and how did it contribute to these processes?

In a broad sense, my Component Study will contribute to the development of gendered and critical global scholarship on labour activism, including on women's labour activism during state socialism. In a narrower sense, it will contribute to placing the gendered character of state-socialist economic development and social control strategies in a longer history of social change in the ZARAH Region, one influenced by imperial and post-imperial competition and legacies. Also, it will show that this process of social change was heavily dependent on women's unpaid or barely paid labour and state-coerced labour. It will reveal a long history of struggles against the super-exploitation of women workers, and of workers' frequent, often systematic, attempts to counter or reshape various forms of extracting labour (including patriarchal control in rural households and communities). By showing the continuity of intensive labour and gendered labour control practices across regimes, my study will problematize the canonized gender studies argument that state-socialist regimes and their politics of full employment placed a system-specific "double" or "triple burden" of labour on women, while also providing a range

of benefits which undermined private patriarchal authority but facilitated virtually unprecedented forms of state control of women's lives. My case studies will show that such dynamics were frequent for at least certain categories of employed women before state socialism, in "free wage labour" contexts, with labour activism integral to bringing smaller and larger improvement to these workers' lives.