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Where was 1821? Space and Territory in the Greek Revolution



Review of Leda Papastefanaki and Nikos Potamianos, eds., *Labour History in the Semi-Periphery: Southern Europe, 19th-20th Centuries*

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Leda Papastefanaki and Nikos Potamianos, eds.

*Labour History in the Semi-Periphery:  
Southern Europe, 19th–20th Centuries*

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Comparative and international perspectives of labour history have been thriving in the recent decades. However, historical work on labour relations in Southern Europe from a comparative standpoint is, to a large extent, still lacking. The studies presented in this book place historical perspectives of labour within the Southern European framework and are divided in four major issues: small enterprises and small ownership, formal and informal labour, industrial relations, and labour on the sea and in the shipyards in the Mediterranean. The investigation of these issues points to the question as to whether the focus on Southern Europe indicates a particular configuration in labour relations that opens a research path for further exploration. Another implicit question is whether the concept of semiperiphery points to economic and labour patterns that constitute structures.

The introduction by Leda Papastefanaki and Nikos Potamianos clarifies the use of two central concepts that bind the four parts: Southern Europe and semiperiphery. The geographical focus on the study on Southern Europe coincides with a critique of its political ramifications. Area studies have been criticised for the hierarchical divisions involved in the creation of geographical entities that are usually homogenised on the basis of real or imagined cultural, economic or political characteristics. Southern Europe as a category is politically charged since it emerged after the Cold War to indicate the separation of Greece from the Balkans – another much-debated area. Cultural superiority of the European countries in the Mediterranean has also shaped the concept as well as perceptions of “backwardness” as compared to the “North”. Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy are usually handled together in respect to political transition from junta to democracy. In terms of economic and labour structures, the study strengthens findings and points to certain configurations that differ markedly from those in Northern Europe, such as a Southern European welfare regime or the weak role of trade unions. The concept of semiperiphery has a longer history of theoretical elaboration that relates to unequal exchanges in world systems. The Southern European region was incorporated in the analysis through the division of core and periphery of capitalist world systems. Without subscribing to a

notion of a European canon, the editors use the concept of semiperiphery in order to facilitate an account that acknowledges the inequalities, hierarchies and power relations that constitute both the divisions of labour and historiographical trends associated with global history.

The first part of the book deals with the pivotal role of small enterprises and the artisan sector in Southern Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The studies cover a range of countries, provinces and cities, such as Lisbon, Italy and Greece. Whether the artisan and small enterprise sector constituted an economic and social pattern of Southern Europe is an underlying preoccupation in the approaches of the essays. Furthermore, the attribution of a major economic and social role with cultural connotations to small enterprise by the various political institutions is assessed and confirmed in the case of postwar Italy.

The case of the western Peloponnese indicates the creation of a variety of forms of big land property, a finding opposed to a hitherto largely prevalent view that the land reform brought about by the national land distribution laws reinforced small property. Stavroula Verrarou shows both the “endemic” character of big property and the extensive use of hired labour by landowners motivated by the high profits promised by the expansion of viticulture during the nineteenth century. Mountainous communities constituted the main man pool for the labour-consuming plains.

The demand for a day of weekly rest in shops created a clash between shopkeepers and shop assistants in Lisbon at the beginning of the twentieth century, as Daniel Alves’ study shows. Shopkeepers used the vocabulary of “freedom” in order to combat the interference of legislation that regulated labour relations and developed paternalistic discourses and practices to defend their opposition. When the state attempted to introduce regulations, shopkeepers managed to achieve several exemptions to the laws. This led to the cancelling of the benefits that aimed at alleviating the hard condition of labour for shop assistants. The introduction of the half-day rest was indicative of the strength of a European tradition of managing labour relations that rested on paternalism and the ideology of progress according to which a man of humble origin could succeed through work and persistence. Paternalism created the image of the “benevolent paterfamilias” who prepares his workers to achieve an independent status through obedience and hard work.

Anna Pina Paladini’s essay focuses on the craft sector and approaches the transformations in the legal definition, representation and welfare policies between the Fascist regime and the first republican governments. The study explores the boundaries between the craft and the industrial sector as well as its social and economic role in relation to party politics with a historical perspective informed by a political science approach. The Fascist regime set up a relevant public body, the National Organization of Small Industries, which became the National Organisation of Artisans and Small Industries (ENAPI), in 1925

while in 1926 the Fascist Federation of Artisans was the first national body to represent the interests of artisans. These organisations became corporative instruments to serve the regime's interests and policies and centred on combatting unemployment and not on substantive and systematic regulations for the welfare of artisans and small entrepreneurs. The postwar period signalled a new phase for the autonomy of the craft sector in terms of the creation of a plurality of associations and of promoting a legal definition of the artisan firms which led to the 1926 law. Laws in the postwar period enabled the entry of artisans into the democratic regime after the autonomy of their associations was safeguarded. The postwar regime attached an economic and social role to the artisan and small enterprise sectors promoting them as contributors to stability and social solidarity.

Vincent Gouzi's essay employs a dual statistical and cultural perspective in order to pursue the interesting question of industrial structures in twentieth-century Greece, in terms of the size and legal forms of companies as well as of employment composition and characteristics. The features of Greek enterprises and employment are investigated through a statistical analysis and placed within a comparative European perspective. Greece has one of the highest number of enterprises in relation to its active population and in relation to its inhabitants. As concerns employment, unpaid family labour in the total working population far exceeds the European equivalent. This trend has continued up to the twentieth-first century. Gender differentiation in employment is also prevalent, with the overrepresentation of women in unpaid family and wage labour. Gender division of labour in economic sectors is also high in comparison to the rest of the EU. Industry relies on very small enterprises and family enterprises prevail over stock companies and limited partnerships. The cultural factors that sustain, according to the author, the prevalence of the small enterprise in Greece are based on the "Mediterranean culture of honour". The author needs to provide more concrete and systematic evidence for the supportive culture of family enterprise in Greece and incorporate the criticism of the Mediterranean culture of honour by anthropologists and historians for three decades now.

The second part, which deals with formal and informal labour, starts with a view of the artisan and manufacture sector in central Balkans during the nineteenth century. Using a rich pool of sources, from state records to municipal and personal archival collections to memoirs and traveller accounts, Svetla Ianeva convincingly illustrates that there is no easy historical account of the various levels of institutional control of guild and nonguild labour and production. These levels depended on the economic and institutional context, the scale and the character of the production. For example, certain guilds developed market-oriented strategies and also became agents for the standardisation of production. Besides, guild members were involved in protoindustrial manufacturing and became merchants-entrepreneurs. Thus, guilds in the region demonstrated adaptability, vitality and flexibility to the changing economic conditions while manufacturing beyond guilds was an important element of the economy.

Nikos Potamianos meticulously studies the unresearched topic of street vendors,

exploring their conditions and transformation of their trade and the class identities. As a largely invisible economic activity, itinerant and street trading pose many difficulties in tracing the features of this type of activity which are placed in the informal sector of the economy. Although the rise of settled retailing was a factor for marginalising itinerant trade, there was a substantial number of licensed street vendors in Athens in 1920. There were tensions between shopkeepers and itinerant traders, yet “stationary” street vendors developed a sense of belonging to the retailers’ community while itinerant vendors claimed a professional status as opposed to occasional vendors. Using Erik Olin Wright’s notion of “contradictory locations within class relations”, the essay shows that during the interwar period there were enough “professionals” to control certain associations defending their right to be granted licenses in the most privileged locations. As concerns their class identities, Potamianos demonstrates the “development of forms of identification with the retailing community” (170).

Maria Papathanassiou’s essay assesses in a systematic way the importance of industrial child labour for the Austrian economy, working-class families and children themselves. Although labour legislation restricted children’s employment in the industrial sector and children’s contribution to the industrial economy was rather minimal since the 1880s, child labour remained crucial in certain sectors, such as glassworks and the brickmaking industry, and in home industry. The study, based on a variety of sources, surveys, labour inspectorate reports, the press, and autobiographical accounts, demonstrates that in late imperial and interwar Austria in rural and in urban settings, child labour was crucial for the family economy, as children’s earnings were part of a collective household economy.

Part 3 deals with industrial relations. This field offers promising research, innovative methodologies and interpretations that pave the way to more systematic comparative work. Concepts such as “welfare capitalism,” “paternalism” and “arbitration” are meticulously investigated with new material and sources. Milan Balaban’s examination of the Bata Company in Borovo (Croatia) offers a good example of how to investigate a company’s employment strategies. In 1920, Bata constructed Borovo as an ideal city with an age and gender division of labour, residential and recreational zones. The paternalistic practices employed by the company aimed at creating an ideal worker with certain characteristics: loyal, sober, a breadwinner, healthy and not organised in unions. By training skilled workers with stable family lives, Bata’s ultimate goal was to reduce losses in productivity and inefficiencies.

Italian labour relations are investigated through a variety of approaches, concepts, themes and sources. A very interesting case is offered by Anna Pellegrino’s study, which focuses on labour arbitration as a form of regulating and settling individual labour conflicts in Florence and Milan during the early twentieth century. This focus sheds light on

neglected cultural issues by using different types of sources and helps us to understand the ways in which authority was exercised in relationships between employers and workers. The cases of disputes presented in tribunals of *probiviri* (arbitrators) affirm the high degree of autonomy enjoyed by Florentine artisanal culture. The judgements of labour arbitrators mitigated, to some extent, the almost absolute and unquestioned authority of masters. In Milan, the tribunal protected the worker only from the most obvious and unjustified abuses of power by entrepreneurs, contributing in this way to the acceptance of power relationships and new limits of authority.

Paolo Raspadori offers a historical quantitative approach on welfare capitalism in Italy in the 1920s, 1930s and 1950s, meaning the “social and economic structures, outside of contractual and legal obligations, that companies make available for their employers’ wellbeing” (278). In the 1920s, factory owners started to show an interest, however patchy, in welfare facilities as a tool for industrial relations in order to keep unrest and staff turnover low and productivity high. In the following decade, welfare facilities were more often found in large firms and their establishment was influenced by the corporate welfare promoted by the authoritarian political regime. During the 1950s, the investment in welfare facilities compensated for the sacrifices demanded of the workforce to increase productivity and to accept manpower cuts. The essay convincingly demonstrates that the different patterns of industrial relations and the welfare state were linked in Italy at that time.

The paradigm of the Falck steelworks in Sesto San Giovanni offers a more detailed investigation of paternalistic practices, welfare and leisure measures. Andrea Umberto Gritti’s reconstruction of Falck’s corporate organisational strategy is sustained by the argument that the social policies of firms have to be examined in relation to economic objectives as well as the impact of conjunctures and political contingencies. The legacy of interwar corporatism was maintained and transformed by elaborations of American organisational culture with an emphasis on corporate communication that was transferred to Italy throughout the 1950s. Its major achievement was the establishment of the centrality of employers in the factory and the establishment of a corporate identity, marginalising political actors such as trade unions and the state. “Corporate privatism” remained strong until the late 1950s.

Kostas Paloukis’ study starts with an interesting and innovative hypothesis: that the social and cultural characteristics of a working-class neighbourhood underpinned the development of an important nucleus of resistance against the Axis occupation. In 1925, Asia Minor refugees created the settlement on the western fringes of the city, whose population increased rapidly with the influx of internal migrants. A poverty-stricken neighbourhood with high unemployment impeded the integration of its subproletarian population into the working class. Armed violence confined to domestic and private issues was an ordinary element of popular culture. The establishment of a Communist Party organisation in 1930 and its influence in the largest refugee union, which endorsed a new combative model of collective action, reinforced the expansion of a more universal and

class-based culture of solidarity and political action. The establishment of the Lanaras textile factory accelerated the proletarianisation of the neighbourhood in the 1930s. New forms of working-class consciousness and self-awareness emerged. Forms of proletarian protest and two major strikes during the occupation were rooted in existing social and cultural characteristics of the settlement.

The last part deals with shipyards and maritime labour in the Mediterranean. The history of labour in a Palermo shipyard is of particular importance for the illustration of the complexity of labour relations and the structure of the economy in the European semiperiphery. Aurora Iannello's essay looks at the Palermo shipyards, controlled by the Genoese Piaggio family, from an integrated perspective that covers the location of the shipyard in the wider context of the development of the shipbuilding industry as well as working conditions and trade union activity of the Palermo workers, the *cantieristi*, between 1945 and 1970. The shipyard was the largest privately owned shipbuilding and repair centre in Italy and one of the largest plants in southern Italy. Workers in the shipyard received lower wages than workers in shipyards in the north due to the lack of competition among employers for skilled workers in the south. They worked in an insecure and unhealthy environment and were subjected to very long shifts. The role of mafia in the recruitment process surpassed its usual illegal profit scope and extended to the management of labour. The Palermo shipyard had a highly skilled, unionised and flexible workforce which was divided into permanent workers and workers hired by subcontractors with differential treatment and wages. Institutional factors such as the division of the country into 13 areas with different minimum wages (wage cages) resulted in the disadvantaged position of the Palermo workers. Besides, skilled workers in the Palermo shipyard were registered and paid as unskilled. Although the shipyard introduced the piece-rate system, which led to a massive increase in productivity, workers did not receive piecework allowance, saving the extra labour cost for the company. Although trade union activity was important, it did not result in the overcoming of disparities among workers and in the improvement of wages and working conditions.

The little-studied profession of *maquinista* (ship engineer) in the Spanish merchant marine, which was born with the introduction of steam ships, over the course of a century (1877–1980), reflects, according to Enric Garcia-Domingo, the hierarchies of labour as well as of historiography. As opposed to the prominent position and recognition of ship masters and deck officers, the profession of *maquinista* was perceived as a technical career without a superior academic qualification. Even when they achieved full recognition as an equivalent to bachelor, they did not enjoy the same social recognition as captains and deck officers.

The methodical investigation of each essay and the variety of topics, concepts and approaches presented in the book offer an integrated and systematic examination of labour



relations in Southern Europe. The paternalistic practices in small enterprises, arbitration and forms of “welfare capitalism” employed by big companies emerge as industrial relations tools to control workers and for the management of employees. The artisan and small enterprise sector constituted an economic and social pattern of Southern Europe. Yet, a variety of forms of economic structures, state regulations, types of formal and informal labour and strategies of management dispel the image of Southern Europe as an entity with homogeneous economic characteristics. The studies form a stable and valuable ground for future comparative approaches that integrate a European and even global perspective in labour relations.