

Women's Labour Struggles in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond

Toward a Long-Term, Transregional, Integrative, and Critical Approach

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Abstract

The introductory chapter provides a historiographic and thematic framing for the contributions and, we hope, for future research. The first section discusses the existing historiography of the region, highlighting the long history of writing on women's labour activism in Central and Eastern Europe and its adjacent territories within and across the borders of different types of empires and nation-states, and across vastly diverse political regimes. The second section discusses key contributions of the chapters assembled in the volume to the study of women's (and sometimes men's) quests for the improvement of the lives and working conditions of women, pointing to their interconnections and highlighting their contributions to the development of long-term and transregional approaches to the history of women's labour struggles. The third section expands on the rationale for studying women's labour struggles from a long-term, transregional, integrative, and critical perspective, further discusses insights emerging from the volume and other scholarship, and highlights challenges as well as directions for ongoing and future research in the field of women's labour activism.

Keywords

19th century – 20th century – Austria – Bulgaria – Cold War – communism – Central Europe – Czechoslovakia – Eastern Europe – feminism – gender – historiography – Hungary – integrative and critical approach – internationalism – Italy – labour history – labour movement – long-term perspective – Poland – Romania – Russia – Slovakia – socialism – Soviet Union – state socialism – trade unions – transnational approach – Turkey – women's and gender history – women's internationalism – women's labour struggles – women's movement – Yugoslavia

In recent years, the history of women's labour activism has enjoyed renewed scholarly attention, which has, in turn, generated new intersections between labour history and women's and gender history. The emerging scholarship on women's labour activism expands our knowledge of the types of demands women put forward in relation to their gendered labour interests, the repertoires of action they used to achieve their goals, and the wide range of social and political movements in which they mobilized during the past two centuries.¹ However, both older and newer scholarship on labour history and women's and gender history continues to be characterized by geographical, geopolitical, and thematic imbalances. Internationally visible contributions to the history of women's labour activism focus mainly on Western Europe and North America and, to a lesser degree, on parts of Africa and Asia. Studies on the large Eastern European contact zone between the Russian, Habsburg, and Ottoman empires and their successor states—the region covered by this volume—are still rare. New handbooks and volumes on women's and gender history in Eastern Europe do not yet systematically include the theme of women's labour-related activism and struggles.²

As a contribution dedicated to rectifying these imbalances, the present volume collects new research emerging at the intersection of labour and gender history in the Central and Eastern European context and beyond. The contributions collected here were first presented in October 2021 at the international conference “Women's Labour Activism in Eastern Europe and Beyond, 19th and 20th Centuries”³ we, the editors, organized and held at the Vienna campus of Central European University. Our interest in women's labour activism is rooted in our dedication to moving working women from the margins of labour, gender, and European histories to the center. As researchers collaborating within the large-scale research project ZARAH, we aim to foster wider scholarly collaboration.⁴ In autumn 2020, we circulated a call for researchers from multiple disciplines to share, discuss, and publish their work on the topic of women's

1 Betti et al. 2022; Cobble 2021; Boris 2019; Boris, Hoeltker, and Zimmermann 2018; Cobble 2005.

2 Bluhm et al. 2021; Fábíán, Johnson, and Lazda 2021; Penn and Massino 2009. For a recent publication that deviates from this trend, although still without putting women's labour struggles center stage, see Artwinska and Mrozik 2020.

3 The conference material including the call for papers and a few photographs can be found under <https://zarah-ceu.org/events/>.

4 *Women's Labour Activism in Eastern Europe and Transnationally, from the Age of Empires to the Late 20th Century* (ZARAH), <https://zarah-ceu.org/>. Hosted by Central European University in Austria, the project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 833691—ZARAH).

labour activism. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the call highlighted that “many different types of sources can be creatively used to foreground and discuss women’s labour activism.” We invited colleagues to think about their own scholarly interests and ongoing research projects *through the prism of gender and work* to consider how women’s activism relates to “work” in their research. During the intensive three-day conference, the participants, two specialist scholars invited as commentators,⁵ and ZARAH team members (as prospective editors of this volume), discussed pre-circulated draft papers. Many of the papers presented later became the chapters of this volume. Inevitably, the volume mirrors the composition of the papers presented at the conference, which is reflected in the fact that some lands belonging to the region being studied are not represented. As editors of this volume, we aim to make a modest contribution to rectifying this state of things by discussing in some detail the existing scholarship on these lands in the introductory chapter.

In what follows, we provide a historiographic and thematic framing for the contributions and, we hope, for future research. We advocate for and aim to advance approaches to the history of women’s labour struggles that are *long-term, transregional, integrative, and critical*. The chapter proceeds in three steps.

In the first section, we discuss the existing historiography of the region, foregrounding how it can offer solid starting points for up-to-date approaches to the history of women’s labour struggles in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond. Just as the chapters collected in this volume refer to earlier scholarship, this section highlights the long history of writing on women’s labour activism in Central and Eastern Europe and its adjacent territories within and across the borders of different types of empires and nation-states, and across vastly diverse political regimes. We show how, since the 1960s, the topic of women’s labour struggles has been steadily, if not always centrally, present in the historiographies of labour and gender written and published in the many languages of the region addressed in this volume and in other languages as well. We identify four relevant thematic clusters of the historiography on the region: women’s activism in labour and left-wing movements; women’s movements in the national and international arenas; social histories of gender and work; and life histories of activist women.

In the second section, we discuss key contributions of the chapters assembled in this volume to the study of women’s (and sometimes men’s) quests for the improvement of the lives and working conditions of women. Each of

5 We would like to express our gratitude to Krassimira Daskalova and Marcel van der Linden for their valuable comments on the papers discussed at the conference. They contributed greatly to the development of many of the chapters published in this volume.

these chapters is the result of using *work* as prism when studying women's activism, revealing not only a broad spectrum of labour-related activism but also the diverse perspectives of the invited scholars. The chapters tackle under-researched topics and present new interpretations in the history of women's labour struggles in the region and transnationally. Highlighting how they advance an integrative approach to the history of women's labour struggles when read together, the chapters are grouped under three headings: "Women's Struggles and Men-Dominated Trade Union and Labour Movements: Rethinking a Complex Relationship"; "Women's Ways of Action: New Perspectives on Repertoires and Agendas"; and "Activist Travels through Changing Political Landscapes: The Uses of Life Histories." Certainly, this volume does not fully cover all relevant spaces and time periods. Yet, as we discuss the chapters, we point to their interconnections and highlight their contributions to the development of long-term and transregional approaches to the history of women's labour struggles in the region on which this volume focuses.

In the third section, we expand on the rationale for studying women's labour struggles from a long-term, transregional, integrative, and critical perspective. In so doing, we further discuss, from this quadruple perspective, the insights emerging from the volume and other scholarship and highlight challenges as well as directions for ongoing and future research in the field of women's labour activism.

1 Historiography

Exploring women's work and labour activism in Central and Eastern Europe and internationally requires creative, resourceful, and critical engagement with many historiographical traditions and clusters of research. In this section, we present the four research clusters we consider most relevant for a fruitful exploration of the history of women's labour struggles in this region. We point out how explicit accounts of women's labour activism and implicit insights into the topic can be traced in these four strands of research. Namely, we focus on histories of left-wing social and labour movements, histories of women's (non-labour) movements, social histories of women's work, and biographies of women workers and women labour activists. As we revisit earlier scholarship and highlight some of the more recent contributions in these four research clusters, we do not aim to offer a comprehensive overview of the available scholarship. Rather, we critically reflect on the linguistically, conceptually, and methodologically diverse traditions in the scholarship on the region and put them in conversation with each other.

1.1 *Women's Activism in Labour and Left-Wing Movements*

Women's presence in labour and left-wing movements became a topic of scholarly inquiry in the second half of the twentieth century in Eastern and Western Europe alike. In the "West," historians' interest in this field was often indebted to their (past) engagement in labour, left-wing, and (so-called second-wave) women's liberation movements. In Eastern Europe, the interest tended to grow out of both institutionalized labour movement historiography and the dedication of researchers and (former) activists, mostly women, to the subject of women's emancipation. Long-term trends, transnational connections, an expanded notion of what constitutes activism, and initial roadmaps to precious primary sources can be brought to the surface through a critical re-reading of a large body of social movement history.

Research on the history of women's participation in labour and left-wing movement in the region examined in this volume has been shaped by contextual differences between countries, especially in terms of social movements and political regimes. In state-socialist countries, women's activism was a consistently legitimate, if sometimes marginal, subject of history-writing that enjoyed periods of greater interest. In Romania, for example, research on women as workers and labour activists flourished as early as the late 1940s to the early 1950s,⁶ and again in 1970s. Articles on women's labour organizing appeared regularly in key Romanian historical journals from the 1960s to the 1980s.⁷ In the early 1970s, new research emerged on socialist and communist militants,⁸ and two volumes on women's activism and women's labour organizing were published. These volumes used evidence from the labour press to document the worsening living and labour conditions and women's activities in organizations dedicated to childcare, prison support, or material aid for struggling workers.⁹ Similarly, in socialist Yugoslavia, significant efforts were made from the 1950s on to document women's labour struggles, often by official women's organizations. Publications included collections of primary documents with explanatory comments, memoirs, short biographies of "people's heroines," and summaries of important events and processes in different republics,¹⁰ followed by more scientific works in the 1970s and

6 Constantinescu-Iași 1952; Romanian Workers' Party 1949.

7 Tudoran, 1987, 1986, 1985; Ioniță 1980; Marian 1965.

8 Homenco and Ioniță 1975; Ioniță 1973.

9 Căncea 1976; Georgescu and Georgescu 1975.

10 For example, Musabegović 1977; Veskovik-Vangeli and Jovanović 1976; Cvetić 1975; Kovačević 1972; Gerk, Križnar, and Ravnikar-Podbevšek 1970; Šoljan 1967; Đurović, Lakić, and Vuković 1960; Šoljan 1955. The lack of historical analysis and unequally developed

1980s.¹¹ In Bulgaria too, publications on women's labour activism based on primary documents and scholarly research appeared throughout the state-socialist period.¹² In Czechoslovakia, there was occasional research into the early involvement of women in the social democratic movement,¹³ while a more comprehensive account of the workers' press and women's movements was produced by non-specialists like Božena Holečková, a journalist and member of the communist party, and Eva Uhrová, also a journalist and editor.¹⁴ In the field of Russian and Soviet studies, from the 1970s onward scholars investigated the role of women in the revolution and in the early Soviet working women's movement.¹⁵

Research on women's activism in left-wing and labour movements enjoyed similar popularity in non-state-socialist contexts from or connected to our region. In Austria, research on the social democratic women's movement and the lives of working women as well as women trade unionists had been carried out since the 1970s.¹⁶ And in Turkey, women's labour struggles appeared in scholarship starting in the 1980s, notably in the work by feminist researchers.¹⁷

Despite the differences in social histories and political regimes, similar tendencies can be identified in the social movement historiographies produced in both the state-socialist and non-state-socialist contexts of the region in the 1970s and 1980s. In state-socialist countries, the history of socialist and communist movements and revolutionary figures was a favorite topic, one that generated shared and diverse generic conventions and modes of arguing. Such research helped legitimize state-socialist political programs and the communist or workers' parties that brought them to the fore. Thus, in social movement historiographies from across the region, pre-World War Two left-wing and labour movements were often represented teleologically as the predecessors of state-socialist organizations.¹⁸ Some of these works also focused on the

research in different republics were criticized by historian Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević. Kolar-Dimitrijević 1977.

11 For example, Sklevicky 1984a, 1984b; Kecman 1978.

12 Todorova 1982; Bozeva 1981; Vodenicharova and Popova 1972; Bradinska 1969; Todorova et al. 1960.

13 Bednářová 1984; Wohlgemuthová 1965.

14 Holečková 1978; Uhrová 1984.

15 Hillyar and McDermid 2000; Wood 1997; Stites 1978.

16 For example, Bauer (1988) 2015; Hauch 1986.

17 Urhan 2014; Toksöz and Erdoğan 1998; Ecevit 1986; Kazgan 1981.

18 On some of these works that discuss women's organizations more specifically, see Bozeva 1981; Vodenicharova and Popova 1972.

partly outlawed movements of the interwar period and on communist participation in resistance movements during World War Two.¹⁹

Mainstream labour history narratives produced in state-socialist contexts tended to treat women as workers without issues or problems that were distinct from the common problems of workers as a class. Alternatively, such narratives pointed to the supposed deficiencies of women workers' political "consciousness" and activist behavior. Focused on men-dominated trade unions and parties, this genre of history writing produced in state-socialist countries prompted or reproduced a limited understanding of activism as it saw the communist parties and trade unions affiliated with them as the pinnacle of the labour movement. Consequently, even though women's labour struggles formed part of the histories of labour and left-wing movements, overall women's labour activism was only marginally addressed, and women's contributions to these movements were not adequately captured conceptually. For instance, a comprehensive collective study of the labour movement in the Bulgarian textile industry between 1878 and 1944 described unorganized women workers' relationship with the (communist) unions in two ways. On the one hand, it explained that the low unionization rates and strike failures were due to the "backwardness" of the predominantly female workforce. On the other hand, it attributed the success of many "spontaneous" strikes to the union leadership or at least to the influence of communists.²⁰

Similar to state-socialist countries, albeit in a different time frame, studies concerning women's labour activism in the labour historiographies of Austria and Turkey have focused on women's presence in organized labour and left-wing movements. These works have addressed women's labour activism in trade unions and the socialist movements in the territories of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires and in the postimperial nation-states before and after World War Two, including its social democratic, socialist, and later communist varieties.²¹ Strikes stood out as a form of labour activism frequently addressed

19 See, for example, Próchnik 1948.

20 Vasilev et al. 1970. See also Réti 1980; Friss 1974. Some researchers at the time pursued a more critical approach when discussing the relationship between the men-dominated labour movement and women workers. For example, Zsuzsa Fonó (Fonó 1978, 1975), writing on the history of the Hungarian women workers' organizing in the socialist movement between the late nineteenth century and the 1930s, shifted the focus to problems in the approach of party and trade unions rather than the women. Magda Aranyossi (Aranyossi 1963) points, though in a much more limited manner, to the difficulties women's mobilization faced due to gendered social differentiation, including within the working classes and the men-dominated social democratic party organizations and trade unions.

21 Satı 2021; Akbulut 2016; Pervan 2013; Hauch 2009; Lukasser 2002; Toksöz and Erdoğan 1998; Hann 1988.

with reference to women. For Cisleithanian and post-1918 Austria, through his long-term analysis of strike movements, Christian Koller has shown that women workers, in contrast to their low rates of membership in trade unions, were a crucial part of strikes in the late nineteenth century up until the inter-war period.²² In the Turkish case, historians such as Birten Çelik, Yavuz Selim Karakışla, and Nicole van Os have focused on women's participation in strikes in the late Ottoman period as the earliest examples of women's labour struggles.²³ Studies on the republican period similarly highlighted women's active role in strikes and working-class public protests at the expense of other forms of labour activism.²⁴ More recently, Büşra Satı's research on the union organizing of textile workers in 1970s Turkey has shed light on the gendered issues and demands women workers raised.²⁵

In Western contexts, from the 1980s onward feminist labour historians have been deconstructing labour historiographies that were androcentric in their design and outcomes. They argued that such historiographies misrepresented women's involvement in labour activism, for example by portraying women workers as difficult to organize.²⁶ In many places in Central and Eastern Europe and its adjacent territories, such rethinking became widespread only in the 2010s. Yet, relevant new studies already reveal a much more complex relationship between women and labour and left-wing movements than earlier studies had shown.²⁷

Despite these recent evolutions, however, a more nuanced and fresh engagement with the older mainstream (i.e., androcentric) labour historiographies from state-socialist and non-state-socialist contexts alike still requires further development. This is especially true for the handling of state-socialist scholarship. Ongoing and future research can benefit from replacing postcommunist "withering skepticism" for older works that have addressed or documented women's labour struggles with forms of "qualified interest" for the contents of these materials.²⁸ Re-reading older works from the region through the lens of women's labour activism can generate insights that are relevant for new research agendas in several ways.

22 Koller 2009.

23 Çelik 2013; Karakışla 2002; Van Os 1997.

24 Gülenç 2022; Aydın 2010; Yici 2010.

25 Satı 2021.

26 See, for example, Rose 1988; Milkman 1985; Briskin and Yanz 1983.

27 See, for example, Helfert 2021; Todorova 2020; Akal 2003.

28 Ghit 2018.

What are the specific benefits of revisiting the old historiographies of social movements and their established genres for nuanced, up-to-date research on women's labour activism? What can we learn from the often massive publications on the history of "the labour movement" in specific industrial sectors—especially when considerable portions of the workers employed in these branches were women—and time periods? How can we use the historiography of trade unions and their activities in the decades before 1945? We believe that revisiting such publications provides four key insights into the study of women's labour activism in the region.

First, because of their encyclopedic character and dedication to listing, in minute detail, any work-place related activism, in particular strike activity, these works provide important information on *long-term trends* in women's labour struggles in terms of both "waves" and character. Such a repository was produced by Zdeněk Šolle for the second half of the nineteenth century in the Czech lands, which touched on long-term patterns in industrial strikes, including the number of women involved, workers' demands, and archival sources.²⁹ Regarding the Hungarian textile industry, for example, strikes involving large numbers of women from 1890 onward have been documented.³⁰ These strikes mostly focused on wages (e.g., planned wage reductions) and issues related to working hours. For later decades, complex interactions between workers and management related to "rationalization" were also recorded. Read carefully, such publications reveal that the offensive and brutal treatment of one worker often served as a trigger for the strikes, and the demand for respectful treatment regularly formed part of striking workers' agenda.

Second, occasional information can be found in these works on the work- and life-activities sustaining the strikes. This includes, for example, the widespread institution of the "strike camp." In 1903, again in the activist world of Hungarian textile workers, the setting up of one such camp involved complex organizational tasks such as the election of representatives, the collection and administration of material and financial support, and the organization of games, dance, and entertainment programs.³¹ Excavating such information allows for the *expansion of the classical notions of what constitutes activism*, including its gendered dimensions.

29 Šolle 1960.

30 The following information comes from one book alone, Réti 1980. A comparable work written in another state-socialist country (Bulgaria) is Vasilev et al. 1970. See also Hadzhinikolov et al. 1960.

31 Réti 1980.

Third, these works can help uncover the *transnational links* between women labour activists from the region. For example, in her 1978 monograph on women in labour and feminist movements in the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Jovanka Kecman mentions several instances of Yugoslav communist women's transnational engagement and analyzes their connection with networks such as the International Women's Secretariat of the Comintern.³² In Bulgaria too, several publications addressed communist women's transnational ties and their involvement in the international communist movement.³³ Revisiting such publications can contribute to the emerging research on women's border-crossing, transnational engagement in labour organizing and labour struggles in the region and beyond.³⁴

Additionally, earlier works can often serve as detailed guides to otherwise difficult to locate *precious primary source material* including, for instance, large sets of published governmental reports (e.g., police reports, reports on the "state of industry," labour inspectorate reports) or material that is not always readily accessible today (e.g., more or less formalized branch trade union archives or interviews with prominent activists). However, one should always take the accuracy of these sources with a grain of salt. In Hungary, for example, a series of edited volumes published by the Institute of the Hungarian Workers' Movement (Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Intézet), later Party History Institute of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Központi Bizottságának Párttörténeti Intézete) in the 1950s and 1960s, lists and excerpts a vast number of original documents often excavated from local-level archives.³⁵ Despite the apparent historical rigor of these source materials, elements in the texts that could have shed negative light on the attitudes of members of the (activist) working classes, such as antisemitism, were systematically edited out. This becomes apparent when one revisits the original archival collections or compares them with document collections from the 1980s that provided a full version of the texts. As this example shows, the specificities of the sources produced and edited under state socialism do not make them unusable but require the researcher have thorough knowledge of the context to properly address the biases and lacunae of the publications and source collections. Unquestionably, this situation is not unique to state

32 Kecman 1978.

33 Marinova 1989; Vodenicharova and Popova 1972; Bradinska 1969; Paskaleva 1953.

34 Zimmermann 2023a; Gnydiuk 2022; Ghodsee 2019, 2012.

35 Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Intézet (from 1956, A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Központi Bizottságának Párttörténeti Intézete), 1951–1960.

socialism; similar biases and silences can also characterize the source material from other contexts.

1.2 *Women's Movements in the National and International Arenas*

From the 1990s onward, scholarly interest in the history of the labour and left-wing movements, including the history of women's labour activism in the pre-1945 period, declined considerably in the former (state-)socialist region.³⁶ Instead, the history of women as women rather than workers in the state-socialist period began to occupy a central place in the work of researchers with an interest in women's and gender history. In Austria, historical research on women and gender since the 1980s has dealt with various aspects of women's lives until well into the Second Republic, including studies on women as subjects of persecution, accomplices, and perpetrators during the National Socialist period.³⁷ In Turkey, the 1990s saw a growing interest among feminist researchers in women's and gender history of the late Ottoman/early republic period,³⁸ whereas the post-1945 period became an object of inquiry only in the 2000s.³⁹

Drawing on these multiple contexts, since the 1990s,⁴⁰ scholars studying the region have produced a large and inspiring body of scholarship on the history of women's movements and activism.⁴¹ At the same time, especially in the early post-Cold War period, much of this research focused on middle- and upper-class women's activism and foregrounded gender over other categories of social difference and inequality. The topic of women's work and labour activism surfaced in this literature as one among many agendas of the organizations in focus but did not attract particular analytical attention. Lower- and working-class women's labour activism when taking place in informal collectives (rather than formal women's associations) or mixed-gender organizational

36 The trend has been reversed only very recently, and this volume as well as the ZARAH project form part of this recent trend. See, for example, Rajković 2021; Todorova 2020; Kučera 2016; Van Duin 2009.

37 Hauch 2003.

38 Çakır 1994; Demirdirek 1993.

39 Çağatay 2017; Talay Keşoğlu 2007.

40 We do not discuss the scholarship on women's movements published before the 1990s here. Significant examples include Kecman 1978; Taşkıran 1973; Szegvári-Nagy 1969; Celasun 1946.

41 Examples of foundational studies include: Malinska 2013; Daskalova 2012; Bahenská, Heczková, and Musilová 2011; Dudeková et al. 2011; Feinberg 2006; Mihăilescu 2006; Jovanović and Naumović 2004; Zihnioğlu 2003; Żarnowska and Szwarz 2000; Nagy and Sárdi 1997; Mazohl-Wallnig 1995; Çakır 1994; Demirdirek 1993.

frameworks (such as the labour movement of denominational contexts) was seldomly addressed. For example, in the pioneering *Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms in Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe* published in 2006, women labour activists are underrepresented, reflecting the volume's focus on women-only movements and its limited interest in class issues within women's movements.

In addition, the better part of this scholarship has tended either to take the nation(-state) as its primary framework of analysis or to reify the nation-building dimension of women's activism in the region. By contrast, some of the research on women's movements in the region can be considered as pioneering in how it de-naturalized national framings—as sustained by both the protagonists of these movements and their earlier historians—and how it captured the cross-border character of women's activism. These works, while not or only partially engaging with women's labour activism, can greatly inspire the study of women's labour activism. In her *Die Töchter der geschlagenen Helden (Daughters of the Battered Heroes)*, Natali Stegmann offered a detailed history of the women's movement in the Polish lands between 1863 and 1919, elucidating especially the complex interrelationship between this movement and the Polish movement for independence.⁴² Dietlind Hüchtker's *History as Performance* used a focus on three women activists to create an integrative history of different national and political activist networks across and beyond Galicia, and touched on the labour-related agendas and demands promoted by these activists.⁴³ Krassimira Daskalova's 2012 *Жени, пол и модернизация в България 1878–1944 (Women, Gender and Modernization in Bulgaria 1878–1944)* addressed the narrative of women's activism in the framework of gender discourses connected to the social processes of modernization and state-building.⁴⁴ Yaprak Zihnioğlu's 2003 *Kadınsız İnkılap (Revolution without Women)* investigated the formation of early republic feminist activism in Turkey, which was then sidelined by the Kemalist regime for being too much of an independent voice in the newly established nation-state.⁴⁵ Finally, Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak reflected on the “pragmatic or community feminism” of Ukrainian women in the Habsburg and Russian empires, who advanced women-specific goals but did not necessarily identify as feminists.⁴⁶

42 Stegmann 2000.

43 Hüchtker 2021.

44 Daskalova 2012.

45 Zihnioğlu 2003.

46 Bohachevsky-Chomiak 1988.

The approaches of authors who, since the 1990s, have explored the relationship between nation-building, nationalism, and women's emancipation vary greatly. Some have foregrounded the empowering character of nationalist contexts for women's emancipation. In this line of argumentation, women belonging to non-dominant nationalities were able to expand their public roles and visibility in cases where women's emancipation was regarded as part of struggle for the emancipation of the nation or when women managed to make and exploit this argument. Others have discussed these same historical settings more critically, pointing to the limits and trouble spots of opportunities thus generated, including persistent gendered hierarchies within national movements, the ethnocentrism of these movements, and the backlash encountered after the establishment of new nation-states.⁴⁷ New scholarship on the Habsburg Empire that has moved beyond the inherited foregrounding of the national question and nationalism in the historiography of the empire must engage with the findings of gender historians if it is to fully engage with the gendered dimensions of political and socio-cultural change in the Habsburg lands. The emerging new historiography of women's labour activism in the region has the great potential to contribute to such innovation.

Historians of women's movements in the region have also made important contributions to the development of transregional approaches to women's activism. Transnational links already were featured in scholarship produced during the state-socialist period. Some earlier histories of women's activism, including working-class and left-wing women, had an openness to transnational dimensions, including non-socialist internationalism, and embraced comparative interpretations. For example, a 1948 study of the history of the Hungarian women's movement by Mrs. Péter Ágoston included references "in a rather self-evident manner to the context of both trade-union and non-socialist internationalism when discussing pre-1914 and interwar socialist demands in relation to women's work."⁴⁸ A Hungarian Women's Council publication on the history of the international women's movement and historian Katalin Szegvári-Nagy's 1981 book on Hungarian women's movements between the late nineteenth century and World War Two further illustrate the transnational and comparative dimensions present in this older scholarship.⁴⁹

47 For examples of both approaches, see Saygılıgil 2021; Verginella 2017; Bahenská and Malínská 2014; Malínská 2013; Bilal and Ekmekçioglu 2006; Heindl, Király, and Millner 2006; Malečková 2004; David 1991.

48 Zimmermann 2014, 127.

49 The first publication, authored by Zsuzsa Ortutay (Ortutay 1960), presents both Hungarian and international socialist and non-socialist women's activism from the eighteenth century onward and discusses the history of Women's Day in various countries. Szegvári-Nagy

From the 1990s onward, women's and gender historians have demonstrated, in the context of the Habsburg Empire as well as the late Ottoman Empire and the early Republic of Turkey, the rich variety of women's organizations' strategic use of internationalism to advance their agendas. For instance, they examined how women's organizations seized the opportunities provided by international organizing to enhance their visibility in the domestic context.⁵⁰ In her volume on the interwar Ukrainian women's movement in Galicia, Myroslava Diadiuk focused both on women activists' local agendas and actions and their efforts to participate in international congresses and forge transnational networks.⁵¹ Several publications and editorial enterprises have aimed directly at bringing and "thinking together" various national and transnational branches of the women's movement. The pioneering *Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms in Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe* referred to above described the lives and work of more than 150 women across the region.⁵² Focusing on the territories of the Habsburg Empire, *Writing the Women's Movement: Historiography, Documentation, Positions, Bibliographies* presents the history of the different sections of women's movements.⁵³ In the Ottoman/Turkish context, Elife Biçer-Deveci has discussed the uneven but continuous relationship between international women's organizations and late Ottoman and early republican feminists.⁵⁴ A landmark document collection and introductory overview concerning the period from 1820 to 1918 is provided in the Habsburg Empire cluster of the database *Women and Social Movements in Modern Empires* (WASMME). The editors of the cluster provided over six hundred highly curated primary sources, included selected secondary literature, and authored an overview essay on the historiography and documents made available in the database. They deliberately pursued an inclusive approach, featuring women of highly variegated (class, ethnic, and religious) backgrounds and political persuasions active in mixed- and single-gender organizations; claimed to represent different groups of women; and focused on, among other things, labour-related issues. The "Women and Social Movements in the Habsburg Empire" overview essay approached activism

1981 in turn addressed domestic developments in a comparative transnational framework with references to women's movements in England and Germany, as well Russia, and (later) the Soviet Union. See also Zimmermann 2014, 134.

50 Biçer-Deveci 2017; Tutavac and Korotin 2016; Dudeková 2011; Zimmermann 2006, 2005.

51 Diadiuk 2011.

52 De Haan, Daskalova, and Loutfi 2006.

53 Gehmacher and Vittorelli 2009.

54 Biçer-Deveci 2017. On the Turkish context, see also Davaz 2020; Azak and De Smaele 2016.

from an integrative, cross-national, and cross-border perspective and identified the wide array of themes addressed in women's activism.⁵⁵

Especially since the 2010s, the "transnational turn" in gender history has led a growing number of researchers studying state-socialist women's organizations to address transregional and cross-Iron Curtain activism.⁵⁶ Some scholars of state-socialist women's organizations and activism have developed strategies for reading sources that go beyond the basic rules of source critique established for the historical profession. These scholars engage in productive "against the grain" readings of primary sources produced under state socialism. Writing about the role of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in transnational women's activism in the context of the Cold War, Yulia Gradskova has analyzed such sources from a postcolonial perspective.⁵⁷ She carefully differentiated between "selective and manipulative official accounts" in WIDF publications and documents, usually aimed at external readers, and "more reliable," internally circulated materials such as protocols, minutes, and letters. Combining these two reading strategies, she investigated the Soviet archives with an eye toward exposing "the silences and internal contradictions" in materials. As she has pointed out, "even if the Soviet archives do not seem to be a place to look for alternative voices and interpretations of the WIDF's ideology and activism, some of the documents kept there clearly indicate dissent, and reveal the voices of women who did not share a 'communist', 'Soviet' or 'Euro-centric' way of thinking."⁵⁸ Similarly, Mária Schadt (re)discovered how formal reports on women functionaries' activities in "the world of work" in 1950s Hungary communicated agreement and disagreement, respectively, via constructing bullet point lists that summarized achievements and problems in highly variable levels of detail—a selective reporting strategy that the 1950s functionaries certainly employed intentionally.⁵⁹ Schadt used this insight to

55 The lead essay was written by Susan Zimmermann with Birgitta Bader-Zaar, Ágoston Berecz, Jitka Gelnarová, Alexandra Ghiț, and Michaela Königshofer. See Zimmermann et al. 2018. The scholars mentioned above and Dietlind Hüchtker collected and curated the source material contained in the Habsburg Monarchy cluster of the WASMME database.

56 For example, De Haan 2023; Bracke 2022; Donert 2022; Lóránd 2022; Artwinska and Mroziak 2020; Ghodsee 2019; Grabowska 2017; Jarska 2015; Donert 2013; Nečasová 2013; Bonfiglioli 2012; Fidelis 2010; Popa 2009. See also Sercan Çınar's 2023 study on women's transnational activism, which offers insight into collaboration and solidarity between socialist women in 1970s Turkey and their counterparts in state-socialist countries, and Eloisa Betti's contribution to the present volume.

57 Gradskova 2022, 2021.

58 Gradskova 2021, 6.

59 Schadt 2003.

reveal the disagreements, power struggles, and ensuing policy changes within various Hungarian institutions dealing with women's issues. Such creative readings of sources can greatly contribute to the advancement of a new critical history of women's labour struggles under state socialism. We discuss this point further below, in the third section of this chapter.

1.3 *Social Histories of Gender and Work*

A third historiographic cluster relevant for researching women's labour struggles is the social history of gender and work. Starting from the second half of the 1960s and rooted in the early stages of Western women's and gender history,⁶⁰ histories of women's work included an explicit focus on labour activism. This literature, covering both the Eastern and Western European contexts, was inclusive of working-class women's living conditions and specific experiences in areas of industrial wage labour, such as in tobacco manufacturing and various branches of the textile industry, or in domestic service.⁶¹ Studies on women's work in the Russian and Soviet contexts, produced largely by researchers working in North American institutions and shaped (to varying degrees) by early Western women's and gender history, are particularly diverse and sophisticated. Beginning in the 1980s, historians such as Rose Glickman and Wendy Goldman offered insight into the social and political lives of working-class women in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s.⁶² In her 1995 study of printing industry workers in the early Soviet Union, Diane Koenker provided a nuanced analysis of the interactions and conflicts of men and women workers on the shopfloor. Through a critical reading of the official Soviet press and archival documents, she painted a vivid picture of conflictual workplace relations and official and unofficial strategies of organizing and disseminating information. Tracing the process of workplace marginalization and the deskilling of women in the printing industry throughout the 1920s, Koenker highlighted the discrepancies between official policies regarding women workers

60 The concept of "gender" emerged in Western scholarship in the 1970s, while in Eastern Europe, with some early exceptions, it came into use after the fall of state socialism. In the Turkish context, the term appeared simultaneously with its use in the postsocialist context in the 1990s. To denote historical works with a focus on women and using what came to be defined as gendered analyses, we use the term "women's and gender history/historians" when referring to works published both before and after this shift, including the historiography from the state-socialist period.

61 Bauer (1988) 2015; Nacar 2014; Quataert 1991; Gyáni 1989; Augeneder 1987; Ecevit 1986; Pasteur 1986; Appelt 1985; Ehmer 1981a, 1981b; Rigler 1976.

62 Goldman 2002; Glickman 1986. See also Ilic 1999; Buckley 1989; McAuley 1981.

and everyday gendered relations in the print shop.⁶³ Key conceptual contributions made by historians of women's work in Russia and the Soviet Union have been integrated into the mainstream of the field, as in the 2008 edited volume *A Dream Deferred: New Studies in Russian and Soviet Labour History*, where gender and gendered work form a key dimension of analysis in most of the contributions to this "general labour history" volume.⁶⁴

Before the 2000s, research on women's work in Central and Eastern Europe and its adjacent territories from a social history perspective has been unsystematic but still present. It tackled themes such as agrarian labour history and what could today be termed "care work."⁶⁵ In the state-socialist period, works on the social history of agrarian labour and the living conditions of the agrarian population evolved into a significant branch of history writing. These works addressed women's work, including women's unpaid family labour. Nevertheless, they treated the gender division of labour as a given and did not consider women's work "a type of work worth a separate contribution" when publishing, for instance, large-scale edited volumes.⁶⁶ As for care work, the 1975 volume *Mișcarea democratică și revoluționară a femeilor din România* (*The Democratic and Revolutionary Movement of Women in Romania*) mentioned the Great Depression-era protests by Bucharest women who could no longer support their families, as well as the existence of covertly communist associations enthusiastically run by women activists, who especially helped mothers with young children.⁶⁷

Since the mid-1990s, works that undertook a more explicit and systematic gendered analysis of women's paid and unpaid labour in state-socialist contexts have been published regularly. In their overview of the historical scholarship on women and gender in Central and Eastern Europe, Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann highlighted three major themes that had been fundamental for the post-1989 scholarly efforts to gender the history of labour in the region: the labour of women in agriculture and farming; the initial and unevenly paced integration of women into wage labour; and the mass entry of women into the workforce under state socialism.⁶⁸ Studies investigating these large themes dealt with subjects as diverse as peasant women's (under)paid casualized work, significant opposition to women's entrance into

63 Koenker 1995.

64 Filtzer et al. 2008.

65 Some of this historiography is discussed in Ghiț 2018 and Zimmermann 2014.

66 Zimmermann 2018, esp. 84.

67 Georgescu and Georgescu 1975.

68 Daskalova and Zimmermann 2017, 283.

the trades and professions in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary after World War One, the ambiguous effects of women-specific protective labour legislation applied in the region in waves throughout the twentieth century, and women workers' biographies.⁶⁹

Another important theme in post-1990s scholarship has been “gender and everyday life,” whereby scholars examined how women workers experienced the effects of labour policies in state-socialist regimes. For instance, Jill Massino argued that “women’s experiences of the labour force were diverse and ambiguous”;⁷⁰ some of the women she interviewed in Romania enjoyed their employment during state socialism, while others felt overwhelmed by the expectation of having to perform equally well as workers and mothers. Harassment by their male colleagues in workplaces and patriarchal relations at home were (mostly) difficult to avoid and reject. Nevertheless, financial independence and access to consumer goods offset negative experiences for some women workers, as in the case of the Hungarian factory workers researched by Eszter Zsófia Tóth, for example.⁷¹ Carola Sachse’s book *Der Hausarbeitstag: Gerechtigkeit und Gleichberechtigung in Ost und West 1939–1994* (*The Domestic Workday: Justice and Equality in East and West 1939–1994*) published in 2002 zooms in on how women in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) reconciled family and employment as a delicate negotiation of gender relations and workplace-related activism.⁷² Importantly, and increasingly starting in the 1960s, experts (psychologists, sociologists) were asked to weigh in on issues concerning women’s work and, by extension, their status in state-socialist societies. Recent work, including this volume, shows that topics such as “the double burden” or women’s equality with men had already become carefully studied research subjects back then.⁷³

In the twenty-first century, social histories of gender and work flourished at the intersection of labour history and gender history, drawing on both fields and—sometimes—weaving them together. On the one hand, the rise of a “new global labour history” has brought with it a more inclusive perspective in terms of regional coverage, forms and levels of activism, and types of labour relations.⁷⁴ While the field as whole has retained its limited engagement with

69 Bahenská, Heczková, and Musilová 2014; Neudorfllová 2010; Sekyrková 2010; Papp 2004; Nazürska 2003; Żarnowska and Szwarc 2000; Asztalos Morell 1999; Grandner 1995.

70 Massino 2019, 142.

71 Tóth 2009. See also Massino 2009.

72 Sachse 2002.

73 Híncu 2022; Massino 2019, 155.

74 For an introduction to discussions on this field, see, for instance, Brown et al. 2012.

gender as an analytical category,⁷⁵ when labour historians consider gender and gendered interests in activism and organizing, their conclusions challenged the long-standing assumptions of the field and highlighted overlooked dynamics of labour conflicts. Can Nacar has shown how in Istanbul in 1908, employers offered wage increases only to striking women cigarette makers. However, all strikers continued their protest, shunning employers' gendered strategies to divide workers.⁷⁶ H. Şükrü Ilıcak similarly described how in Ottoman Salonica (present-day Thessaloniki) in 1911, women workers' exclusion from the negotiation process between strikers and employers led women to reject a proposed agreement and continue the strike on their own. A newly formed labour organization in the city served as the mediator between men and women workers.⁷⁷ These examples from the late Ottoman Empire's tobacco industry contribute to overcoming the stubborn notion in labour history that women, as the more precarious category of employee or the subordinate spouses of employed men, were often less willing to organize or engage in long-term resistance. Still, more careful research and an integrative rethinking of women's labour struggles is necessary. Several contributions in this volume show how, for example, working-class culture was not solely a culture of organized men but included many women and various interactions between women and men.

Contributions informed more by interests entertained in women's and gender (rather than labour) history have also focused on state policies regarding women's work and the complexities of their implementation. Daskalova and Zimmermann pointed out how "complexity and unevenness" characterized state-socialist policies focused on drawing increasing numbers of women into paid labour.⁷⁸ Luciana Jînga's 2015 volume on gender and political representation in Romania underscores this unevenness. Jînga emphasizes the prevalence of gendered segregation and discrimination in employment despite the policies (particularly starting in the 1970s) that sought to increase women's power and visibility in workplace governance and political structures.⁷⁹ By contrast, Chiara Bonfiglioli has argued that complexity and ambivalence characterized the somewhat less oppressive "working mother gender contract" of Yugoslav self-management. This complex legacy has shaped women's labour activism in Croatia into the twenty-first century.⁸⁰ Margolzata Fidelis's 2010 monograph

75 Betti et al. 2022.

76 Nacar 2019, 147–150.

77 Ilıcak 2002, 132.

78 Daskalova and Zimmermann 2017, 288–290.

79 Jînga 2015.

80 Bonfiglioli 2020.

on gender and industrialization in postwar Poland is one of a handful of studies written after the end of state socialism that specifically addresses women's labour struggles in Central and Eastern Europe after World War Two. Focusing on the textile and mining industries to recover women workers' agency, Fidelis found complex strategies of compliance and protest employed by women during the turbulent years of postwar reconstruction in Poland.⁸¹ In the Turkish case, Gülhan Balsoy and Görkem Akgöz investigated the impact of state policies on the working conditions of women as factory workers in the late Ottoman and early republic periods, respectively, and pointed out the discrepancies between legal frameworks and women's lived realities at the level of the shopfloor.⁸² Yet, while this new historiography acknowledges the ways in which women's work constituted an important element of the politics pursued by women's organizations with close ties to the state, it often overlooks the role of women's activism in trade unions and state institutions in the making and for the realization of state policies.⁸³

1.4 *Life Histories of Activist Women*

A final historiographic strand worth noting for the study of women's labour activism concerns studies and ego-writing that is focused on the life histories of left-wing women in social and labour movements.⁸⁴ An established genre of women's and gender history, biography has recently become both more popular and more conceptually sophisticated.⁸⁵ Close-up analyses of activists' life stories offer a privileged vantage point for studying women's multiple engagements that might not be visible otherwise. Women identifying with working-class women's interests and agendas repeatedly collaborated with both feminist organizations (i.e., cooperated across class lines) and with labour organizations dominated by men. Activists followed this strategy because men-dominated labour organizations foregrounded class issues and—sometimes—could provide more opportunities to pursue the interests of women as workers. Organizations of the women's movement, which were often led by middle- or upper-class women, also addressed issues relevant for working-class women,

81 Fidelis 2010.

82 Akgöz 2021; Balsoy 2009. See also Makal and Toksöz 2012.

83 Fábíán, Johnson, and Lazda 2021; Ghodsee 2012; Fidelis 2010.

84 Popova and Helfert 2021. See also the contributions on several women labour activists from Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, and Austria in the ZARAH blog series II, <https://zarah-ceu.org/blog/>.

85 For a discussion of problem zones of feminist historical political biography, see Hemmings 2018; Bosch 2009.

and women identifying with working-class women's interests aimed to represent their agendas in these organizations.⁸⁶ Furthermore, biographies following an activist's life course transgress historical political ruptures (e.g., 1918, 1945, 1953, 1989) and enable a long-term perspective. The life stories of the Romanian Ana Pauker and the Bulgarian Tsola Dragoicheva exemplify communist women's turbulent fate in the interwar period and during the early years of state-socialist regimes.⁸⁷

Put into a wider perspective, women's and gender historians writing especially in Western Europe and North America saw biographies of extraordinary women as valuable in and of themselves, offering key elements for recovering the histories/herstories of "foremothers."⁸⁸ They drew on a tradition of biographical writing on remarkable women that reached back to the nineteenth century. In Central and Eastern Europe and its adjacent territories, biographical works pursued a similar recuperative agenda.

Biographies and life stories of women labour activists produced in Austria since the 1970s emerged at the intersection of this West-centric feminist interest and the growing contemporaneous interest in the history of social democratic and socialist militancy. Book-length biographies of prominent social democratic women politicians active in the period before the Cold War like Anna Boschek, Marie Tusch, and Käthe Leichter were published in the late 1990s and early 2000s.⁸⁹ Together with works on radical and communist women in interwar Vienna, such as an article on the feminist peace activist Olga Misař or the edited book-length oral life history of Vienna Communist Party of Austria (Kommunistische Partei Österreichs, KPÖ) member Privé Friedjung,⁹⁰ these volumes shed light on how activism on behalf of working women underpinned the broader ideological commitments of these left-wing labour activists. Three recent biographies—on social democratic trade unionist and politician Rosa Jochmann, communist antifascist Tilly Spiegel, and the leader of the Austrian and international social democratic women's movement Adelheid Popp—all published in 2019, testify to growing scholarly and public interest in the lives of women labour activists in twentieth-century Austria.⁹¹ As compared to the older, sometimes celebratory literature, these new works are grounded in,

86 A number of the protagonists presented or mentioned in De Haan, Daskalova, and Loutfi 2006 belong to this group.

87 Daskalova 2016; Levy 2001.

88 Chevigny 1983; see also Caine 1994; Alpern et al. 1992.

89 Jobst 1999; Göhring 1998.

90 Rath 2010; Lichtblau and Jahn 1995.

91 Duma 2019; Markova 2019; Trausmuth 2019.

among other things, (self-)critical conceptual reflection on the genre of the activist biography.⁹² In Turkey, oral history research with women involved in labour struggles after World War Two since the 2000s stands out as an important tool to reconstruct the undocumented activism of women whose gendered demands were marginalized in the labour historiography dominated by men. Significant examples in this scholarly genre are Emel Akal's and Muazzez Pervan's research on the Progressive Women's Association (İlerici Kadınlar Derneği) and Gülfer Akkaya's work on the Democratic Women's Association (Demokratik Kadın Derneği).⁹³ More recently, since the 2010s, researchers mobilized primary sources to offer life stories of women intellectuals and labour activists such as Yaşar Nezihe (1882–1971), Sabiha Sertel (1895–1968), Suat Derviş (1905–1972), and Zehra Kosova (1910–2001).⁹⁴ Finally, as a distinct category of publication, autobiographies by women workers constitute a relevant source for historians of women's labour activism. An important example of this in the Turkish context is the interwar tobacco worker Zehra Kosova's valuable autobiography *Ben İşçiyim (I am a worker)*.⁹⁵

Biographies were a key genre of women's history writing in socialist countries as well. In Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, historians who focused on socialist women's activism published biographies of labour activists from the nineteenth century and the interwar period. In 1949, the Romanian Workers' Party issued a brochure with several biographies of women activists who died while fighting for the communist movement in the previous decades.⁹⁶ In Yugoslavia, biographies of numerous "People's Heroines" and their contributions to the antifascist struggle were published as part of biographical collections.⁹⁷ In Romania, historians focusing on activist women's history were marginalized in the late 1950s and rediscovered in the 1970s,⁹⁸ whereas in Hungary and Bulgaria,⁹⁹ the genre thrived throughout the period. *A cselekvés szerelmese (In Love with Action)* is the well-known Hungarian intellectual György Dalos's biography of Ilona Duczynska, which he published in 1984.¹⁰⁰ Many of these volumes, while barely engaging in a critical reading of *all* the twists and turns that characterized the life courses of these

92 See also Hauch 2012.

93 Pervan 2013; Akkaya 2008; Akal 2003.

94 Atay 2021; Saygılıgil 2021; O'Brien and Deris 2019; Kırılmış 2014.

95 Kosova 1996.

96 Romanian Workers' Party 1949.

97 Bjelić et al. 1980; Beoković 1967.

98 Ghiț 2018; Homenco and Ioniță 1975; Ioniță 1973.

99 Iankova 1980; Bogdanova 1969; Paskaleva 1953.

100 Dalos 1984; see also Helfert 2015.

women, contain precious information on activism: they detail workplace circumstances, discuss women's paid and unpaid labour, their gendered involvement in social movement work, and their border-crossing and international engagements.

The same is true for the many activist autobiographies published in the state-socialist world of Eastern Europe and the life-history interviews conducted and deposited in a systematic manner in many places but seldom used for research thus far.¹⁰¹ The material produced about the Hungarian Magda Aranyossi is a case in point. Aranyossi was forced into exile in the interwar period, became a founding member of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women (Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége, 1945–1956), and was later a party historian who wrote about women's activism. Aranyossi's *Rendszertelen önéletrajz (Disorderly Autobiography)*, published in 1978, gives detailed information on the history of the communist and popular front international organizing of women in the 1930s. Aranyossi was responsible for the daily operations of its journal *Femmes (dans l'action mondiale)* (*Women [in global action]*) in the Paris Secretariat of the Women's World Committee Against War and Fascism, and her autobiography paints a multifaceted and detailed picture of the workings of the Secretariat, the organization, and its leaders.¹⁰²

Since the end of (state-)socialist regimes, biographical works continued to be important sources of information about the contexts and dynamics of women's labour activism.¹⁰³ In her recent monograph on Bulgarian socialists, Maria Todorova corrects stereotypes that hold that women became activists because they were married to activists, arguing that sometimes it was the other way around: marrying men activists enabled women to continue their activist work.¹⁰⁴ A compact biography of the textile worker and leading communist trade unionist in interwar Czechoslovakia Karla Pfeiferová, published in 2006, was written by Jiří Pokorný, a historian with an unshakable interest in the history of trade unions and the labour movement.¹⁰⁵ Eva Uhrová also published a collection of biographies of women "that we know and we don't know," among them essays on the social democratic politician-activist, women's right activist,

101 In Hungary, for example, this includes two large collections of memoirs and life history interviews of socialist-communist and trade union activists, including a considerable number of women, (originally) kept in the archival division of the Párttörténeti Intézet (Party History Institute) in Budapest.

102 Aranyossi 1978.

103 Gehmacher and Vittorelli 2009; Livezeanu with Pachuta Farris 2007; Zirin and Worobec 2007; De Haan, Daskalova, and Loutfi 2006; Schindler 1993.

104 Todorova 2020.

105 Pokorný 2006.

and journalist Karla Machová, the women's right activist and national social politician Fráňa Zeminová, and the editor of *Socialistka* (*The Socialist Woman*) Miloslava Hrdličková-Šrámková.¹⁰⁶ A more recent contribution sheds light on the life of Luisa Landová-Štychová, the anarchist member of parliament in the interwar period, revealing the ways Landová-Štychová's personal life story and circumstances intersected with her activist and political career, both advancing it and hampering it at different points.¹⁰⁷

Such contributions show that biographies are not simply about extraordinary individuals worthy of commemoration and perhaps emulation. In sparse historiographical contexts, as is still the case for women's labour activism in the region covered in this volume, biographies can serve as valuable starting points for further research. Indeed, Kevin Morgan has argued that in research on communist activists (and beyond, we would claim), a biographical treatment "allows a distinct and formative role to individual human agency"; reveals how other influences and movements shaped the experiences of individuals committed to the political cause; and enables a deconstruction of the "proverbial conformism, intrusiveness and monolithicity" of the international communist movement.¹⁰⁸ The well-known Hungarian writer Péter Nádas, who was the nephew of and was raised by Magda Aranyossi, has deeply and critically engaged with the life history of his aunt in his recent publications. Contextualizing her published work through a range of diverse unpublished documents, Nádas has laid the foundation for further critical and productive re-readings of Aranyossi's autobiography.¹⁰⁹ For historians studying women's labour activism, then, biographies can spark research questions about the ways in which women were part of larger networks or broader historical processes and the factors that constrained or enabled their remarkable (or indeed singularly infamous) individual choices.

Historians have reflected on the use and potential of the historical analysis of ego documents produced in state-socialist countries and the world of communist organizing. These include not only biographies and autobiographies,

106 Uhrová 2008.

107 Holubec 2021.

108 Morgan 2012, 461. Comparably, Ghodsee 2019 (esp. 13–15) underscores how the stories of the leaders of state-socialist women's organizations help show the ways these women could shape "the will of the state" in systems that were not as monolithic as commonly assumed.

109 An English-language account of the not unproductive encounter of these diverse "politics of history" concerning Magda Aranyossi can be found in Zimmermann 2022. The volume also includes an English translation of (large parts) of Aranyossi's 1954 study of women's role in the Hungarian Republic of Councils.

often solicited by party and academic institutions, but also cadre files containing self-descriptions and political evaluations, petitions, reports, and denunciations addressed to various authorities, letters written to periodicals and, in the period of high Stalinism, a whole genre of self-criticism and self-reporting. Historian of the Comintern Brigitte Studer has characterized these “institutional ego documents” as a scholarly “stroke of luck” because of their sheer quantity and variety.¹¹⁰ Studer convincingly argued that these sources can be used in a critical manner to help scholars move beyond the “totalitarian” school in Soviet studies, which has denied their value beyond documenting state and party control over the individual and the “revisionist” social history approach that used them as quantifiable data sets. The critical use of these sources requires careful adaptation of the historical profession’s general rules of source criticism to the specific context and a focus on the relationship between text and power, namely the production of subjectivity and the communicative process between the addressees and the subjects producing these documents.

2 Chapters in the Volume

The studies collected in this volume demonstrate how fruitful it can be to think and work across not only the historiographical gaps between labour history and women’s and gender history but also across time periods and borders. While some chapters cover the period before World War One, the interwar period, or the decades between 1945 and 1989, several contributors cover time spans that include moments of major political rupture or upheaval. Other chapters transgress the borders of nation-states or Cold War divides, and still others, the borders between different social movements. Engaging with a great variety of primary and secondary sources, which include—in addition to archival material—interviews, letters, journals, meeting protocols, and films, the contributions highlight the multiplicity of actors as well as the arenas and scales of activism mobilized throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to further women’s interests at the intersection of gender and labour relations. The volume, with surprising density and variety, showcases both the key role labour struggles played in women’s activism and the many articulations of women’s struggles for social and economic rights. Below, we highlight the

110 Studer 2008.

scholarly significance of these contributions as we provide a summary of the organization of the volume.

2.1 *Women's Struggles and Men-Dominated Trade Union and Labour Movements: Rethinking a Complex Relationship*

Part 1 of the volume moves to center stage women's agendas, demands, and experiences in men-dominated trade union and labour movements in the national and international context. In the organizations to which they belonged, as well as in the larger labour movement contexts in which they operated, women activists simultaneously strived to shape the discussions, decisions, and policies regarding their gendered social and economic interests and waged struggles against men's domination and men-focused policies. Read together from a long-term perspective and in the context of the existing scholarship, the chapters grouped in Part 1 underline the key role of women who engaged with and in men-dominated policy contexts to advance working women's interests in diverse, complex, and historically shifting ways.

Opening Part 1, Sophia Polek's chapter on typesetters in St. Petersburg in the early twentieth century examines the labour movement in Imperial Russia and analyzes a 1906 debate on the "woman question" in the industry which unfolded in the printer's journal *Printers' Herald* (*Вестник Печатников*). An early example of an open-ended and complex exchange of views on key tropes in the gendered history of trade unionism, the debate included discussions about "unity" versus "separate organizing," the marginalization of women in the trade union movement, and women's gender-specific mistreatment in the workplace not only by superiors but also by their male colleagues. In the pages of *Printers' Herald*, women workers questioned the claims to moral superiority upon which men constructed the foundation for class unity; they criticized the denial of disrespectful behavior toward women; and complained that women workers would be forced to create their own unions, which would effect the unity of the typesetters' union. Despite workers' radicalism, the printers' work culture remained strongly masculinist: women were daunted by the cost of membership; meeting locations like pubs and restaurants were not accessible or safe for women; and evening meetings were more difficult to attend because many women had childcare duties; issues that remain on the agenda of trade union women to this day. Polek's chapter develops a new perspective on the question of the "unity" of the labour movement by analytically foregrounding the voices and experiences (as described in the debate) of those on the margins of the labour movement and in the world of work, i.e., women. Women's experience of what today would be called gender-based discrimination and harassment in the workplace is discussed by Polek from the perspective of

discussions on “unity.” Polek shows that it is the very marginalization of women's work, interests, and experience that historically has inhibited the “unity” of the labour movement, or, if seen from the other direction, genuine unity must be based on the inclusion and accommodation of the realities of those on the margins.

Mátyás Erdélyi's chapter on the labour activism of women bank clerks in Central Europe from 1900 to 1914 brings to light the struggles of women employees and the evolution of their relationship with men-dominated professional associations in the late Habsburg Monarchy. Analyzing men-dominated and women-only organizations of clerks in the banking sector in the territories of present-day Hungary, Austria, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, Erdélyi shows how women clerks' demands for better education and training, higher wages, and improved civil and social rights (such as the end of the marriage ban, improved access to pension funds, and other benefits) targeted gender discrimination at the white-collar workplace as well as in organizations representing the interests of the sector's employees. When discussing plans to improve women's working conditions, one of its most easily recognizable cluster of demands were those related to equal pay (alternatively “equal pay for equal work” or “equal pay for work of equal value”). Equal pay broadly defined, i.e., the struggles to close the wage gap and to eliminate gender-based discrimination regarding remuneration, holds a special place in feminist labour history.¹¹¹ Erdélyi's chapter is one of several contributions in this volume that capture the complexity of gender wage justice, known popularly as the issue of “equal pay,” a topic to which we will return in the third section of this chapter.

In our region of focus and beyond, women's labour activism developed in relation to global and supranational developments. This is partly because activist women had to use creative strategies at both the local and national levels and partly on account of the strong internationalist dimension of the feminist, labour, and social reform currents that underpinned the rise of women's labour activism since the 1860s. Focusing on the struggles of women in the communist international labour movement of the 1920s, Daria Dyakonova's chapter considers more specifically the role of communist women in party structures as compared to trade union structures and the role international changes regarding participation structures played in shaping women's activism on the ground. Bringing in examples from the Bulgarian and Polish national context, the author shows that the shift toward the Profintern within international communist organizing related to women was accompanied by

111 Betti 2021; Zimmermann 2021, 2020a; Betti 2018; Neunsinger 2018; Kessler-Harris 1990.

the establishment of separate women's structures within the Profintern and a vision of enhancing trade union work among women in all countries.¹¹² Dyakonova's chapter underscores that over time, dedicated women functionaries, whether engaged in party or trade union structures, played a key role in trying to advance practical, workplace-related, pro-women demands and action. The reports of Bulgarian and Polish activists toward the Profintern discussed in the chapter showcase some of the difficulties of communist women's organizing and activism that stemmed from the parallel engagement with women's issues within party-type and trade union-style organizational structures—a difficulty that would haunt women's politics and work-place related activism in state-socialist Eastern Europe throughout the rest of the twentieth century. Studying the varieties of interaction between local communist women's politics and the international changes outlined in the chapter will greatly advance our understanding of left-wing women's workplace-related activism in Central and Eastern European countries and beyond.¹¹³

Intimately connected to the struggles of working women has been the issue of reproductive rights and the effects of insufficient means of controlling pregnancies and motherhood on working women's lives. In the region considered in this volume, women's public engagement with this huge issue within the labour movement gained new momentum after World War One. Analyzing communist women's activism on behalf of working-class women in the Slovakian territories of Czechoslovakia, Denisa Nešťáková's chapter offers an example of how ideas about sexuality circulated in Central Europe in the early 1920s. Through an analysis of the Slovakian communist women's paper *Proletárka* (*Proletarian woman*)—which was different from its Czech sister paper *Komunistka* (*Woman Communist*)—Nešťáková discusses the inclusive approach of Slovak women to the problems caused by working women's special burden resulting from their involvement in paid and unpaid labour and exacerbated by the large families for which they cared. Marginalized by the state, the Communist Party, and the non-socialist women's movement, Slovak communist women drew on international communist and noncommunist actions and knowledge to make their case for working-class women's liberation. The

112 The shift toward the Profintern described by Dyakonova happened at the beginning of the "Third Period" of international communism, when the struggle against "reformist," i.e., social democratic "traitors" gained prominence and communist activists aimed to put into practice the "class against class" strategy in many countries. Zimmermann 2021, 212–213, 218–225, has first drawn attention to this shift in the women's politics of international communism in the interwar period. See also Devinatz 2019; Manley 2005.

113 See also Masheva (forthcoming).

authors of *Proletárka* conceived of reproductive rights (e.g., family planning, birth control, sexuality) as a key element of working women's liberation and aimed to include these issues and women's sexual liberation more generally in the official agenda of working-class struggle. The chapter adds an important perspective to understanding women labour activists' efforts to problematize various consequences of the fissures and links between women's paid and unpaid labour. It highlights how these efforts were entangled with questions of nationality and internationalism and curbed by the resistance of communist men during the period when expressing ideas of sexual emancipation became gradually unwelcome in Soviet Russia and in communist parties across Central and Eastern Europe.¹¹⁴

Similar to Dyakonova's discussion of the Comintern and Profintern in the 1920s, Johanna Wolf's chapter on the equal pay debates and controversies in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in the late 1940s shows the important yet overlooked contributions of Eastern European women activists in the making of the international politics of gender and labour in the postwar period. Discussing the WFTU's role in the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC), Wolf reveals the important but ignored contributions women activists such as Nina Popova of the Soviet Union made to the WFTU's gender politics. Pointing to the key role of discussions about labour market segregation as well as skill and wage systems in the evolution of the international debate on equal pay, the chapter deepens our understanding of the origins and dynamics of the international campaign for equal pay before the ILO adopted its Convention no. 100 on equal remuneration in 1951. In addition, the study carries further the insight that the research on women's international labour activism must situate all actors and organizations within a large arena of activisms and politics informed by both competition and cooperation between women's, labour, and "official" internationalisms.¹¹⁵ Only such an approach will enable a careful and accurate evaluation of the trajectory of the international politics of women's work in the twentieth century.

Investigating equal pay cannot be done in isolation as it was intertwined historically with wage and job evaluation systems, skill, gender-based work discrimination, segregated labour markets, access to vocational training, and other career-advancing opportunities, in addition to the fight for (but also against) protective labour legislation. Eloisa Betti's chapter demonstrates this entanglement, giving an account of how, in Italy from the late 1940s to

114 Studer 2015, 50–58.

115 See also Zimmermann 2020b, esp. 115.

the early 1960s, vocational training became a key topic in debates on women's work across political parties against the backdrop of the division between the Eastern and the Western blocs. In the context of the Italian "economic miracle" of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Italian socialist and communist women referred to gendered labour politics in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to successfully promote vocational training as part of their campaign for equal pay. Betti's chapter contributes to the historicization of the struggle for vocational training, moving as it does beyond ahistorical juxtapositions of conservative—i.e., restrictive and traditionalist—versus progressive—i.e., more egalitarian—visions of vocational training. At the same time, the chapter exemplifies how, during the Cold War, the appropriation of the language and politics of women's work in state-socialist Eastern Europe sustained women's activism in a Southern European, democratic country. In so doing, the chapter highlights the role of communist-led, Western-dominated international organizations in generating and propelling momentum for change in the struggles over vocational training. Thus, Betti's contribution becomes a springboard for research on activism revolving around vocational training in international organizations as well as in other national contexts. Similar to Wolf's chapter, Betti's study confirms that state-socialist Eastern Europe was far from an isolated and insular space. On the contrary, key elements of the politics of women's work traveled across the Cold War divide, shaped discourses, and sustained women's activism on gender and work in Western and Southern European countries and internationally.

The final chapter of Part 1, Büşra Satı's study uses an innovative approach, which is indebted to the anthropological study of labour, to explore how kinship structures facilitated union organization and shaped communal aspects of workers' mobilization in Turkey in the 1960s. Satı analyzes a 1965 strike at the Berec Battery Factory in Istanbul, where mostly young migrant women from the Balkans (Bulgaria and Yugoslavia) as well as rural areas of Turkey worked, as a starting point to understand the role of gendered "fictive kin" in building labour solidarity. Fictive kinship among strikers enabled women workers to engage in labour activism, while labour activism reconfigured the housework and care work they provided for the benefit of their families. Addressing the culture of solidarity-building through familial metaphors and marriage practices in Petrol-İş, (Türkiye Petrol Kimya Lastik İşçileri Sendikası; the Petroleum, Chemical and Rubber Workers' Union of Turkey), this chapter broadens our understanding of what could be called reproductive labour in trade unionism and strike activities—a field that has been studied

in the Western European context since the 1980s¹¹⁶—while shedding light on paternalism in a Turkish labour union. In this case, examining women's actions within and against a men-dominated context brings to light the important role of women's gendered strategies in advancing working-class interests.

2.2 *Women's Ways of Action: New Perspectives on Repertoires and Agendas*

One of the crucial objectives of the volume, reflected in many of the contributions, is moving women's agendas and demands related to workplace justice from the margins to the center not only of research but of conceptual and historiographic debate. The volume strives to highlight the complexity and interconnectedness of various clusters of demands, addressing women's social and economic inequality in the world of gainful employment within the context of evolving gender and labour regimes. The existing multilingual historiography on women's work covering our region of focus, although valuable, has only rarely captured the full diversity of strategies women's labour activists mobilized to achieve their goals. It has also only partly revealed the nature of engagement with issues of women's work in many different social movements and organizational contexts.

Addressing these lacunae in the scholarship, the chapters in Part 2 of the volume turn to unusual and less studied contexts in which women's labour struggles unfolded; point to the diversity of agendas around women's work; and highlight—following Büşra Satı's chapter (in Part 1)—the rich variety of repertoires of action that women employed to improve the work and life conditions of themselves and others around them.

The first chapter in Part 2, Masha Bratishcheva's analysis of the Women's Publishing Cooperative (Женская издательская артель) in St. Petersburg in the 1860s and 1870s offers insight into the functioning of an enterprise run by the pioneers of the Russian feminist movement. An early women's organization that embodied women's struggle for employment, the Cooperative was highly visible in the public sphere. Examining the demands and the experimental organizational form of the Cooperative, Bratishcheva argues that while not pursuing an explicit agenda related to the struggle for women's rights, the actions of the activists involved in the Cooperative laid the foundation for later generations of activists. Radical Russian women publishers such as those discussed by Bratishcheva helped galvanize the political imaginations of radical socialist women across the region for several decades after their enterprise

116 See, for example, Moriarty 2002.

folded. Thus, in her 1908 pamphlet discussing Russian women radicals in the 1905 revolution, Romanian socialist and labour activist Ecaterina Arbore mentioned the pioneering examples of radical women working as publishers and translators in late 1800s St. Petersburg.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, women-only collectives, cooperatives, and trade unions remained an organizational strategy adopted by many leftist or feminist political and practical projects until the 2000s; such structures challenged women's marginalization and oppression by not only addressing their social and economic rights but also applying alternative working models and knowledge distribution. The Hungarian National Association of Women Office Workers (Nőtisztviselők Országos Egyesülete), established in 1897, featured in the chapter by Mátyás Erdélyi discussed above, and the all-Cisleithanian association of women postal workers founded in 1905¹¹⁸ constitute only two examples of such organizations. It is worth noting, however, that not every group of women workers had the financial means to deal with gender-based discrimination in the professional sphere by establishing a cooperative, as the case of the women printers discussed by Polek in Part 1 shows.

Next, Dóra Fedeles-Czeferner in her chapter on women's labour activism as pursued by and represented in the Austrian and Hungarian liberal and left-liberal feminist press rethinks the established view that this branch of early twentieth-century feminism was mainly concerned with women's suffrage. Analyzing three journals published between the 1900s and 1910s, namely *Woman and Society* (*A Nő és a Társadalom*), *The Woman. A Feminist Journal* (*A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat*), and *New Women's Life* (*Neues Frauenleben*), Fedeles-Czeferner finds that the subject of work, and in particular the discussion and critique of the situation of working women in industry, agriculture, the civil service, and the wider service sector received a great deal of attention. Authors who wrote in these journals not only provided detailed analyses of the poor working conditions and exploitation of women but also offered illuminating insight into how the women's organizations or collectives that published the journals understood the ways that the distinct Austrian and Hungarian historical context shaped (working) women's circumstances. Exploring how specific alignments and intersections of class, gender, and ideology opened spaces for women's labour activism, Fedeles-Czeferner's contribution demonstrates the fruitfulness of reading known sources with fresh eyes, through the prism of work and gender. Read together with Bratishcheva's chapter (introduced above), Fedeles-Czeferner's comparative analysis reveals intra-, trans-, and

117 Arbore-Ralli 1908, 18.

118 See the chapter "Morsé-Zeichen: Post-Front-Post" ("Morse Characters: Postal Services-Troops-Postal Services") in Hacker 1998, 109–119.

postimperial similarities in middle-class progressive women's labour activism. The women in the editorial collectives discussed by both authors creatively interpreted legal frameworks limiting associational life and women's public involvement in the tsarist and Austro-Hungarian empires. There are similarities also in how these women engaged in labour activism, how they worked together, and in what they published. Both Bratishcheva and Fedeles-Czeferner show how these women, in their publication strategies, promoted progressive changes in their respective linguistic spaces by disseminating information on what they considered good, or comparatively better, practices in Western Europe and North America concerning women's access to professions. Unlike the case of the radical Russian women, the non-socialist brand of progressive labour activism espoused by the Hungarian and Austrian women's journals sometimes provoked skepticism from trade unions and socialist women.

In addition to emphasizing the more diverse and distinctive arenas in which educated women engaged in labour activism, several contributors to this volume illuminate how women workers, reacting to the marginalization of their concerns in men-dominated organizations, developed distinctive forms of engagement with trade unions or engaged in union-critical or non-formalized women's labour activism within (and alongside) labour movements. Jan A. Burek's chapter on gender, generation, and labour struggle in the Polish textile city of Żyrardów before and after World War Two is a case in point. Taking a transwar perspective on women's militant labour activism in the textile factories of Żyrardów, Burek shows how, in their pursuit of workplace interests related to wages and work, women workers developed alternative independent working-class cultures beyond (and sometimes within) trade unions, centering on self-organization and direct negotiations with factory management and local authorities. Burek's transgression of the paradigm of World War Two as a historical rupture enables us to see the seemingly nonstrategic tactics of women textile workers in a different light. Shifting from having to deal with conservative authorities in the 1930s to communist-dominated organs in the 1940s, women workers distrusted and were reluctant to act within trade unions; instead, they tapped into interwar repertoires of action. In the early postwar strikes in Żyrardów, an older generation of spinners with experience in prewar labour activism played an important role. The inherited reliance of women workers on self-organization rather than trade union structures helped these women workers insist on self-defined interests and independent action, which in turn explains some of the resilience of labour militancy in the period.

Women's engagements with the state have formed an important area of research in the history of women's activism. Developing new concepts and approaches such as state feminism, femocracy, and feminist institutionalism,

Western feminist researchers have discussed the many ways women participated in policy-making processes despite their frequent and systematic marginalization in formal political structures. For instance, Bereni and Revillard discuss how post-1968 “women’s policy agencies” in France worked in conjunction with feminist movements but also—through bureaucracy-specific methods—pursued goals that were not priorities for the non-governmental women’s movement (e.g., vocational training).¹¹⁹ Within state institutions, various forms of labour activist agendas could be pursued, with varying degrees of success. Adding to this growing area of research, the next two chapters in Part 2, authored by Natalia Jarska and Marie Láníková, respectively, show how state-funded agencies as well as state-tolerated “alternative” research on women’s working lives emerged in the late 1950s in different state-socialist countries. In her chapter on the equal pay debate in post-1956 Poland, Jarska examines the activities of the Women’s Commission of the Central Council of Trade Unions (*Komisja Centralna Związków Zawodowych, KCZZ*) and a report by the economist and sociologist Janina Waluk to discuss how trade union activists, women experts, and the broader public considered and questioned gender inequalities in the workplace. Conceptualizing knowledge production as a form of activism, Jarska shows how these actors revealed the persistence of wage inequalities in a system that had officially abolished wage discrimination based on gender and which was committed politically to the principle of “equal pay for equal work.” Jarska’s contribution resonates with the chapters by Wolf and Betti in Part 1 in that it shows how women activists and professionals developed a sophisticated debate on the ways in which questions of, for instance, skill and vocational training related to the definition of unequal pay, and it situates the Polish case vis-à-vis the broader international discussion about (un)equal pay that unfolded after the adoption of the ILO Convention no. 100 on equal remuneration.¹²⁰

Complementing Jarska’s contribution on knowledge production and expertise as a significant form of labour struggle in state-socialist regimes, Láníková’s chapter investigates how women functionaries, professionals, and activists participated in shaping the politics of women’s work in Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s and 1970s. The chapter examines the work of the Czechoslovak Women’s Union (*Československý svaz žen*) regarding women-specific labour protections, paying special attention to change over time, i.e., the union’s political negotiation of the changing political context before, during, and after the

119 Bereni and Revillard 2018; Banaszak and Whitesell 2017; Lovenduski 2005; McBride, Stetson, and Mazur 1995.

120 On the key role of labour market segregation in the evolution of the multiscale debate on equal pay and gendered wage justice, see also Jan A. Burek’s chapter in this volume.

Prague Spring in 1968. The chapter thereby develops a novel view on the politics of the union and expands our understanding of the complex relationship between women aiming to shape the politics of women's work, policy-making, and the state. The contribution of the chapter to our understanding of women's engagement with the politics of women's work under state socialism is twofold. Pointing to the parallel and intertwined engagement of women professionals with their more independent roles as experts on issues of women's work and the policies of the union, this chapter challenges prevailing views on the character of women's "mass organizations" in state-socialist contexts. It also shows that the politics and activities of these organizations were not simply orchestrated in a top-down manner by the state or the top-level party leadership. In addition, the chapter broadens our understanding of the politics of scale by highlighting how two local branches of the union, in Třebíč and Gottwaldov (present-day Zlín), pursued various social projects in collaboration and constant negotiation with an array of other, often more powerful local actors. At the same time, to achieve their goals, activists in these branches repeatedly referenced the central union and its experts. Láníková's chapter thus serves as a warning against generalizing blanket approaches to analyzing women's labour activism in given national contexts.¹²¹

Since the 1970s, feminist scholars and labour historians with an interest in the history of working women in the West have published on the questions of social reproduction and reproductive labour as part of their research on capitalist exploitation of the working class. In this way, they also criticized gaps in existing research on labour movements and the working classes.¹²² Criticism of men-oriented historiography and political economy was not restricted to the so-called West. As Chiara Bonfiglioli argues, feminist activists in Yugoslavia and East Germany developed "their own specific language vis-à-vis the socialist state" in problematizing women's double burden and the paid-unpaid work divide.¹²³ In Bulgaria too, women activists successfully pushed the government to allocate resources to build care infrastructure. Yet, as Zhivka Valiavicharska warns, women's activism carried the mark of its time and was deeply entangled in population-management projects and ethnonationalist visions of nationhood. Moreover, it had uneven effects as it left care work largely feminized, even if partly socialized.¹²⁴ Since the 2000s, we have witnessed renewed

121 On this point, see also Burek 2017, which points at the differential political agency of women activists on the local and national level.

122 Arruzza 2016; Bhattacharya 2015; Federici 2012; Boris and Lewis 2006; Kessler-Harris 1990; Bock 1989; Laslett and Brenner 1989; Scott 1987.

123 Bonfiglioli 2018, 251.

124 Valiavicharska 2021, 87–88.

attention to the topic of care in the historiography of capitalist and state-socialist countries.¹²⁵ Against this background, Masha Shpolberg's chapter encourages us to think of filmmaking as part of labour activism in late socialist Poland. Scrutinizing the work of two Polish filmmakers, Krystyna Gryczelowska (1930–2009) and Irena Kamińska (1928–2016), who maintained a strong interest in the everyday lives of women workers in state-socialist Poland, this chapter offers a reading of Gryczelowska's and Kamińska's films in dialogue with the weavers' strike in Łódź in 1970 and the emerging *Solidarność* movement in 1980. While film has been a medium used widely before (and in other countries) to showcase the gender-specific hardships experienced by working women, Shpolberg's chapter invites us to include it as an important part of critical knowledge production in the state-socialist context, in this case to discuss the working and living conditions of Polish workers. Indeed, as recent research also shows, it was repeatedly filmmakers in (state-)socialist countries such as Poland or Yugoslavia who put the "double burden" of women workers on screen and explored the costs of performing the "second shift" of caring for oneself and others.¹²⁶

Continuing the theme of women's care work, addressed in a growing body of scholarship as a core issue of current historical and sociological debates about the gendered nature of labour,¹²⁷ Maren Hachmeister probes the limits of an integrative conceptualization of women's labour struggles. The chapter is based on archival materials from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR and interviews conducted with care workers from the People's Solidarity (*Volkssolidarität*), an important social welfare organization in the GDR that survived the regime change and reunification. Hachmeister's account of women's unorganized or only informally organized voluntary work for the elderly during the transition from state socialism to capitalism brings to mind studies that have discussed women's practical grassroots and community engagement as activism based in an alternative ethics of care (aimed at) spreading the seeds of an alternative society.¹²⁸ Inviting us to think in terms of the possible continuities and ruptures between the (state-)socialist and postsocialist periods with regard to activist care work, the chapter contributes to recent discussions concerning the reconsideration of the border between activism and non-activism and the inclusion of seemingly non-political acts by marginalized

125 Daskalova and Zimmermann 2017, 288–290.

126 One example is the film *Od 3 do 22* (*From 3 am to 10 pm*) directed by Krešimir Golik in 1966, analyzed in Bonfiglioli 2017.

127 Fraser 2016; Kofman 2012; Benería 2010.

128 Robinson 2011; Naples 1998; Kaplan 1996.

individuals and groups in our understanding of repertoires of action.¹²⁹ Similar to the case of Polish textile workers in Żyrardów highlighted in Burek's chapter, the women who undertook care work in the public and private systems of care during the period when formerly state-socialist societies were undergoing transformation (which had dramatic consequences for social welfare systems) had been involved in voluntary yet systematic mobilization of unpaid care work within social welfare organizations long before the system change. Considering this continuity of women's welfare activism, and thus gendering our thinking about the systemic change, alters our perception of welfare and activism in both the pre- and post-transformation periods.

2.3 *Activist Travels through Changing Political Landscapes: The Uses of Life Histories*

In her study of Emma Goldman's archives, Clare Hemmings reminds us that writing the stories of women activists is bound together with "processes of identification and projection" and is "productive of its own passionate political desires."¹³⁰ For scholars of state-socialist women's organizations such as Kristen Ghodsee, biographical writing and the recovery of Bulgarian activists' life stories are essential for overcoming post-Cold War historiographical erasures enacted within the history of global feminism, partly in the hope of helping renew left-feminist political imaginations in the Global North.¹³¹ Writing biographies could thus be a good exercise in self-reflexivity. Why historians decide to write about individuals, how they relate to their subjects, and how they deal with the complexities of writing such histories have remained relevant questions in debates about the genre of historical biography. The increasing interest in works with a distinct biographical focus—as we discussed in the previous section—is reflected in the third and final part of the volume.

Part 3 of this volume is centered on the life and activism of socialist and intellectual women who challenged women's subordination in local and border-crossing contexts. These women sought gender justice through their individual or collective involvement in leftist or feminist political and practical projects. In this section, the three authors whose chapters focus on individuals offer valuable insights into the history of women's labour activism in Central and Eastern Europe through the lens of women activists' lives of struggle.

Jean-Pierre Liotard-Vogt's chapter on Anna Kéthly (1889–1976) brings to the fore the theme of the multiple engagements of women's labour activists.

129 See Archer 2022; Arik et al. 2022.

130 Hemmings 2018, 2–3.

131 Ghodsee 2019.

Kéthly was a Hungarian politician and trade unionist and a life-long Marxist social democrat. While remaining committed to the same core agendas, she nevertheless adapted her identity and activist focus to the changing historical and personal circumstances as she went into exile in Belgium as the single-party system was established in post-1945 Hungary. In exile, she engaged with the Western European trade union movement and diasporic anticommunist politics. Liotard-Vogt offers a careful reading of Kéthly's life-path, uncovering how a self-identified socialist transgressed the often narrowly defined class allegiances advocated by many within the labour movement—an ideological and political heterodoxy that can be observed among other socialist-identified women of her generation. Kéthly's fight for equal pay and women workers' rights resonated with the program of not only social democracy but also liberal feminism. The fight for women's social and economic rights was a focal point in her political career and permeated her other diverse political interests. The chapter shows how approaching a woman labour activist's multiple engagements may help us rethink movement divides and write more nuanced gender and labour histories. Liotard-Vogt's chapter also reflects two of the threads running through different parts of the volume that help advance new historicizations and conceptualizations of women's labour activism. First, similar to Fedeles-Czeferner's and Erdélyi's chapters discussed above, Liotard-Vogt's contribution demonstrates the connections and interactions between various social movements and their agendas regarding women's work. Women active in the labour, women's, and left-wing political movements pursued issues of gender and work in a variety of contexts and within a large range of competing yet interconnected institutional and ideological frameworks. Second, similar to Burek's and Hachmeister's contributions, this chapter bridges the historiographical divide between different periods. Showing how the broad-scope, multi-layered, and international character of Kéthly's political engagement was present already in the interwar period, when she simultaneously nurtured multiple relationships with nonsocialist women's organizations, the chapter highlights the continuities and ruptures between the interwar and the Cold War periods from the perspective of activist women.

Taking the reader to a working-class neighborhood in the 1930s and 1940s Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Eric Fure-Slocum's chapter explores the dynamics of migration, class, gender, and race in a U.S. industrial city. In his micro-historical study, Fure-Slocum places the antiracist and antifascist activism of Nada Hudson, née Goldner (1922–2015), born to Croatian parents with a Jewish paternal grandmother, within the context of workplace-related and neighborhood-based social and activist networks that transgressed racial and ethnic divides. His findings expand our understanding of multiethnic labour-left antiracist

egalitarianism in the 1930s and 1940s. Fure-Slocum's chapter is one of those in the volume that engages with the transnational circulation of knowledge and practices related to women's work and labour activism, thus addressing a gap in research on women's labour transnationalism with roots in or connections to the region.¹³² Emphasizing the interwar circulation of radical political practices between Eastern Europe and North America and their effects on the postwar political engagement of a woman with a migration background, the chapter offers an in-depth analysis and interpretation of historical contexts and various factors including family alignments and transnational connections that influence individual choices and shape activism.

Concluding Part 3 and the volume, Georg Spitaler's chapter offers an emotion-historical and epistemological reading of the letters of the Austrian socialist and resistance fighter Hilde Krones (1910–1948). Examining Krones's relation to the labour movement and dissecting factors that influenced her personal and political choices, Spitaler demonstrates that for Krones, the struggle for gender equality included the private, the political, and the economic spheres as her socialist conception of women's emancipation remained grounded in advocacy for paid labour and financial independence. Joining the chapters by Burek, Hachmeister, and Liotard-Vogt which bridge different historical periods, Spitaler transgresses the political ruptures of 1934, 1938, and 1945 in Austria and provides insight into the activities of socialist women in the interwar period and the immediate aftermath of World War Two. An important contribution of the chapter lies in its presentation of Krones's multiple inner struggles, which help us better understand why historical actors used what appear at first glance to be unusual and ideologically unacceptable language, references, and concepts. Offering a type of analysis that is rarely found in historical writing, the chapter emphasizes the importance of the life history perspective for understanding contemporary leftist political projects and calls for further self-reflexivity in biographical writing.

3 Toward a Long-Term and Transregional, Integrative, and Critical Approach

Taken together, the contributions in this volume and the historiography reviewed in the first section of this introductory chapter bring to light a wide

132 See Dyakonova's, Nešťáková's, Wolf's, and Betti's chapters in the first section, Fedeleš-Czeferner's chapter in the second, and Liotard-Vogt's chapter in this section.

spectrum of agendas, organizational forms, strategies, and scales of action working women and women activists and professionals of many political persuasions adopted in their struggles for the improvement of the position of working women and their communities and women's social and economic rights. The scholarship reviewed and this volume demonstrate that we can unearth an amazing array of political, practical, and professional engagement with issues of women's work when we analyze the thinking, writing, and action of women's collectives and organizations, women in men-dominated contexts, and individual women through the prism of gender and work. In dialogue with the existing scholarship, this volume invites us to begin to synthesize our knowledge on the history of women's labour struggles from a *long-term, transregional, integrative, and critical* perspective, with a view to capturing its historical variety and transformation within and across different political contexts and systems. The volume opens opportunities to reshape the historiographical topography of women's and workers' movements and put women's multiple labour struggles in and connected to Central and Eastern Europe on the global map of gender and labour history.

3.1 *Long-Term and Transregional*

In this section, we discuss the uses of a long-term and transregional—i.e., cross-border, cross-regional and transnational—approach to the history of women's labour struggles. In our cooperative research project ZARAH, we pursue a transregional perspective by looking at the vast Eastern European contact zone between the Russian, Habsburg, and Ottoman empires and the successor states of these empires. We aim to not isolate this space but to relate it to other world regions and to establish the chronology and cartography of women's labour activism in the region and explore its involvement in transnational social movements and organizations. Viewed through the prism of women's labour activism, some of the established caesuras shaping the historiography of Eastern Europe are recast as rather artificial temporal divisions. Women's labour struggles transgressed historical ruptures, and women engaged with historical contexts and change in a gendered manner. Putting their struggles at the center of the story thus contributes to gendering our knowledge of the long-term history of the region. Chapters in this volume, engagement with earlier scholarship, and insights from our own research help us construct a regionally specific historical arc, starting in the 1860s, when the labour movement crystallized in Europe, and ending in the 1990s, when changes in political and/or economic regimes and the end of the Cold War signaled a new phase of globalization.

The advantage of employing a combined long-term and transregional perspective when studying women's gendered labour struggles is that it allows scholars to trace continuity and change in women's labour activism through and across different empires and nation-states. This helps move the state of the art beyond the conceptual limitations of the study of women's labour activism that result from inward-looking perspectives on the history of singular imperial territories, their "national components," or the succeeding nation-states (e.g., Austria versus Hungary, or the Habsburg versus the Ottoman Empire) as well as from simplifying siloed approaches to political regimes (e.g., democracy versus state socialism). Our motivation in pursuing a long-term and transregional approach comes from our interest in grounding the history of women's labour activism in the lived reality and social history of working women and men, histories which involved migration and population exchanges, as well as transnational influence and collaboration. Several scholars have highlighted the social, political, and epistemic constructedness of regions and explored the changing definitions of "Eastern Europe" through different epochs and the political motivations that informed them.¹³³ They have pointed out how representations of "Eastern Europe" included, for example, the European parts of the Ottoman Empire or excluded the Russian Empire altogether.¹³⁴ Yet, beyond dominant regionalizing constructs, workers and workers' movements are "linked to each other by the world scale division of labour and global political process."¹³⁵ Therefore, historical trends in women's labour activism should be seen as playing out on a broad, historically changing global stage. Combining a focus on Central and Eastern Europe with the study of its adjacent, historically connected lands helps capture phenomena which have historically transcended or pertained only to subregions of today's seemingly self-evident Central and Eastern European space. Such an analytical shift can foster research questions and comparisons veiled precisely by the unproblematic adoption of regional constructions.¹³⁶

133 Kraft 2018; Mamadouh and Müller 2017; Schenk 2017.

134 Schenk 2017.

135 Silver 2003, 26.

136 For instance, by including in this volume case studies that deal with Austrian and Turkish postwar women's labour activism and communist-led internationalist activism in Italy alongside papers on activism within state socialism, we seek to foster reflection on change and continuity in women's labour activism in postimperial Europe. Such reflection is also necessary when considering the interconnected development of labour movements in the Russian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire in Central and Eastern Europe between the 1860s and the end of World War One and their postimperial repercussions.

What kind of insights, then, can a long-term and transregional approach bring? Compared to the available research on the post-1945 period, up-to-date research on women's labour struggles from the late nineteenth century to World War Two is scant regarding most of the countries covered in this volume. Also, there is comparatively little research on the transnational advocacy of women from this region for better living and working conditions for themselves and their communities. Still, considering the emerging research, including contributions assembled in this volume and our own (ongoing) research,¹³⁷ we can share several insights into the history of women's labour struggles across the region.

From the nineteenth century onward, women's labour activism in the region was marked by the circulation of activist practices in the empires dominating the region and across their porous borders. As highlighted in the previous section, political radicalism in the Russian Empire around 1905 as well as suffrage politics and labour organizing around the same time in Austria-Hungary shaped the practices and demands of women workers in Romania and Bulgaria. Across the whole region, including the Ottoman Empire, women workers' demands for better pay and working conditions were supported by anarchist and socialist movements whose transnational ties stretched across imperial Russia and the Balkans. At the same time, women's involvement in social movements in imperial contexts was often deeply entangled with nationalist causes and shaped by divisions along ethno-religious lines.¹³⁸ Recent scholarship has stressed the "transnational phenomenon" of protest culture marked by the revolutionary events in Russia and a European strike wave that began in 1905 and stretched well into the aftermath of World War One, a wave that combined labour unrest with socio-economic protest and demands for political sovereignty in the form of suffrage, national independence, and an alternative social order.¹³⁹

Within this cycle of protest, the 1900s and 1910s were a period of upswing in women's labour activism throughout our region. This activism occurred in or was supported by a growing number of workers' associations and local socialist organizations. It took place across a wide range of sectors in which women workers were represented in higher proportions such as the textile and tobacco industries. The strongly agrarian and agro-industrial character of many lands

137 In addition to the individual papers of ZARAH team members under review, cited elsewhere in this introduction, the ZARAH team has recently published a journal special issue; for the introduction see Ghiț et al. 2023.

138 Yılmaz 2021; Konstantinova 2018; Tunçay and Zürcher 1994; Balkanski 1982.

139 Stibbe et al. 2022, 18.

in the region put a specific stamp on this cycle, and this is necessarily reflected in our thinking about the patterns of labour-related activism. For instance, in Hungary, a country where strongly commodified, large-scale agrarian export production involving masses of landless or nearly landless workers constituted a leading sector of the economy, women's agrarian socialist labour organizing and activism reached back into the early 1890s, as demonstrated in Eszter Varsa's research.¹⁴⁰ Peasant women's labour activism in 1890s Hungary inserts a new periodization and a new geography into the established conceptualization of the European history of women's social movements. Strikes involving large numbers of women workers, for instance in the textile and tobacco industries, were recorded already in the 1890s, but it was between 1903 and 1906 when more stable and formalized urban-based socialist women workers' associations, including one for domestic workers, were established in Hungary. The socialist women workers' movement then became very active and faced many challenges simultaneously, including the intense competition with paternalistic middle-class women's activism regarding domestic servants, tensions with men-dominated trade unionism in the textile industry, and the radicalism of unorganized or newly organized industrial and domestic workers.¹⁴¹ Alexandra Ghiț's investigation of a 1911 strike of women workers employed in a state-owned tobacco factory in the Transylvanian city of Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca, present-day in Romania) shows how state institutions and the paternalist industrial practices they promoted shaped women's labour activism in the Kingdom of Hungary. During the 1911 Kolozsvár labour conflict, well-organized tobacco women, who were backed by local socialists, presented themselves in the local press as ideal—humble, charitable—employees of a paternalist institution and cast the factory director as a manager who did not live up to his claim of treating workers with fatherly benevolence.¹⁴²

During World War One in our predominantly agrarian region of focus, the degree of women's participation in the industrial "home front" and its impact on labour activism differed across more and less industrialized areas. For example, whereas in the more-industrialized Czech lands, there was an upsurge in women's participation in labour activism during the war,¹⁴³ in the less-industrialized Ottoman Empire, the increase in women's participation in industrial production was minimal since only Muslim men were allowed

140 Varsa (under review).

141 Zimmermann 1999, Chapters 2.d and 5.c; Réti 1980, Chapters 2 and 3; Fonó 1975; Aranyossi 1963.

142 Ghiț (under review, a).

143 See the section "Rationed Manliness: The Politics of Gender" in Kučera 2016, 94–129.

to go to war and non-Muslim men replaced them in industrial jobs.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, in countries like Austria,¹⁴⁵ Russia,¹⁴⁶ Bulgaria,¹⁴⁷ Romania,¹⁴⁸ and Hungary,¹⁴⁹ women took the lead in some elements of wartime protest such as hunger riots. Overall, the impact of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution and the wave of social and political unrest that accompanied the fall of the Central and Eastern European empires set the stage for women's increased political participation in the newly formed states and in many social movements. The revolutionary transformation phase of the late 1910s and early 1920s offered an opportunity for radical and reform-oriented socialist women alike, as showcased by Daria Dyakonova's chapter in this volume.

During the interwar period, women's involvement in social movements was increasingly internationalized but ideologically divided. Central and Eastern European women were active in a number of international arenas such as the Comintern, the Profintern, the International Federation of Trade Unions, the Labour and Socialist International, the International Co-operative Women's Guild, as well as the ILO (particularly its Correspondence Committee on Women's Work). By the mid-1930s, women from Eastern Europe were better and more steadily represented in international labour politics.¹⁵⁰ This development was interrupted by the authoritarian tendencies of the interwar governments and (later) the fascist regimes taking root in these lands, but the developments of the 1930s foreshadowed a long-term trend that fully manifested itself after 1945.

At the same time, the advent of the global economic crisis and the increasing push toward rationalization and mechanization in various industrial sectors marked the beginning of a new cycle of women's labour unrest in the late 1920s and the 1930s. Worldwide, the globalization of mechanized textile production generated intense competitive pressures, resulting in a wave of (women's) labour militancy.¹⁵¹ The introduction of Taylorist, Fordist, and other models of "scientific management" and labour organization brought issues of increased managerial control, overwork, precarity, and deskilling to the forefront of labour movements' agendas. Optimizing production costs often involved

144 Karakışla 2015, 59.

145 Helfert 2021, Chapters 3–5.

146 See, for example, Kaplan 1987.

147 Dimitrova 2018a, 2018b.

148 Ghiț (under review, b).

149 Varsa 2023; Ignácz 2020; Zalai 2017a, 2017b.

150 Ghiț 2021; Zimmermann 2021, esp. 179–181, 206–208, 222–223; Lazitch and Drachkovitch 1986; Popova (under review).

151 Silver 2003, 89–93.

increasing the proportion of (cheaper) women workers in the labour force, making the issue of rationalization a highly gendered one. Organized labour displayed ambivalent attitudes toward rationalization's gendered aspects, including the rhetorical defense of all members of the working class and the simultaneous promotion of the male breadwinner ideal.¹⁵² Communists were among the fiercest opponents of rationalization and in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Comintern and Profintern resolutions explicitly linked the fight against rationalization with organizing work among women workers.¹⁵³ In Bulgaria, the issue featured high on official communist women's agenda and was routinely present in agitation materials, periodicals, and in International Women's Day's events starting in the early 1930s.

In hindsight, the 1930s signaled the coming of an altogether different period. In the domestic context, in many lands represented in this volume and studied in framework of the ZARAH project, the increased repression of left-wing social movements changed women's modes of engagement in labour activism. Clandestine activism, the move of women aligned with now-illegal communist parties into trade unions,¹⁵⁴ and, from the middle of the 1930s, Popular Front politics changed both the agendas and repertoires of action as communist women activists joined (bourgeois-liberal) women's organizations, cooperatives, trade unions, and cultural associations and aimed to expand their role in these organizations.¹⁵⁵

The occupation of large parts of Central and Eastern Europe by the National Socialist Third Reich and the ensuing politics of persecution and extermination had an immediate and profound impact on the lives of labour activists and women workers. Many (but by far not all) of the surviving left-wing women activists became ardent supporters of the newly emerging state-socialist regimes. The state-socialist system, while definitely constituting a sharp political and socio-economic historical rupture, must also be conceived of as both an important phase in the long-term historical development of the Eastern European region and a regional variety of a larger transregional post-1945 trend. During the Cold War period, activists who included working women's problems on their agenda concentrated—to varying degrees—on shaping state politics and state-led policies on women's work. Many (but not all) activists in the region now acted within states, which dramatically expanded their

152 Frader 2008, 139; Masheva (forthcoming).

153 Lozovskii 1930, 215–222.

154 Bujaković 2021.

155 For Popular Front tactics in Bulgaria, see Vodenicharova and Popova 1972, 172–181; for Yugoslavia, see Grubački 2020.

(bureaucratic) capacities and ambitions. Ulf Brunnbauer has argued that the Eastern European state-socialist system with its “developmental state” aiming to facilitate economic catch-up policies was part of “a larger story of etatism in the region.” In other words, this was not a state-socialist particularity but an all-European post-1945 trend toward more inclusive social and economic policies facilitated by a strong state. From this perspective, the period of state socialism can be considered “as a kind of climax of the Eastern European state.”¹⁵⁶

The long-term history of women workers’ engagement with state-led industrialization and related paternalist politics directed at women workers, as showcased in the 1911 tobacco strike in Kolozsvár mentioned above, deserves more attention in future research. Seen from the perspective of labour struggles, the historical rupture marking the creation of the state-socialist regimes, as well as the prolonged period of transition reaching back to the 1930s, possessed a distinctly gendered character. Mark Pittaway has argued for Hungary and Adrian Grama and Alina Cucu for Romania that in the early state-socialist period, an older generation of skilled men workers, building on their traditions and power on the shop floor, were able to resist as well as accommodate the reorganization of wage systems and production processes by bargaining with lower management and trade union functionaries.¹⁵⁷ Jan A. Burek’s case study of a Polish industrial town presented in this volume complements these findings, demonstrating that labour unrest in the late 1940s and early 1950s built on women workers’ (not always freely chosen) distance from organized labour inherited from the 1930s. Pittaway and Mária Schadt also show how in Hungary, men workers were not simply hostile toward incoming young women workers; they proactively marginalized them on the shop floor.¹⁵⁸

The engagement of women trade unionists, activists, and professionals with the state-socialist politics of women’s work, documented in this volume in the chapters by Natalia Jarska and Marie Láníková, arose in contrast to these experiences, which characterized the early years of state socialism. These women’s action targeted integrating—and accommodating—the growing women labour force into the industrialization drive orchestrated by the state; mitigating gendered discrimination on the shop floor, in wage systems, and in vocational training; and tempering the tensions between women’s paid and unpaid labour.¹⁵⁹ The state-oriented labour activism of women who aligned with state-socialist institutions was strongly variegated in terms of level and

¹⁵⁶ Brunnbauer 2022. For a discussion on etatism in the Turkish context, see Birtek 1985.

¹⁵⁷ Cucu 2019, esp. Chapter 5; Grama 2019; Pittaway 2014, esp. Chapter 3.

¹⁵⁸ Schadt 2003.

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Tešija 2014. See also Zimmermann 2023b, 2020a.

degree, but all in all, it was a characteristic feature of the state-socialist politics of women's work. Below we discuss how this activism can be analyzed in a critical manner.

At the same time, from a transregional perspective, the Turkish Kemalist and the Austrian corporatist states of the Cold War period displayed characteristics that are in some ways comparable to developments in the world of Eastern European state socialism. In both countries, we see party, trade union, and activist women concerned with working women's labour issues engaging with the state in a distinct manner. In the Turkish case, different groups of activists collaborated with the state to shape the policies that regulated women's work. As Selin Çağatay's research shows, from the 1950s until the 1980s, Kemalist women's organizations, in their encounters with the state, advocated for women's greater inclusion in formal employment as a mode of emancipation. Women organized in the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) demanded early retirement for women in recognition of their unpaid work at home, while women in the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (*Türk-İş—Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*) called for vocational training for women in the many meetings organized by or in collaboration with governmental institutions (e.g., ministries), which they attended as representatives of women workers.¹⁶⁰ In Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Austria from the 1970s onward, feminist women disenchanted with state-led women's policies mobilized for women's self-organizing apart from and against the state in order to address, among other things, working women's issues. While these developments were in tune with and formed part of the border-crossing emergence of the "second wave" feminist movement, they had distinctive traits in these countries. Veronika Helfert's research brings to light a specific triangle of activist interaction and entanglement between feminist, (state-oriented) social democratic, and communist women with unmistakable repercussions for the politics of women's work in the period.¹⁶¹ The history of the involvement of these women in multiple negotiations of gendered socio-economic rights disrupts inherited understandings of post-1945 Austria as a capitalist society and its corporatist state as devoid of large-scale political conflict. It also demonstrates that

160 On state-oriented women's activism in Kemalist women's organizations and the Republican People's Party, see Çağatay 2017, esp. 108–149. On parallels between Kemalist and state-socialist women's organizations, see Çağatay 2022; on trade union women's engagement in decision-making processes at the state level, see Çağatay 2023; on Kemalist women's advocacy of working women's rights in the 1950s, see Sarıtaş and Şahin Akıllı 2015.

161 Helfert (under review).

women's combined state-oriented and social movement-based activism contributed to bringing about important changes in the gendered politics of work from the late 1960s until the 1980s.

As for the pronounced role of women from the region in international labour politics and the role of women active in the world of communist(-led) and state-socialist activism and policy-making, recent research, including chapters published in the present volume, has begun to show the relevance of the demand for "equal pay" in shaping these engagements. In the long view, the transformation of the demand for "equal pay" for women into a multifarious "full equality" issue¹⁶² is exemplary for women's engagement in labour activism.

Starting in the late nineteenth century, women activists successfully transformed the demand for equal pay from a shrewd slogan into a genuine wage justice issue.¹⁶³ Determination and strategic thinking were needed to bring about this transformation. Initially, "equal pay" was often a demand used to curtail the influx of cheap women workers into occupations dominated by men. Mátyás Erdélyi's contribution shows that in early-twentieth-century Central Europe, (men-dominated) organizations that represented the interests of white-collar workers advocated for equal pay or at least a predetermined pay scale for both sexes (somewhat) pro-actively to counteract the "undercutting" of wages. At the same time, they left proactive engagement in politics of promoting women clerks' professional education to associations of women clerks and openly neglected the specific issues of women clerks such as the marriage ban and gender discrimination in company and pension benefits. This implies that their interest in the full equality of women clerks, i.e., in promoting a de-gendered labour market for women and men clerks, was limited at best.

In interwar Bulgaria, as Ivelina Masheva's research shows, organized labour displayed a wide range of competing and often ambivalent visions of gendered wage justice. Corporatist state-backed unions of the late 1930s were the most conservative, upholding gender-segregated labour markets and (wider) gendered pay gaps in collective bargaining. On the one hand, these unions, resembling fascist and national-socialist trade union models, entertained the idea of equal pay only as a tool to curb the influx of cheap women's labour; yet, they also fought to bring the lowest wage tiers (where women were disproportionately represented) up to par with the increasing cost of living. Communists, on the other hand, displayed a more ambivalent attitude that is best understood

¹⁶² Cobble 2021.

¹⁶³ For a discussion of the extant research on Western and Central European countries, see Zimmermann 2021, 34–49.

by taking into account the different scales of action (local, national, and international). The official gender politics of international communism included demands for equal pay, paid maternity leave, and better working conditions that were far-reaching when compared to the demands advanced by other actors at the time. However, these progressive policies sometimes stood in stark contrast to the conservative attitudes of rank-and-file men activists fighting for a breadwinner family wage and against women's access to skilled and better-remunerated positions.¹⁶⁴

During the Cold War period, the ambiguity of engagement with the equal pay issue took a back seat in the debates about and policies addressing this key demand of women labour activists. The demand had already gained traction in (women's circles within) the international socialist¹⁶⁵ and communist labour movements—as documented in Daria Dyakonova's chapter—in the 1920s. It was only in the immediate post-World War Two period that practical, overarching, and international action gained momentum, particularly with the adoption of the landmark ILO Convention on equal remuneration no. 100 in 1951. The role of the labour movement and women's activism in this important step forward in the struggle for gendered wage justice and its aftermath have been studied so far with a focus on the “free” trade unions and activists of the West and Global South; but there have been only a few efforts to integrate Eastern European and state-socialist perspectives into the history of this struggle.¹⁶⁶ The chapters in the present volume authored by Eloisa Betti, Natalia Jarska, and Johanna Wolf point to the growing and increasingly professionalized engagement of activist women involved in communist-led organizations with the politics of equal pay in several national contexts and internationally. Their contributions add to our knowledge of the important role of the international encounters and contributions of women identifying with communist politics in bringing about the transformation of “equal pay” from a slogan into a genuine demand for wage justice.

3.2 *Integrative and Critical*

Some of the novelty and significance of this volume is due to its integrative framing of working women's struggles. By an integrative approach we mean, and develop further below, an expansive approach to women's labour activism, the issues women tackled in this activism (for example, not only wage work but

164 Laskova 1974; Masheva (forthcoming).

165 Zimmermann 2021, Chapter 4.

166 Neunsinger 2018; for the latter (i.e., exceptions), see Cobble 2021; Boris, Hoehtker, and Zimmermann 2018, 94–120.

also unpaid work or sexual violence), and the social movements and spaces in which it took place (for example, neighborhoods or state-backed women's organizations). An integrative approach also means making women's labour activism a core part of the history of social movements rather than a side issue that deviates from "standard" activism dominated by men or women's activism dominated by middle-class women. To this end, many chapters in this volume mobilize new historical sources, while others offer innovative re-readings of previously known and analyzed materials. Taken as a whole, these contributions draw our attention to the full spectrum of women's work and labour activism from the second half of the nineteenth century until after the Cold War. They expand what we know about women's labour struggles within and beyond the region, invite new questions, and contribute to the ongoing and steadily growing scholarly debate.

We argue that, conceptually speaking, an integrative approach is necessary to capture the full variety of women's labour struggles. First, this is because women's labour struggles always involved class and gender issues simultaneously—and often addressed other elements of socio-cultural difference and conflict. It is for this reason that we find women's labour struggles in highly diverse social movement contexts. To capture this variety, we need historical writing that does not prioritize class over gender or gender over class issues but integrates the study of various social movement contexts. Second, as this volume amply demonstrates, women's labour struggles often involved gendered modes of action. To have a comprehensive view of these modes of action, we need to overcome masculinist modes of defining the political and expand the very concept of what constitutes activism in the first place.

We can develop such an integrative conceptualization of women's labour struggles with the help of three distinct levels of scholarly engagement. First, we must reconsider, i.e., integrate, sources that might not seem directly related to or relevant for women's labour activism at first glance. When we mentioned that different types of sources from very diverse contexts could be creatively used to discuss women's labour activism to our colleagues who attended the "Women's Labour Activism in Eastern Europe and Beyond" conference, this was an invitation to "re-work" some of the sources available (despite the closure of many archives and libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic) so as to bring about new insights and enable us to "think together" different contexts to integrate them into a cohesive whole. Second, we need to look at "all" kinds of women's social action that sought to improve the position of working women and their communities and advance women's social and economic rights, with a view to establish how they—and how many—engaged with issues related to gender and work in a way that was hitherto underestimated and understudied

in different scholarly traditions. Third, we need to make use of and, again, “think together” (as discussed in the first section of this chapter) a large variety of literatures. We should engage with such scholarship even when some of it has reproduced rather than questioned both the historical divides between different social movements and masculinist concepts of what constitutes the political. The contributions to this volume as well as our own research indeed demonstrate that women pursued their struggles not only in a wide variety of social movement organizations but also in various non-formalized settings. To achieve their goals, they expanded the inherited spaces and repertoires of action available to them. For instance, they acted as self-organized entrepreneurs or public commentators calling for action on working women's issues (Bratishcheva and Fedeles-Czeferner in this volume) or attached new social meanings to seemingly trivial types of activities (Hachmeister in this volume). They also engaged with the state from within, through organizations that were—more or less closely—aligned with states (Jarska and Láníková in this volume) and through international authorities.

When conceptualizing women's labour struggles in an integrative manner, it is important to bear in mind the risks of indiscriminately considering “everything” as constitutive of women's labour activism. It is also important to be aware of the dangers of uncritically approaching the various trends in and types of women's labour struggles. In this volume, we deliberately aimed to bring together contributions that would analyze women's labour struggles in all their historical diversity, to go beyond modes of analysis that have left this diversity under-researched—much like a woman scientist aiming to draw new conclusions would diffract light through a prism to analyze the beam's full spectrum. The contributions, while united by a large common theme, are heterogenous in terms of why and how they discuss the various threads and instances of women's (and sometimes men's) engagement with women's work as a form of struggle or activism. We are convinced that open-ended collaborative efforts resulting in a volume such as this one are an important means of moving the field forward and promoting its integration and visibility in the larger realms of labour and gender history.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ We have also generated, and continue to develop, the database ZARAH DB, a collection of research data and reproductions of original documents on the broad theme of *Women's Labour Activism in Eastern Europe and Internationally from the Age of Empires to the 1990s*, <https://zarah-ceu.org/zarah-db/>; have invited colleagues to contribute to our ZARAH Guest Blog Series, <https://zarah-ceu.org/blog/>; and aim to support and publicize research on the broad theme discussed in this volume in a variety of other ways.

At the same time, we believe that through collaboration and engagement with each other's work, we can promote a *new socio-political history* of women's labour activism that examines women's labour struggles through a critical lens. Collaboration helps overcome three inclinations that are often found in the early phases of establishing new fields in social movement history, namely empiricism (without a sophisticated interpretation), limited contextualization, and a celebratory tendency. This is not to say that the historiography of women's labour struggles can or should simply bypass the recuperative effort. Without significantly expanding our empirical knowledge, we cannot move the field forward. We also acknowledge that the sympathies of women's and gender historians toward the agendas and actions of women in the past have been an important driving force behind the recuperative effort of restoring both history to women—by denaturalizing women's inferior status in society—and women to history—by considering women as agents in the making of history.¹⁶⁸

Still, we argue that the historiographical and conceptual discussions on women's struggles for the improvement of women's social and economic rights and the position of working women and their communities in the region studied in this volume should move beyond recuperative efforts. We consider this to be particularly necessary for the debate on "women's agency" in the state-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as the communist-aligned international organizations that flourished during the period. In this debate, those working within the "feminist revisionist paradigm" have associated scholarship indebted to the "totalitarian" model with "ongoing Cold War paradigms," pointing to the undeniable fact that anticommunism has played an important role in devaluing anything women did under state socialism.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, some of the scholarship inclined toward the "totalitarian" or, to put it more bluntly, the anticommunist model has denied women the status of being historical agents in state-socialist contexts unless they confronted and directly challenged the state-socialist system. This anticommunist model, in fact, reverberated with how mainstream historical scholarship treated women and their activism before women's and gender historians restored women to history. It also suffered from biases—similar to those in old-school imperial and colonial histories—which have resulted in ignoring, marginalizing, and/or

168 On these two key moves, see Kelly-Gadol 1976.

169 De Haan 2010. A good introduction to the debate in English is the "Forum" published in 2016 with contributions by Francisca de Haan (as editor), Chiara Bonfiglioli, Krassimira Daskalova, Alexandra Ghiț, Kristen Ghodsee, Magdalena Grabowska, Jasmina Lukić and Raluca Maria Popa, see De Haan 2016.

devaluing the actions and perspectives of non-Western populations, deeming them irrelevant for the course of history. In return, some of the “feminist revisionist” scholarship aimed at restoring “agency” to women living and acting in state-socialist contexts, has, not without reason, been characterized as celebratory.¹⁷⁰ From the perspective of a critical history of women's labour activism, both the “totalitarian” and much of the “feminist revisionist” scholarship, we argue, can indeed be characterized as lacking full historical contextualization and a fully reflective analysis of women's activism in these state-socialist contexts and communist-aligned movement organizations more generally. The take of some of the “feminist revisionist” scholarship on women's action and agency under state socialism can be characterized as having much in common with the classical recuperative women's history and with scholarship glorifying social movement history.

It is against the combined backgrounds outlined above that we advocate for an integrative and critical approach to the history of women's labour activism. This approach helps put into perspective the debate on women's activism under state socialism and calls for a more contextualized and critical stance. With this approach, we join an emergent cluster of scholarship that goes beyond the “feminist revisionist” tendency by fully including the study of political problem zones and the historical shortcomings of these activisms.¹⁷¹ We argue, in other words, that while insisting on the historical relevance of women's activism in state-socialist contexts (just as the “feminist revisionist” scholarship does), we should think in a conceptually and historically specific manner about these activisms. We must conceive of this activism as an important dimension of an enlarged, global constellation of activisms and as integral to the global history of women's activism—all currents of which should be analyzed critically. This can be done, we suggest, by developing our analyses with reference to three key sets of historical circumstances.

First, we need to build our analysis on a clear delineation of the type of state (political system) a specific type of women's labour activism developed in and with whom and what much of this activism interacted, whether in closer or looser alignment. When building such an analysis, it is important to not lose sight of the state as part of a global typology of political systems. The state-socialist political system differed markedly from the (idealized) political constitution of the Western world. In state socialism, civic social movements were largely absent while the state claimed to embody the interests of the working

170 In her blurb on the back of Kristen Ghodsee's *Second World, Second Sex* (2019), historian Maria Bucur writes that Ghodsee “makes visible and celebrates” these actors.

171 Recent examples in English include Donert 2022; Todorova 2021; Valiavicharska 2021.

class, including the interests of working women. This stood in contradistinction to non-socialist states, at least in the earlier decades of the Cold War era. At the same time, despite its claim to represent women's quest for emancipation, the state-socialist state was also a deeply masculinist one, and it sustained and reproduced the masculinist traditions of the labour movement. It also commanded limited material resources, many of which it reserved for economic catch-up policies within the global capitalist-dominated economy.

Put in the larger, global perspective, when determining the structural conditions of women's power to act, it is important to consider the place that different types of states, including classical bourgeois, social/democratic, colonial, and state-socialist, allotted to the vision and practice of emancipation for women belonging to lower social stratas.¹⁷² The state-socialist regime—the far-reaching qualifications and limitations just mentioned notwithstanding—was, we claim, relatively more open to and keen on considering working women's issues. This was an important factor that contributed to the willingness of women who identified with working women's problems to closely engage with this state. The fact that the state-socialist period can be regarded as “the climax of the Eastern European state” further undergirded this tendency. In the second half of the twentieth century, women not only in Eastern Europe but also in countries like Turkey and Austria regarded the expansive state as a privileged site through which to pursue their agendas of socio-economic improvement for women. Thus, research on women's social and political action to improve the lot of working women in the Eastern European state-socialist context should consider these historically specific conditions of women's activism when developing a critical analysis of its character in terms of both its involvement with a non-democratic political system and its agendas, achievements, and failures.

Second, and moving on to the study of specific cases of such activisms, we need to explore more thoroughly the determining factors and political dynamics that shaped women's (labour) activism within the expansive and layered state-socialist political system. How exactly were women functionaries, women experts and professionals, women trade unionists at every level (from the shop floor to the highest reaches of government), and ordinary working women—women so variably positioned in a diverse network of political actors—involved in formal and informal processes of decision making? Which rights did national women's committees, factory-based shop stewards, and many other groups of activists, functionaries, and institutions involved with

¹⁷² Zimmermann 2021, 681–686.

the politics of women's work acquire, and to what extent were they able to exercise these rights? What material resources did they command, and what was the scope of possibilities available to them when using these material resources? How did women aim to exploit the ever-shifting opportunities to advance agendas they regarded as their own within the variable and changing policy frameworks afforded by the state-socialist regimes? How did they explain and react when they failed to achieve certain goals?

In other words, we need to engage in a deep analysis of the formal and informal power relations in which women actors were involved and to which they contributed and establish the strategies they employed, the variations in their room to maneuver, their modes of activism, and the effectiveness of their actions. Effectiveness was impacted not only by power relations and the status of an actor(s) alone but also by the compatibility of women actors' views and policy templates with those of other actors in any given policy field, including the leading players in the state-socialist political regime. Scholars who focus on the history of expert and professional women in state-socialist countries, as Natalia Jarska and Marie Láníková do in their chapters in this volume, have begun to address these and related questions through an exploration of women's activism rooted in a critical gendered re-reading of governmentality in state-socialist societies.¹⁷³ A lot can be learned also from a transregional perspective, when we examine simultaneously and from a comparative perspective the history of women's labour activism in political systems that, in certain ways, resembled state-socialist systems in terms of political economy and/or governmentality. This is one reason we embrace the corporatist and, from the 1970s onward, social democratic Austrian state as well as the Kemalist and developmentalist Turkish state when aspiring to deepen our understanding of women's labour activism.

Finally, we need to investigate and situate within a global framework the state-socialist model of women's emancipation, the related debates in which women during the state-socialist period engaged, and the variegated policy templates—which were linked to the state-socialist model—for which they advocated. Discussing West-East interactions, Dorothy Sue Cobble has noted that labour feminists from both sides of the Iron Curtain entertained similar women's (labour) rights agendas in substance and variety, debate

173 Large-scale projects advancing this research agenda are now underway, including "ExpertTurn: Expertise in Authoritarian Societies. Human Sciences in the Socialist Countries of East-Central Europe," n.d., <https://expertturn.fss.muni.cz/team>, with team members Šárka Caitlín Rábová, Annina Gagyiova, Natalia Jarska, Eva Kicková, and José Luis Aguilar López-Barajas.

notwithstanding.¹⁷⁴ Women labour functionaries and activists under state socialism regarded women's paid work as a liberatory force, paid close attention to women's involvement in and their attachment to care work, and went a long way to ease the tension between women's paid and unpaid labour—although without fundamentally challenging the unequal relationship between both or critically evaluating the latter's function in modern economic development. Their plans for a more women-friendly politics of women's work formed part of the long-term global trend of increasing women's involvement in paid employment (and, in the Global South, in paid work as such). Rather than interrogating the overarching meaning and implications of this trend, many women engaged in the state-socialist politics of women's work aimed to counterbalance its negative effects on large groups of working women. With the critical perspective we advocate, it is possible to move beyond the emphasis on—in global comparison—the “advanced” agenda of the state-socialist politics of women's work and contextualize it within the history of women's work in the twentieth century as it played out on both sides of the Iron Curtain and in the Global South. This can contribute to the evaluation of larger trends in the history of women's work; discussions about the embeddedness of the state-socialist politics of women's work in these larger trends; and the establishment of a more reflective view on the contributions as well as limitations of women labour functionaries and activists within this larger context. In turn, approaching women's labour struggles in the (state-)socialist context in such a manner can contribute to the advancement of integrative and critical approaches to the history of women's labour struggles in other parts of and across the world.

174 Dorothy Sue Cobble speaks explicitly about the “shared women's rights agenda” of labour feminists on both sides of the Iron Curtain in the 1950s. See Cobble 2021, 326. While focusing on “democratic equality” feminists, i.e., those not on the state-socialist side of the global history of women's activisms, the book provides a tremendously rich foundation for a global history of the politics of “full rights feminists” in the twentieth century, with important information on the role of state-socialist actors in shaping the relevant East-West encounters. See also Zimmermann 2023c.

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