

**Proposal for a Special Issue on  
“Intersectional approaches to coercion and marginalization in labour”**

*Extended deadline: 1 March 2021*

Guest editors: Natalia Jarska (Warsaw, Poland) and Hanne Østhus (Bonn, Germany).

**Call for papers**

A recent intervention from labour history has pointed out how “the persistence and transformation of coercion across world empires, gender regimes, and historical eras” run counter to the classic narratives of a development from unfree to free labour within the emergence of a modern or modernized world. Instead, the authors propose a radically different approach wherein research “links the stories of work and production with those of violence, expropriation, marginalization, and criminalization.”<sup>1</sup> This special issue addresses this intervention from the particular approach of intersectionality, and aims to demonstrate how the intersectional approach offers unique insights into this topic. We will achieve this through explorations of how markers such as gender, age, legal status, class, race, religion or sexual orientation shape and are shaped by systems and practices of coercion, bondage and marginalization and systems and practices of labour and production.

Feminist and gender studies scholars’ exploration of how gendered relations and configurations of power shaped past and present societies is an important starting point when investigating bondage, coercion, marginalization and violence. Moreover, scholars within this field have re-evaluated the concept of work. The concept no longer excludes work that happened in the household or reproductive labour. Moreover, this re-evaluation undermined the binary between productive and unproductive work posited by economists since the eighteenth century, and it challenged divisions between public and private spheres, where what happened in private was seen as outside the realms of economy and therefore not considered work. Moreover, the gendered perspective has been crucial in disbanding the idea of an evolution from bonded to free wage labour beginning with the Industrial Revolution.

This assessment has been reinforced by recent developments within global labour history, which have also demonstrated that there was and is no unambiguous shift from unfree to free labour that followed a scheme(s) of “modernization”. Such research has emphasized how “free” and “unfree” forms of labour relations co-exist and even re-enforce each other.<sup>2</sup> Scholars within global labour history have sought to bring together various forms of bondage such as serfdom, slavery, convict labour and/or tributary labour, but also to underscore the importance of context and peculiarities of time and space. Research on bonded and coerced labour has therefore revealed and sought out connections and links between regions and areas and attempted to overcome Eurocentric ideas of labour. It has, however, rarely used insights from intersectionality or feminist studies in its analysis.<sup>3</sup> This Special Issue seeks to remedy this. It combines insights from global labour history with

---

<sup>1</sup> Christian G. De Vito, Juliane Schiel and Matthias van Rossum, “From Bondage to Precariousness? New perspectives on Labor and Social History”, *Journal of Social History* (2020): 2.

<sup>2</sup> Alessandro Stanziani, *Labor on the Fringes of Empire. Voice, Exit and the Law* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> This does not apply to much research on slavery.

feminist studies and gender history, arguing that connecting these different historiographies will bring new insights. It also contends that the best way to do so is through the intersectional approach.

Kimberle Crenshaw sought to “demarginalize the intersection of race and sex” in her famous 1988-article wherein she argued that Black women had been “theoretically erased” in a number of sex and race discrimination cases in US courts. Crenshaw instead “center[ed]” them in the analysis, thereby producing new knowledge on topics such as marginalization and discrimination.<sup>4</sup> Since, intersectionality has been used by numerous scholars within various disciplines, but with the mutual belief that “intersectionality foregrounds the notion that no social category operates in isolation from other social categories”.<sup>5</sup> That belief is shared in this Special Issue. Furthermore, the emphasis on relations and connections invoked by an intersectional approach is particularly useful when connecting labour relations of the past and present and with stories of marginalisation and expropriation.

There are diverse approaches to the study of intersectionality. Ann Phoenix suggests that the most fruitful way is to combine structuralist with cultural approach as “[w]hile different social divisions operate in different ways, it is possible to conceptualise their intersection in relation to the power relations, distribution of resources and agency they allow as well as how they are socially constructed.”<sup>6</sup> We find Phoenix’ suggestion helpful. However, the Special Issue does not seek to impose pre-defined conceptual categories on the paper authors.<sup>7</sup> Instead, we argue that the construction of such categories can in itself be a way to gain knowledge of how the particular stories of work and production are linked with those of coercion and marginalisation.

We welcome contributions from various periods and geographical areas, as well as papers addressing different form of labour and production. We believe that this broad approach to the study of intersectionality and coerced labour will uncover new and interesting patterns, practices and experiences of coercion. Therefore, this Special Issue will help incorporate intersectionality into the major discussion on labour and coercion. We are open to diverse methodological perspectives on intersectionality, and to both empirical and theoretical papers. In order to overcome the entrapping of the historical framework of a transition from unfree to free labour or from pre-capitalist to capitalist societies, we seek research on both historical and contemporary societies.

The papers can employ a variety of social markers and categories, for example, but not limited to, sex, gender, age, legal status, class, race, religion and/or sexual orientation. The papers should explicitly make clear which categories are chosen and why. We argue that making the theoretical underpinnings explicit will lead to a better understanding of how coercion and marginalisation has operated across time and space.

---

<sup>4</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, *University of Chicago Legal Forum* I, (1989): 139-167.

<sup>5</sup> Ann Phoenix, “Interrogating Intersectionality: Productive ways of theorizing multiple positioning”, *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning*, 15(2–3): 21–30.

<sup>6</sup> Phoenix, “Interrogating Intersectionality”.

<sup>7</sup> Nina Lykke, *Feminist Studies. A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (Routledge 2010): 24-25.

The Special Issue is a result of the international COST Action “Worlds of Related Coercions in Work” (WORCK), funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme of the European Union, specifically Working Group 4 “Intersecting Marginalities”. WORCK unites over 150 researchers from various countries interested in exploring ways that acts of bigotry and persecution based on different social markers interrelate to create a system of asymmetrical dependencies and discriminations. It analyses systemic injustice, social inequalities and coercive mechanisms at work in new ways, with a focus on the interrelations between power structures and individual agency. However, we also encourage people who are not members of WORCK to contribute to the Special Issue.

If you are interested in contributing, please send a title and a up to 500-word abstract to Natalia Jarska (njarska@ihpan.edu.pl) or Hanne Østhus (hosthus@uni-bonn.de) by **1 March 2021**.