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Gender history and labour history

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Current research

Gender history and labour history: intersections

Xavier VIGNA and Michelle ZANCARINI-FOURNEL

This survey of current research takes as its inspiration and point of departure two historians, Michelle Perrot and Joan Scott, who admirably represent the coming together of gender history and labour history, and who combined these fields very early.[1] Both authors had begun by research into workers' mobilization, Michelle Perrot with her comprehensive study of strikes, Joan Scott with her case-study of a male trade, the glass-makers of Carmaux. In Number 3 of *Clio FGH*, entitled *Métiers, corporations syndicalismes* [= Trades, guilds and unionism], published in 1996, Laura Frader's article on current research focused on the link between women, gender and the labour movement from the perspective of class formation, relations between public and private, and social protection. In this issue, rather than pursue those lines of enquiry, we have chosen to emphasize some of the fresh perspectives for interaction between gender history and labour history that have opened up in the fifteen years or so since that publication, and to outline some new fields of research.

[1] Perrot 1974 and 1998 (the latter is a collection of previous articles, see esp. the second part); Scott 1974, 1986 and 1991.

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Women workers: a complicated identification

It may be useful to begin by recalling how complicated it has been to identify "women workers" [the French term is *ouvrières*, which often has the connotation of factory or industrial work], since statistical studies regularly come up against the fluid definition of what counts as women's work, and thus, as labour historians of both sexes well know, women's employment is regularly underestimated.[2] Women historians, particularly in Spain and Italy, but also in Latin America,[3] have uncovered massive examples of under-declaration and/or under-recording, often explained by the coexistence of domestic and/or agricultural labour, performed alongside the practice of a trade or (proto)-industrial outworking within the home. While this phenomenon is quite well attested in rural areas, it is also true of cities in the process of industrialization, such as late nineteenth-century Milan: because of the often discontinuous nature of women's work on the one hand, and on the other the existence of sub-contracting and piecework, especially in the garment, toy-making or jewellery sectors, the women workers of Milan were considered as a marginal or reserve army of labour, and often registered as *casalinghe* (housewives) rather than as employed workers.[4] This under-registration has prompted historians to revisit national census material by cross-checking with local sources. Large-scale research of this kind, such as has been carried out in Spain for Catalonia, the Basque region, Castille and Galicia, has led to significant re-evaluations, substantially bolstering estimates of women's overall economic activity, and by the same token that of women in industrial work. In Catalonia, where textile firms, especially cotton mills, recruited women workers on a massive scale, historical surveys have shown that in the 1920s in particular, women's employment did not decline after marriage, or after the births of their first children, but only when their children were old enough to bring in a wage themselves. Such data throws into question the entire economic and

2 MacIvor 2001: 178; see also Maruani & Meron 2012.

3 See the article by Mirta Zaida Lobato in this issue.

4 Ortaggi Cammorosano 1999: 141-147.

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social reality of the "male breadwinner" model.[5] The phenomenon of under-registration has persisted into our own times. In the garment trade in Istanbul for example, women are often employed in family workshops or at home in the manufacture of sweatshirts and T-shirts, without always earning a money wage which could be recorded in an accounting system. Because of the substantial size of this informal sector, such practices have led to a large-scale underestimate of the reality of women's industrial work, not only in Istanbul but throughout Turkey.[6]

It is already possible, without waiting for further statistics, to draw on published research to underline both the large proportion of women in the overall labour force, and the complexity of their itineraries. In the nineteenth century, the size of the textile and garment labour force made it a significant industry in France (28.6% in 1911, the high point)[7] while in the first census in Italy in 1861, it accounted for a *majority* of all industrial workers (58.6%).[8] Similarly, in countries where industrialization came later, and bearing in mind the deficiencies of statistics, women industrial workers, all sectors combined, played a significant role. Thus in inter-war Russia, they increased from 613,000 to 2,627,000 by 1935, in state-run industries, i.e. 38.3% of the labour force.[9] In Shanghai between the wars, the size of the women's labour force corresponded to the dominance of textiles within the economy, but also to employers' preference for recruiting women, who were considered more docile and less likely to rebel.[10] As a consequence, wars, in particular the First World War, while by no means marking women's first appearance in the industrial workforce, did encourage their redeployment, thereby promoting greater competition between male and female workers.[11]

5 Borderias 2012 and 2013.
6 Dedeoglu 2008: esp. 45-50.
7 Marchand & Thélot 1997: 233-237; Schweitzer 2002.
8 Ortaggi Cammorosano 1999: 112-113.
9 Ilic 1999: 40, 183-185.
10 Roux 1993: 18, 35.
11 Thébaud 1992; Curli 1998; Omnès 2004.

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Secondly, women's working careers are characterized by complexity and discontinuity.[12] In Paris between the wars, a certain proportion of women alternated between factory work and the service sector, leaving off work, temporarily or permanently, when they married and/or had children. 40% of these women factory workers had no children, and were often those who had the longest careers.[13] The circumstances of employment in certain industrial centres, in some cases strongly marked by cultural traditions, might offer different types of opportunity to women, and thus account for considerable geographical variations. In the Northumberland coalfield in Northern England for example, at the same period, there was less work for women, whereas the rise of the automobile industry in Coventry created work for them in textiles (car upholstery etc.), and the same was true in Blackburn, Lancashire.[14] Thus it was possible for these women to take pride in their work, and not simply in the fact of being employed, as a current of French labour sociology in the late 1970s tended to argue. In the Rhineland and Westphalia for example, women textile workers, whose numbers rose there between 1882 and 1925, developed both pride in their work and attachment to their activity, as evidenced by their frequent change of employer (*Stellenwechsel*), in which the reformer Alfred Weber saw an indication of professional interest and identity (*Berufsinteresse* and *Berufsidentität*) with a view to promotion in their jobs, an attitude also reflected in the strikes, often unofficial, in which they took part.[15]

It is therefore permissible to suggest a few specificities about women's industrial work as compared with their male equivalents, despite the wide range in time-scales and geographical distribution.[16] In the first place, women factory workers seem to be characterized by their *comparative youth*, since they started work young, and often had discontinuous careers, as can be seen from studies of Italy in the

12 Devrieze & Vanhaute 2001.
13 Omnès 1997.
14 Todd 2005b.
15 Canning 2002: esp. 219-237.
16 Vigna 2012.

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nineteenth century, and again during the economic miracle;[17] of Britain between the wars;[18] or of migrant Chinese workers (*dagongmei*) in the 1990s;[19] (although a counter-example can be found in the longer working careers of women factory workers in France after 1968).[20] The youth of women workers is also explained by the phenomenon of *denial* about their work: it is often considered temporary, as in the case of today's Indonesian women workers in shoe manufacturing,[21] or regarded as "pin money" by men who are still locked into the male breadwinner model. (In that respect, the paradigm is the crass remark by Alcide de Gasperi, the Italian Christian Democrat leader, that the wages of women factory workers served primarily to help them buy silk stockings.)[22] In the years after the Second World War, the new countries of the socialist bloc encouraged women's work for ideological reasons and because of a shortage of male labour. But in East Germany, women were confined to lower status sectors, notable for poor working conditions (chemicals in particular) and did not receive equal pay,[23] whereas in Poland, the partial de-Stalinization after 1956 was a pretext for the regime to expel women from a certain number of jobs (as miners underground for example) and to reassert a patriarchal regime in factories.[24] Thirdly, the situation of women factory workers seems to be characterized by particularly strict *forms of supervision*. This specificity may be linked to accommodation: there are some similarities between the convent-factories in Lyon in the late nineteenth-century and the dormitories that operated in Taiwan in the 1970s,[25] or in Chinese coastal towns twenty years later.[26] Women also seem to have been subject to a particularly harsh form of discipline, sometimes actually accompanied by sexual harassment and/or violence: witness the case of

17 Ortaggo Cammorosano 1999: 125-131.
18 Todd 2005a.
19 Pun 2012.
20 Gallot 2101.
21 Warouw 2008.
22 Di Gianantonio 2006: 208.
23 Kott 2001: 247-250.
24 Fidelis 2010: 203 ff.
25 Kung 1994: 69-75.
26 Pun 2009 and 2012, reviewed in the French edition of this number.

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the foreman at Siemens in Milan in the 1950s, who struck a woman worker who had complained about the speed of the assembly line.[27] As a result, women factory workers found themselves being *looked down on*: apart from their hypothetically greater docility, they have regularly have been accused of loose sexual morality, whether in Europe or in sub-Saharan Africa today.[28] Certain sectors, tobacco for example, were the focus of particular prejudice, whereas the reality is far more complex.[29] But with this topic, we are approaching gender relations within the factory and questions of masculinity.

In 1998, Françoise Thébaud noted in a historiographical survey that women's history had moved from "the labour history approach to women's work" to "the gender of specific trades".[30] Whether applied to men or women workers, the concept of gender was employed in two French doctoral dissertations in 1988, one on the women hosiery workers of Troyes and another on men and women in trimming manufacture (*passementerie*) in Saint-Étienne.[31] These detailed studies demonstrated how skills were constructed according to gender: deconstructing the idea that skills were "natural", they analysed supposed, real or evaluated skills, to show, job by job, sector by sector, how skills were acquired and labelled.

The significance of training, skills and classifications

This point of view was explored by Laura Lee Downs in her book *Manufacturing Inequality*,[32] which compares the historical sexual division of labour in two different contexts, France and Britain, during the Great War. She underlines the convergence between the rationalization of the work process [Taylorization] and the discourse of sex difference in the manufacturing order – an unequal and hierarchized order, justified by the so-called "natural" differences

27 Di Gianantonio 2006: 217.

28 Coquery-Vidrovitch 2013: 204-215.

29 Nemec 2006: 170; Cartier & Retière 2008.

30 Thébaud 1998 and 2007 [1998]; Rogers 2004.

31 Both dissertations have been published in abridged form: Chenut 2005 [2010]; Dubesset & Zancarini-Fournel 1993.

32 Downs 1995 [2002].

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between men and women. In France, as in Britain, this system of organizing the work process and the definition of skills lasted beyond the end of the war. So-called feminine qualities – deftness, precision, regularity – were the attributes attached to certain mechanized and assembly-line jobs handled by women, and not entrusted to men, even if they were unskilled.

In her 1966 study of women industrial workers, the sociologist Madeleine Guilbert had stressed that so-called "feminine qualities" were exploited by employers, but without any market value being attached to them. The issue of skills has been studied more recently, with reference to the classifications established during the collective bargaining process of the Great War, and the further negotiations during the Popular Front and after the Liberation.[33] Catherine Omnès has also looked at the question of female skills, though not always agreeing with Laura Lee Downs. In 1917, she argues, the French state defended female skills by creating the special category of *ouvrière professionnelle,* ranked somewhere between unskilled/semi-skilled and skilled work. In the Parisian metalworking trades until about 1925, a certain number of women were classed as *ouvrières professionnelles*. This did not apply in the provinces, where no women were thus classified. In June 1936, the classifications inside companies, agreed by talks between representatives of unions and employers, contributed to the institutionalization of "gendered" tasks, classified as "skilled" for men but often as semi-skilled or unskilled for women, who were labelled *manœuvres/ ouvrières spécialisées*.

A second series of questions centres on the importance of technical training or apprenticeships for girls and boys. Linked to skills acquisition, the question of training, as investigated by Downs, was different in the two countries. While in Britain, training centres for women workers were opened in 1915, thus allowing them to reach at least the level of semi-skill, the French state and employers preferred training women on the job, which confined them to assembly-line production, and which made skill and technological knowhow masculine characteristics. The earliest kind of training offered to girls was in sewing, in workshops supervised by nuns, for

33 Machu 2011 and see her article in this issue.

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example the schools run by the Béates in the Haute-Loire, specializing in lacemaking.[34] The first publicly-provided apprenticeships, closely related to this definition of the "natural" qualities of girls entering industrial employment, were created by the Astier law of 1919,[35] and led to the CAP [*certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* = certificate of professional competence] in the garment-making industry.[36] In 1965, these apprenticeships still represented 25% of the kinds of occupational training available to girls, despite the decline of the clothing sector. This shows how important training and qualifications were in employment and collective bargaining, and enables us to explore the link between training, jobs, and the labour market. Jean Castet's study of "the gender of paper qualifications" in the case of Lyon between the wars, demonstrates however the scale and variety of male and female skills,. It was concern for the importance of training that led Marguerite Thibert, after her retirement [from the International Labour Office] in 1947 to become a roving ambassador promoting skills training for girls in Asian and South American countries, and later in the newly independent African states. "A figure of international history", she travelled the world to make ILO norms widely known.[37]

Working-class masculinities

In the same way that labour history helped pioneer women's history, it was labour history too which, in the 1990s, provided the paradigm for exploring ideas about masculinity. In France, an innovative thesis in sociology devoted to the home life of male industrial workers suggested that masculinity was in crisis, being seriously undermined by the experience of unemployment, which threatened the factory worker both in the workplace and at home.[38] The theme of a crisis of masculinity has persisted, notably as a means of explaining the behaviour of young workers when they find themselves competing

34 Dubesset & Zancarini-Fournel 1993, part I.

35 Castets 2003: 143-153; Brucy, Maillard & Moreau 2013.

36 Divert 2013: 121-133.

37 Thébaud 2012.

38 Schwartz 1990.

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with young women, in motor manufacture for instance,[39] leading to forms of aggressive misogyny,[40] but also to a reluctance to settle into marriage, and complicated relations with older generations.[41]

Among historians, following a collective publication about the United States edited by Ava Baron,[42] while the question of masculinities has also been considered in relation to wars or economic depression, studies have tended to deconstruct them using four principal approaches. The historicization of masculinity could be approached through analysis of its representations, as Eric Hobsbawm suggested in a pioneering article. In this respect, the standard iconography of the labour movement, concentrating on the muscular proletarian hero, later intensified under Stalinism by the promotion of Stakhanovism, provided an early set of examples.[43] Since then, analysis of working class virility has been taken further, leading to some overall syntheses, on twentieth-century France for example, often drawing heavily on works of autobiography.[44] Workers' own accounts of their lives give an insight into masculine experience, private and public, about which sources from the state or from within the labour movement are usually extremely discreet.

This deconstruction has also been applied to branches of industry where an all-male workforce, or almost so, predominated: dockers,[45] seamen,[46] the building trade,[47] etc. As might be suspected, concentrating on the most homogenous and masculinized kinds of labour has led to a stress on a macho form of masculinity,[48] characterized by the ability to carry out exhausting types of labour[49] and by the importance of drink, but also marked by practices on the

39 Beaud & Pialoux 2002.
40 Eckert 2006: 149-157.
41 Rénahy 2005.
42 Baron 1991.
43 Hobsbawm 1984.
44 Pillon 2001 and 2012.
45 Pigenet 2002.
46 Burton 1999.
47 Hayes 2002.
48 See the article by Xavier Vigna in this issue.
49 Johnston & MacIvor 2004.

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edge of legality, where the dissociation between workplace and home was greatest, and gendered behaviour the most stereotypical, as in inter-war Liverpool.[50] And the male industrial workforce remained the standard norm for a virility which remains to be explored, including forms of male sociability.[51]

But these kinds of masculinity can coexist with less aggressive versions, in particular among political activists, in a certain labour aristocracy, or in sectors where there is a mixed workforce.[52] Moreover, reconfigurations of working-class gender norms, as in 1950s Britain, characterized by changed sexual habits, more frequent mixing of the sexes in the workplace, and the decline of the male breadwinner model, were imperceptibly modifying working-class masculinities, despite the survival of certain misogynist reflexes.[53] In Japan, the masculine ideal shaped by the post-war social compromise, the foundations of which were that men should have jobs for life, receive pay by seniority, and be compulsorily enrolled in the workplace union, while the norm for women was staying at home as "good wives and mothers", was challenged after 1994 by state policies encouraging participation by both men and women.[54]

At the same time, ethnicized representations of particular groups may sometimes block such developments by reinforcing a "virilist" cliché of the working-class world, or on the contrary help to precipitate them. They may certainly lead to distinctions within the working class. In inter-war Canada for instance, Chinese immigrants, who were blocked by miners from entering the mining sector, moved progressively into previously all-women trades such as the shoe, tobacco and garment industry, making it seem as if the men were feminized, or having in some sense diminished masculinity.[55] And there is room for research into the way such working-class

50 Ayers 1999.

51 Baron 2006. For an account midway between reportage and fiction describing a factory in Rome in the 1980s, see Pennachi 2013: 70-74.

52 Pigenet 2011.

53 Brooke 2001 and 2006. See also Andrea San Giovanni's article on Italian masculinity in this issue.

54 Thomann 2005.

55 Frager & Patrias 2005: 44.

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masculinities are constructed. In this context, an all-male sociability may correspond to employers' desire to develop an esprit de corps or factory solidarity, strengthened by a social policy coloured by paternalism.[56] It is more often the case though, as in Hamilton in Canada, that masculinity conforming to traditional gender norms is constructed starting in school, and furthered by street culture, long before young men enter the world of work, then prolonged by either playing or spectating sports.[57] Such approaches may derive, explicitly or not, from the pioneering work of Paul Willis, who studied the socialization of children in England in the 1970s, and found that working-class schoolboys were already constructing oppositional forms of behaviour corresponding to working-class culture, notably by scorning intellectual effort and placing greater store on standing up to their teachers.[58]

The gender of working-class protest

Protest – in the form of labour disputes and demonstrations – is a classic theme in labour studies. Women's role in protest movements has continued to be a subject of research. On one hand, following Michelle Perrot's pioneering and exhaustive thesis,[59] women's participation in industrial strikes has been stressed within sectors where women were in the majority, such as textiles in 1890s Britain,[60] or in various strike waves in France: during and after the First World War, in the Paris region,[61] in the hosiery factories of Troyes,[62] and again in the years after 1968.[63] On the other hand, women have also been present in protest movements about the cost of living,[64] and as

56 Fine 1993.

57 Heron 2006.

58 Willis 1977 [2011]. Although the book was not translated into French until much later, its hypotheses were outlined for French readers in an article in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* in 1978.

59 Perrot 1974: 318-330.

60 Blewett 2006.

61 Robert 1995: 128-137.

62 Chenut 2005: 259-274

63 Vigna 2007: 116-122.

64 Stovall 2012.

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the support system for male strikers, whether in street demonstrations, or by organizing food supplies, as they did in Wales during the great miners' strike of 1926.[65] These forms of female mobilization constitute a double challenge, both to the factory order and to the patriarchal order, as can be seen in the case of women tobacco workers in Lebanon in the later postwar period.[66] By mobilizing, women workers were contesting their economic subjection and acting as subjects in their own right, even if they had not yet acquired their formal civil and political rights. At the same time, they were breaking out of their confinement within the domestic sphere and their supposed docility, and challenging gendered norms, being prepared to resort to violence. One example is the 1890s strike wave in Australia and New Zealand.[67] The hypothesis that strikes may be gendered prompts us to envisage the specificities of a repertoire of actions (the gender of strikers' songs for example) but also to examine the nature of strikers' demands. A particularly suggestive example is the case of women workers in Zyrardow in Poland in 1951, in the middle of the Stalinist years: these women mobilized and went on strike to obtain better food and supplies of coal. They thus conformed to a certain gendered image of women as providers for their household, which was one way of limiting repression. But while not hesitating to manhandle strike-breakers, they also held meetings in the factory cloakrooms, a specifically feminine space which the police could not enter.[68] Similarly, the trajectory of the old demand of the labour movement "equal pay for equal work", which was still the watchword in a strike by women workers in the National Armaments Factory in Herstal, Belgium as late as 1966, needs to be probed.[69] But we should also, in the interests of symmetry, put the masculinity of strikes on the agenda for social science research, so as to deconstruct what might

65 Bruley 2012: esp. 49-52, reviewed in the French edition of this number of *Clio*.

66 They took part in three strikes in particular, in 1946, 1963 and 1965. See Abisaab 2010, reviewed in the French edition of this number of *Clio*.

67 Scates 1997.

68 Fidelis 2010: 82-98.

69 Coenen 1991.

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seem obvious about labour disputes: the use of violence, forms of occupation, the organization of support systems and canteens, the handling of budgets, etc.

A transdisciplinary history

Dialogues between sociologists and historians

French historiography on women's work has been characterized by a constant series of exchanges with sociology. Since the studies carried out by Marguerite Thibert for the ILO during the interwar years,[70] many of the theoretical approaches to the history of women workers have been influenced by sociological research, whether Madeleine Guilbert's studies in the 1960s on women's feminine attributes and skills,[71] Christine Delphy's work in the 1970s on the value of housework,[72] or more recently publications by Margaret Maruani, the editor of the journal *Travail, genre et société*, and thus a distinction has been established between work and employment.[73] Danièle Kergoat, in a pioneering study in 1978, raised the question *Ouvriers = Ouvrières* [i.e. can the same analysis be applied to male and female workers?] By taking a stance contradictory to the prevailing labour sociology in France, which was centred on the archetypal male factory worker in a industrial firm, she was, with Delphy, one of the first sociologists in France to articulate the theoretical relationship between class and gender, and to consider the condition of women workers alongside that of men.[74]

Beyond these general remarks, a few recent elements have helped promote fresh thinking. Miriam Glucksmann's book *Women on the Line*, written in 1978, published in 1982 under a pseudonym, and re-edited since, gave an account of her own experience in

70 Thébaud 2012.

71 Guilbert & Isambert-Jamati 1956; Guilbert 1966.

72 Delphy 1970, 1978 and 1998.

73 Maruani & Nicole-Drancourt 1989; Maruani 1998, 2000, and 2001: 43-56.

74 Kergoat 1978, reprinted 2012: reviewed in the French edition of this number of *Clio*.

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autobiographical form.[75] This was a survey carried out by an intellectual, who went to work (for political reasons) in a car factory, where piecework and the authoritarian and macho style of discipline enforced there provoked strikes and disputes.[76] The author was deeply impressed by the physical exhaustion resulting from assembly-line work and the continuous rhythm of production on an eight-hour shift, doing repetitive tasks in a hot and noisy atmosphere. Her participant-observer position made this sociologist more sensitive than others to the physical conditions of factory labour and its impact on the body. Moreover the women workers earned very low wages (about one-third less than the men) for work considered relatively unskilled and without any prospect of promotion or advancement of any kind. As a result, unmarried women were virtually obliged to take on extra work in evenings or weekends.[77] Nigel Cole's film *Made in Dagenham* depicted other women workers in this London suburb and in particular the women behind the successful strike of sewing machinists at the Ford factory, who fought for better conditions and a more equal wage packet. The re-publication of *Women on the Line* in 2009 and the distribution of *Made in Dagenham* in 2010 were symbolic both of the presence of the past in the present, and of a renewed interest in women's industrial struggles in Britain, the equivalent in French cinema[78] being the 1996 film on a similar theme by Hervé Le Roux entitled *Reprise* ["Back to Work"].

In their comments on the studies carried out for INSEE and DARES in France in 1997, two sociologists have reminded us of some of the basic data about women's factory work:[79] while women represent about 20% of industrial workers, almost half of them (43%) are working on an assembly line. The majority of women (60%) are not considered to be skilled, whereas three-quarters of male workers are. And over 100,000 women workers surveyed were forbidden to

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75 See the article by Pochic 2013.

76 Glucksmann 1997.

77 See also the case cited by Pochic 2013: the survey of Indian women workers in a knitwear factory in Leicester, Westwood 1984.

78 See Nicolas Hatzfeld's article in this number of *Clio*.

79 Gollac & Volkoff 2002. [INSEE is the French National Institute of Statistics, and DARES the section which produces labour and employment statistics.]

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talk at work, which is in complete contradiction to the legislation introduced in 1982 (the Auroux laws). This figure indicates the constraints on industrial work and the difficulty women workers have had to assert their rights. Moreover, the repetitive and strictly controlled movements required of them, the very prototype of alienating work, makes them vulnerable, as trade unionists long ago pointed out, to many muscular and joint problems, which have been investigated by researchers.[80] Male workers, when faced with painful or risky tasks, generally try to overcome their fear. And resistance to pain and fear is accorded high value in the social construction of virility: encouraging gender stereotypes, men do not want to be "softies like girls". The bringing together of contemporary surveys, notably though participant observers, and the long-term approach has long been a characteristic of Nicolas Hatzfeld's work: witness his outstanding study covering fifty years history of the bodywork department of the Peugeot-Sochaux automobile factory,[81] an example of the positive effects of inter-disciplinarity.

Contributions by ethnologists and anthropologists

Ethnologists and anthropologists have also invited us to explore "the world of blue-collar work", by tackling a subject which had not until recently attracted much attention from social scientists. Studying the clothes people wear at work was one way of seeing how people view themselves socially in terms of class and gender.

Working clothes

Two ethnologist/anthropologists have studied working clothes. Anne Montjaret took as her subject the distinctive French worker's overalls, the *bleu de travail*,[82] while Dominique Le Tirant looked at the clothes worn by women workers at the pithead in the mining industry.[83] For men, a kind of "uniform" had appeared with industrialization: blue canvas overalls (known as *bleu(s) de travail*) usually worn over their other clothes, in the form of dungarees, overalls, or jacket and

80 Hatzfeld 2009; Bruno *et al.* 2011.

81 Hatzfeld 2002.

82 Monjaret 2012a.

83 Le Tirant 2001 and 2011.

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trousers. This definition, which looks simple, is complicated by the historicization of the subject. In the first half of the nineteenth century, both peasants and industrial workers in France wore a loose overgarment (*blouse*) made of coarse cotton or linen, grey or black, and the term was used to characterize the group of men who wore it as manual workers. Adolphe Lafont of Lyon is credited with the invention in the late nineteenth century of special blue overalls adapted to each occupation. The *bleu de travail* helped protect the workers' body from dirt. The wooden clogs which appear on early photographs of factories, an indication of the workers' peasant origins, were replaced in the twentieth century by special footwear, for safety reasons. Blue was the colour worn all week, on the street or in work, sometimes replaced by a dark suit on Sundays. Then gradually, blue became the specific colour of factory clothing, and was left in the cloakroom on the way out. The *bleu de travail* came to represent the condition of industrial workers in general, and was worn as a badge of pride, combined with the cloth cap visible in all workers' demonstrations from the 1930s to the 1960s. Until the 1960s, the *bleu du travail* went on being a symbol of working-class virility. It was then gradually abandoned in favour of denim (also blue, but different quality fabric).[84] Women too began wearing denim for heavy or dirty work, and it then became a fashion fabric as well. While firms were abandoning the word "worker" or "workman", and speaking instead of operatives or "production agents", they might also replace blue with other colours, red and green.[85] "Green which was supposed to encourage our love of work […] had above all to draw a line under the past, wiping blue out of our working-class memory", wrote Marcel Durand in his autobiographical account of his years working at Peugeot.[86] This symbolic clothing, which reflected a specifically masculine culture, is rejected these days by younger workers. But in the imagery surrounding the worker, the *bleu*

84 On denim as a fabric for working clothes, see Friedmann 1987.

85 See the review of the book by Fulvia D'Aloisio on Fiat in the French edition of this number of *Clio*.

86 Durand 2006: 348.

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de travail remains, according to Anne Monjaret, "the symbol par excellence of the working man".[87]

The ethnologist Dominique Le Tirant collected evidence about women who had worked at the pithead from the 1930s to the 1960s. They were often the wives and daughters of miners, and occupied jobs considered inferior, low-paid and undervalued. They were described in pejorative terms, indicating their low status and poor reputation. Their working garments were designed to protect them from coal dust: usually old clothes, with a kerchief or scarf over their hair, or a turban which kept off the dust but was also a symbol of femininity, and heavy shoes, or in summer, espadrilles. Trousers started to be worn in the 1930s, above all to protect the women from harassment by their male workmates.

As the wives of miners, they also had to take care of the household and maintain their husband's *bleu de travail*, which would be washed and ironed at regular intervals, a task checked by the neighbours' watchful eyes. In these communities, where gender norms were particularly strictly observed, unpaid housework by married women was the background and condition for their husbands being able to work.

Statues of working women[88]

Anne Monjaret, in another article with an evocative title: *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en pierre* ["In the shade of girls made of stone: working women in Paris parks": the title echoes the second volume of Proust's novel], went in search of three statues representing the *midinettes* – Parisian seamstresses.[89] The ethnologist enquired into the history of these statues and the representations of gender which they embodied over time. The three statues, erected in working-class districts of Paris, illustrated the construction of a bourgeois feminine ideal, fixed in stone. The myth was gradually transformed as society changed: workers in fashion houses are no longer the way they were, especially since their numbers have fallen considerably. And if some

87 Monjaret 2012a: 61.

88 Monjaret 2012b.

89 Zylberberg-Hocquart 2002.

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of them still carry an image of Parisian chic, it is not so much through their own femininity as because of the work they do and their celebrated skills, displayed at haute couture fashion shows. "In the shadow of girls of stone" weaves a socio-cultural history of the women who worked in the fashion trade, as shaped by the bourgeois imagination of the Belle Époque, of which only a few discreet traces remain as examples of "heritage". These anthropological studies have had an influence on historians, who are rediscovering, by applying it to new subjects on the borderline between the individual and the collective (such as "the works canteen", the subject of some planned conferences and a journal issue), the kind of historical anthropology which was fashionable in the 1980s. In these exchanges between the different social sciences, we can see being developed gradually if not a shared epistemology, at least some shared fields of research, indicating the possibility of working together. The editorial of the March 2013 number of *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, entitled "Usines, ouvriers, militants, intellectuels" [Factories, workers, activists, intellectuals] invited its readers to consider the historical specificities of the subject, such as the "privileged moments" of May-June 1968 in France, or the trade union movement in Brazil which brought Lula to power.[90] This issue also stressed that the working class world has changed less than some people have imagined: despite its undeniable numerical decline, the same working conditions persist. Alongside de-industrialization, change has come through the raising of the school-leaving age and longer training periods, and the reduced capacity of this social group to be represented by the various legitimating authorities (parties, unions, the media). It is also among sociologists that studies are being undertaken on the role of women in immigration and migration, French historians having lagged behind somewhat in this respect.[91]

Gender and migration: a global history

In 2004, Rebecca Rogers remarked that French historians were reluctant to use the ethnic categories which would make it possible to

[90] Lomba & Mischi 2013.

[91] Guerry 2009.

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write "a European history more alert to its imperial dimension".[92] Ten years later, we can perhaps give a slightly more positive report, with the emergence of some studies of gender and migration within a global history perspective.[93]

Whereas the history of women migrants has been studied for over thirty years across the Atlantic, French-language research on women's immigration, through the study of the struggles of migrant women (of which there is often no record)[94] has tended to be explored by feminists, rather than emerging from colonial or post-colonial history. The Belgian journal *Sextant* was one of the earliest to look at migration within Europe.[95] In a special number, Monika Mattes considered the immigrant women workers in West Germany between 1955 and 1973: they made up almost a third of all foreign workers (*Gastarbeiter*) in the FGR at the time. But received ideas linger on, and it is still often claimed that male immigrants came to work in factories in France in the 1970s, while their wives only rejoined them under regulations permitting family reconstitution.[96] This is to fly in the face of the history of immigration, of women's work, and of the respective roles of male and female factory workers. Nevertheless domestic issues and prostitution remain the most studied aspects of women's migration, whether in the late nineteenth century or today. The coming of the consumer society in France in the 1950s and 1960s resulted however in the creation of jobs in industry for women workers, largely from other European countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal and Yugoslavia).[97] But most existing descriptions of "immigrant workers" in French industry tend to concentrate on the world of the male worker. The predominant focus on the automobile industry – the Renault factory in Billancourt in south-west Paris for example[98] – has tended to obscure other sectors

92 Crowston 1998; Rogers 2004: 118-119.

93 Douki & Minard 2007.

94 Lesselier 2006.

95 Morelli & Gubin 2004.

96 Schweitzer 2008.

97 Chaib 2008. See Hervé Le Roux's film *Reprise*, 1996, which describes the arrival of these migrant women workers at the Wonder battery factory in Saint-Ouen in the northern suburbs of Paris.

98 Pitti 2006 and 2007.

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which were not major industrial bastions. This is shown for instance in Sylviane Rosière's study of a metal-working factory in the Arve valley,[99] and in the firms of more modest dimensions where women, particularly immigrant women, were most likely to be found: the food, textile, electronic or chemical industries, where their wide geographical dispersal in smaller units has rendered these jobs far less visible. In the 1970s, within these sectors, the nationalities of the workers were changing, as African and Turkish women arrived on the labour market. But overall industrial employment declined during the same years, and the censuses of the late twentieth century record the predominance of the service sector in the employment of immigrant women.

Women migrants are today indeed more numerous among the "new" workers in the tertiary sector, for instance in cleaning firms, as exemplified by the itinerary of a leading union official in Sud-Nettoyage, Faty Mayant, who is a Senegalese mother of a family.[100] Most of the leaders of protests against the precarious pay in this sector are young migrants of both sexes.[101] The presence of women migrants in these movements indicates the critical nature of the social question in France today, which differs strongly from traditional industrial strike movements, in that it does not appear either as re-run of the class struggle, or as the (utopian) perspective of an international workers movement facing the globalization of trade and migration.[102]

But research into the categories of ethnicity or racialization (even more than on gender) remains very under-developed in French historiography. As early as 2002, Nancy Green invited us to "rethink migration", providing an example with her comparative history of the garment trade in Paris and New York, which employed Jewish workers of both sexes.[103] While we have certainly seen more recent works on gender and migration,[104] there was a great deal of leeway to make up, so the move has yet to make a large impact on labour

99 Rosière 2010.

100 Puech 2005.

101 Béroud 2011.

102 Van der Linden 2012.

103 Green 1998 and 2002.

104 Lillo & Rygiel 2007; Rygiel & Lilo 2007; Martini & Rygiel 2009; Guerry 2013.

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history. We hope that this number of *Clio, Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, will be able to make a contribution in this respect.

Translated by Siân REYNOLDS

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