

Women and gender relations in the labour force. The case of mining, 1500-2000

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Call for Papers

Mining has been long-time associated with male labour and male spheres, a perspective reinforced by the ideology of the breadwinner family, by the ideologies of masculinity, by the laws after the II WW and by the Eurocentric lens. Nevertheless, women have been present in the mines working and deploying a variety of activities key to understand the life of the mining centres. This statement means that we are interested in re-think the complex labour division in the mines, the gender division of labour and the role of women in them.

In this panel we propose 3 axis of analysis 1. Women as Producers and Miners, 2. Economic and social role of women in the mining centres and 3. Women and the reproduction of the labour force.

1. Women as producers and miners

Mining is not only the underground exploitation: there is a complex process in the labour division that frequently has been under looked. When this complex process is taking into account, the visibility of women appears more clearly. Thus, women were also “miners” and mines were not exclusively men’s work. Some questions that could be relevant are:

- Which production niches were occupied by women and children? What kind of wages were they receiving and how they were established?
- Do women had a precarious work in comparison to men in the mines? This would mean that the precariat of labour is not a new phenomenon rooted in the new forms of production, but an old gendered practice.
- Do women occupy an “informal” sector in the mining while men occupy a “formal sector”?
- Do women were in charge of the artisanal, small scale (ASM) and self-employed activities in the mines?
- Do women in some regions of the world were “allowed to work” while, at the same time, other women were relocated to their roles as housewives?

2. Economic and social role of women in the mining centres

Minerals are located in very different settings, sometimes in very isolated places and very deep in the ground. In any case, even when the exploitation was not regulated or when the companies tried to build company towns as enclaves and just spaces of work, the places of mining become frequently important economic centres, villages and cities. Women had a key role in this process. When they were not involved in the mining exploitation, women assured the daily life of these mining centres. They could be “miner’s wives” but also women that found spaces of earning their lives or new opportunities to live otherwise. Some questions that could be relevant are:

- What kind of setting are we dealing with and how was established or not, the space of work and the space of living?
- What was the population and the division of labour in the mining centres?
- Do women were in charge of the sales of daily supplies in the local markets?
- Do women were in charge of the daily feeding as worker’s wives?

- Do women were in charge of taverns and other spaces of non-work and leisure?

3. Women and the reproduction of labour force in the mines

The gradual shaping of the labour market in the mines began at a very early stage, together with the first operations. As the operation in the mining activities began to raise a flow of internal and external migration created together with the free or unfree labour of local populations. The men and women workers in the mines had to a greater or lesser extent ties with the agricultural economy and agricultural households, depending upon how systematic the enterprises were, the level of the day-wages and the distance between their place of origin and the mine. The main questions are: How women contribute to the reproduction of labour force, how gender structure labour markets in the mines in long term historical perspective? How male and female migration for working in the mines is connected with family strategies and household patterns?

Abstracts (max. 500 words) are to be sent **by 30 June 2015** and **full papers by 15 November 2015** to: Rossana Barragán (rba@iisg.nl) and Leda Papastefanaki (papastefanaki@ath.forthnet.gr, lpapast@uoi.gr). The organizers have the intention to publish a selection of papers after the conference.