Name: Dr Nora Natchkova & Dr Céline Schoeni
Supervisor: Prof. Sandrine Kott

Institution: European Institute, University of Geneva, Switzerland

Swiss National Science Foundation
Research Project No 100011_134630/1 (01.08.2011–31.07.2014)

Time frame: 1948–1978

Abstract: Work, being the main structure on which Western societies are built, constitutes the core of the problem in understanding why inequalities between men and women have been built and maintained for so long on an international scale. While considering the ILO (International Labour Organisation) as providing one of the major frameworks for regulating women’s labour around the world in the 20th century, this research questions some specific examples in history dealing with the sexual division of labour. It also suggests new understanding in the field of gender history of labour and international organisations. The post-war economic prosperity (“Les Trente Glorieuses”) and the beginning of the Cold War (1948–1978) are analysed according to a didactic approach organised in three levels: national and international actions by women; sexual division in international labour; redefinition of national and international political power struggles (understood as a conflicting or pacified relationship between people for the creation of a social norm).

Thanks to a rich collection of documents that have never been used in research so far (from the IBL, UNO, World Bank, Rockefeller Foundation, National Archives of Argentina and records from feminine/feminist organizations), our study aims, first of all, to better understand the ILO’s normative politics towards women’s labour. In addition, this will enable us to apply this new empirical information about women’s employment to an analysis both of international feminine/feminist networks and groups of people active within the ILO (governments, employers and trade unionist organisations) in the redefinition of sexual division of labour. Finally, thanks to a cross
analysis between normative and operational actions in the field of technical assistance in Argentina – our case study – this research will help us confront discourse and practice, qualitative and quantitative tools in the sphere of international and gendered labour politics.

Three axes of research have been defined in order to understand in a new way the complexity of the challenges related to women’s labour at that time.

a) This research will show how ILO politics regarding women’s labour are intrinsically related to the new international context. Each project, convention and reference elaborated by the IBL Women and Children Labour Service (Service du travail des femmes et des enfants du BIT) will be examined.

b) The chosen approach is based on an analysis of the connections between the main political actors invested in the above-mentioned politics: governments’ representatives; employers and trade unionist organisations of member countries; expert’s reports of women labour; national and international feminine/feminist associations.

c) The specific role attributed to women in the development of technical assistance will be analysed through our case-study of Argentina. This will help us understand how challenges following the ILO new prerogatives towards women labour are applied in practical terms on an international scale.

This research is based on two complementary methodological options. First of all, considering that Swiss academic research is undeniably involved in the discussions about international relations, this study aims at making space for some specific historical perspective, which is often too nationally centred. This can be done thanks to our transnational approach to history. Secondly, the prosopography of key actresses (defined as a study of mutual and diverging characteristics of women involved in a common sphere of activity at given time and space) will allow us to fill the gaps of women’s international history in order to draw up a significant profile of these women as social groups within both the national and the international scenes.
Publications:


Contact: Nora.Natchkova@unige.ch; Celine.Schoeni@unige.ch

Disclaimer: This is a project description, which is made available on the Century Project website for information and comments. It is not for citation without the permission of the author(s). The responsibility for opinions expressed in the document remains with its author(s), and its inclusion on the website does not constitute an endorsement of its content by the ILO.