

**The MOONLIGHTING Project  
Workshop**

**Hidden Economies:  
Modern Women Between  
Precarity and Illegality**

Ljubljana, 21. 1. 2026

Gosposka dvorana ZM GIAM ZRC SAZU,

Gosposka ulica 16, Ljubljana

*The north-eastern Adriatic region, where the Germanic, Romance, and Slavic worlds converge, offers a privileged vantage point for studying women's cross-border economic activities and the relationship between countrysides and urban centres. Historically, the region has also been the site of many illicit forms of paid work, arising from the volatility of political borders and state sovereignties, as well as from the deep political and economic divide between the Western capitalist and Eastern socialist worlds during the Cold War.*



**ZRC SAZU**



9.15-9.30: **Welcome speeches**

9.30-11.00: **Integrated Economies**

Chair: Urška Strle

Marta Verginella: *From Stonemason to Innkeeper: An Example of Invisible Female Work*

Cora Benetti & Raffaella Sarti: *Sharecropper Women's Pluri-activity and Sharecropping Contracts' Clauses: The Case of 19th Century Urbino*

Nataša Rogelja Caf & Špela Ledinek Lozej: *Walking across Borders in the N Adriatic: The Case of Women Traders Called Šavrinkas*

Coffee break

11.15-12.45: **Smuggling for Survival**

Chair: Marta Verginella

Vida Rožac Darovec: *Smuggling and Survival: The Role of Istrian Women in the Early 20th Century*

Sabine Schmitner-Laszakovits: *Women as Economic Actors in the Black Market*

Brina Kotar: *Across Slovenian Villages: Hidden Labour and Everyday Survival*

Lunch break

14.00-15.30: **Prostitution and Other Vices**

Chair: Teresa Bertilotti

Dagmar Wernitznig: *"Roxanne [...] you don't have to sell your body to the night:" Prostitution and Sex Trade during the Longue Durée in Austria – An Explorative Approach*

Nora Maria Lehner: *Hidden in Plain Sight – Women's Sexual Labour in Post-War Vienna (1945 to mid-1970s)*

Urška Strle: *Rations, Risk, and Rebellion: The Female Faces of Illicit Trade between 1917 and 1920*

Coffee break

15.45-17.15: **Moonlighting and Art**

Chair: Dagmar Wernitznig

Teresa Bertilotti: *Black Market in Italian Novels and Autobiographical Writings*

Sára Bagdi: *Emotional Labor and Gender Inequalities in Avant-Garde Networking*

Giulia Brunello: *Women Behind the Scenes of Nineteenth-Century Italian Theatre*

17.30-18.00 **Concluding remarks** (Raffaella Sarti)

## **Marta Verginella: From Stonemason to Innkeeper: An Example of Invisible Female Work**

The paper examines a case of historiographically overlooked forms of labour, focusing on the work of women quarry workers as well as on a wide range of income-generating activities. It demonstrates how, after 1947, the border between Italy and Yugoslavia functioned both as an obstacle and as a catalyst for invisible and illegal labour. The analysis highlights the ways in which the state—regardless of whether operating within a capitalist or socialist system—tolerated spaces of non-institutionalised and illegal work.

The primary source for this study consists of the memoirs of Marija – also known as Marička or Marica – Krt Filipič, who was born in 1928 into a poor peasant family in the Karst region. The family sustained itself through the cultivation of its own land as well as that of others. However, the land under family ownership was insufficient to ensure survival, which compelled family members to engage, alongside agricultural labour, in additional forms of work, most notably the peddling and resale of agricultural produce and goods. Marica herself engaged in various forms of petty trade and resale, which, as she wrote, enabled the “development and progress” of her family.

Marica understood her aspiration to improve her material conditions and achieve a better life as legitimate, while perceiving state interference as the result of envy and malice. This outlook may be interpreted as an extension of a traditional understanding of labour that exploits the interstitial spaces

between systems, as described by Giovanni Levi in *The Immaterial Heritage*. For Marica, the absence of a particular good from the market represented both a challenge to obtain it and an opportunity for enrichment. This traditional conception of labour – entailing a shift from peasant trade to profit-oriented enterprise – did not unfold solely within the framework of a traditional economy.

**Marta Verginella** is a Full Professor of History of the 19th Century and Theory of History at the University of Ljubljana. She directed the ERC project *Post-war transitions in gendered perspective: the case of the North-Eastern Adriatic region* between 2017-2023. In 2019, she was a visiting fellow at the Remarque Institute (NYU). Her research interests include border and national studies, gender studies, transnational history and the political use of history in the North Adriatic area. Important monographs: *Il confine degli altri* (Donzelli, 2008); *La guerra di Bruno* (Donzelli, 2015); *Terre e lasciti. Pratiche testamentarie nel contado triestino fra Otto e Novecento* (Beit, 2016); *Donne e confini* (Manifesto libri, 2021), *Ženske in meje* (FF, 2022). She edited and coauthored: *Slovenka. Il primo giornale femminile slovena (1897-1902)* (Vita Activa, 2019); *Women, Nationalism, and Social Networks in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848-1918* (Purdue, 2023); *Užaljeno maščevanje* (Založba ZRC, 2023), *La memoria dimezzata. I campi fascisti nelle testimonianze slovene* (Donzelli, 2025) and *Women and Work in the North-Eastern Adriatic* (CEU Press, 2025).

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### **Cora Benetti & Raffaella Sarti: Sharecropper Women's Pluri-activity and Sharecropping Contracts' Clauses: The Case of 19th Century Urbino**

Sharecropping contracts usually contained clauses that prohibited the sharecropper's family from engaging in any independent trade, proto-industrial manufacture or other economic activity, in order to ensure that their full time was devoted to running the farm. Our research on women's work in the countryside of Urbino, Italy, carried out within the project "Work, Workplaces and Mobility in Preindustrial Italy: a Gender Perspective" funded by the Italian Ministry of Research on (<https://mobilityandhumanities.it/work>) and based on testimonies recorded in criminal sources, shows that the role of sharecropper women was much more complex and articulated than agrarian contracts suggest. Their lives did not end with agricultural work. They often devoted themselves to domestic service for others, weaving and selling textiles, and other activities. In other words, despite strict conditions imposed by landowners, women found ways to supplement their family income through a variety of handicrafts, trades and services, as we shall illustrate in the paper.

**Cora Benetti** is a research fellow at the University of Urbino with a PRIN project entitled "Work, Workplaces and Mobility in Preindustrial Urbino" (tutor Raffaella Sarti). She obtained her PhD from the University of Trieste with a thesis on Risorgimento and Women's history. Her last publications: *Giorgina Saffi e la costruzione della memoria familiare e politica nel Risorgimento*,

"Genesis", 1/2025. "La casa ci sembra deserta senza di te" domesticità e mazzinianesimo nella famiglia Saffi, Special Issues 'Nelle domestiche mura'. La famiglia come luogo della 'felicità e della miseria', "Quaderni di italianistica", 2024.

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**Raffaella Sarti** teaches at the University of Urbino. She is a founder member and a president (2020-2024) of the Società Italiana delle Storiche. Her research focuses on work, slavery, family, masculinity, material culture, graffiti and wall writing, construction of heroes/heroines, with a long-term perspective. Her publications include *Europe at Home. Family and Material culture 1500-1800* (Yale 2002); *Servo e padrone, o della (in)dipendenza. Un percorso da Aristotele ai nostri giorni* (Univ. Bologna 2015); *What is Work? Gender at the Crossroads of Home, Family, and Business*, ed. with M. Martini and A. Bellavitis (Berghahn, 2018; Spanish transl. Trea, 2025).

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## **Nataša Rogelja Caf & Špela Ledinek Lozej: Walking Across Borders in the N Adriatic: The Case of Women Traders Called Šavrinkas**

In July 1995, we took a large, top-bound spiral promotional notebook, clumsy compared to the sleek Moleskines used for fieldwork nowadays and started writing a journal of the 125-kilometre circular trade route that we walked along during the following four days. The route between Gračišče, the villages above Buzet, and Trieste, which was a weekly trek for women traders at the beginning of the twentieth century, weaves through a region that has been affected by borders that shifted more than once over the last century and a half. Those who crossed borders daily, whether by accident or by choice, found themselves turned into smugglers—many times not out of malice, but because the weight of necessity excused their unlawful acts. When we re-read our notes and memories of one of the woman traders with whom we cooperated most, we recall our experience with customs officers in Osp and reflected on the position of women in petty smuggling that appears to be an overlooked topic, often dealt with simply by comparing it to male contraband and not as much as a topic of its own, in the context of a wider female role. As Caroline Schuster (2022) finds in her research about women smugglers and petty contraband in Paraguay, female contraband is not just an “invisible area” in research, it also eschews the local narratives, where in different contexts, “male successes” stand out, thus providing women with an invisible—and consequently, auspicious—position in smuggling, related to their economic independence and

participation in networks existing outside of their families or the local environment. The latter positions women on the map of wider economic and other sociopolitical events, which can use this invisibility against the (invisible) woman. In the contribution, we will reflect on the role of walking in her and our endeavours when crossing borders and will highlight the often-overlooked notion of smuggling in narrations about Šavrinkas. Namely, today, these historical trade routes in Istria were transformed into tourist products (with not much success) and entered the heritagization process but also in a wage dialogue with recent migrant routes passing the border region of Istria, resembling the historical smuggling and migration aspects of Šavrinkas routes that were, in the face of positive affirmations and romantizations of these routes, chased into the background of the story.

**Nataša Rogelja Caf**, PhD, is a social anthropologist who has been working at the Slovenian Migration Institute at ZRC SAZU since 2011. She has authored and co-authored books from different genres—academic, fiction, and non-fiction—and her research is predominantly linked to Istria and the Mediterranean, where she studies female labour migration, lifestyle migration, maritime anthropology, heritage(-making) processes, experimental methodologies, and experimental ethnographic writing. Since 2025, she has been editing the online collection of essays, FootNotes (<https://footnotes.zrc-sazu.si>), envisioned as a hybrid space for tracing the routes between science and art.

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**Špela Ledinek Lozej**, PhD, is an ethnologist who works at the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at ZRC SAZU. She studies heritage and heritage(-making) processes, architecture, dwelling culture, and pastoralism. She has published several scientific articles and has led various research and applied projects. Since 2019, she has been leading the multidisciplinary research programme Heritage on the Margins (cf. Heriskop, <https://dediscina.zrc-sazu.si/en/home2/>) and teaching at the Postgraduate School ZRC SAZU.

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### **Vida Rožac Darovec: Smuggling and Survival: The Role of Istrian Women in the Early 20th Century**

This paper aims to shed light on the phenomenon of smuggling activities carried out by Istrian women during the first half of the 20th century. At a time when the severe economic crisis in the Istrian countryside made female labor often essential for the survival of families unable to meet all their needs through agriculture alone, such activities played a crucial role. The widespread nature of this phenomenon shaped societal perceptions of what was essentially an illegal practice, rendering it socially acceptable out of necessity. The study is based on the collection of life stories, which provide insight into the subjective experiences and perspectives of everyday life for Istrian women, often challenging the stereotypical bourgeois conception of women's subordinate role and status in the past.

**Vida Rožac Darovec** is a researcher at the Institute for Historical Studies of the Science and Research Centre Koper. Between 2008 and 2012, she served as head of the Annales University Press and as editor-in-chief of the Annales Manuel and Annales Majora Library series. She is a member of the editorial boards of the journals Acta Histriae and Annales for Istrian and Mediterranean Studies. To date, she has published several scholarly and professional articles and conducts research in the fields of individual and collective memory in the border area of western Slovenia.

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## **Sabine Schmitner-Laszakovits: Women as Economic Actors in the Black Market**

Economy in the border area of Wiener Neustadt during and after WWI. Contraband trade had been common in the Austro-Hungarian border region of Wiener Neustadt, since there was a tariff wall between the two different internal administrative territories of Austria and Hungary, that was not abandoned till 1850. The food crisis in WWI led to a black market economy that overpowered the legal war economy. Taking up the theoretical perspective of dispositive analysis, the paper defines the black market as a product of illegal economic practices that opposed the economic war order. The main focus of the paper is the local women's part in the traditional and wartime black market economy. Hungarian and Austrian Women both were actors in various black market settings. Depending on their social and economic background, the women had access to specific environments, strategies and networks. They smuggled food for their families, they stored contraband, they organised and sold contraband. The traditional black market had its root in the tariff wall and the poverty of the people in the rural West Hungarian and Lower Austrian border region. These circumstances fostered a culture of solidarity, where whole villages protected their people, who participated in black market dealings. Women were, of course, part of these local communities and acted within family networks. The Black Market of WWI emerged with the wartime provisioning system that eventually sought to control production, distribution, trade, and consumption. Many everyday forms of market behaviour became illegal—for

example, selling any quantity to any buyer, or buying whatever suited your taste. Of course, the rural villages with a tradition of black market dealings quickly adapted to the wartime situation. But the black market gained such an influence especially during the last years of the war and the first year after that it could be considered the “actual” market. The whole society, all social classes participated. Some people acted professionally within the black market, earning a living – or even a fortune. The majority of people sought to acquire goods for their daily needs or small-scale contraband trade. Among the latter were many women, since they were responsible for the housekeeping and alimentation of the families. Well-of lower Austrian housewives and underclass women alike travelled to Hungary by train, to buy food, and smuggled it. Hungarian Women travelled to Austria, to sell small quantities of goods. But women did run businesses too and entered the black market to secure their income. As a method, dispositive analysis strives to analyse discourses, practices and materialities that (re)produce social life. The chosen micro context allows us to reconstruct and analyse practices that produced the black market in a specific region with a long tradition – the border region of Wiener Neustadt. Relevant sources are police and court files, various local records, newspaper reports, contemporary witness reports, maps, and photographs. A sample of analysed context and incidents will be presented, to give an insight into women's part in the black market.

**Mag.a Sabine Schmitner-Laszakovits** studied Communication Science and History in Vienna and is currently finishing her PHD in social and economic history entitled “Krieg managen. Kriegsordnung und Widerstand im Ersten Weltkrieg am Beispiel des Rüstungszentrums Wiener Neustadt“. She is an employee of the City Archive Wiener Neustadt and published articles in journals and volumes concerning Lower Austrian social and economic history, women's history and cultural history.

Publications (selection): Surviving and Resisting the Wartime Order. Black-Market Economy in the Border Region of Wiener Neustadt during and after World War I. In: Hannes Grandits, Ibolya Murber, and Katharina Tyran (Ed.), *The Disputed Austro-Hungarian Border. Agendas, Actors, and Practices in Western Hungary/Burgenland after World War*. Volume 36 *Austrian and Habsburg Studies* (New York / Oxford: Berghahn 2025). Die (Ohn)Macht der „Mitte“. Zur gesellschaftlichen Position bürgerlicher Schichten in Kleinstädten. In: Oliver Kühschelm, Elisabeth Loinig, Stefan Eminger, Willibald Rosner (Hrsg.), *Niederösterreich im 19. Jahrhundert. Band 2: Gesellschaft und Gemeinschaft. Eine Regionalgeschichte der Moderne*. (St. Pölten 2021). Local politics during the First World War: political players in the armaments center Wiener Neustadt. In: *European Review of History: Revue européenne d´histoire*, 24:2 2017, 229-249.

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### **Brina Kotar: Across Slovenian Villages: Hidden Labour and Everyday Survival**

This paper examines informal and undocumented forms of women’s labour across (what is now) Slovenia in the first part of the 20th century. In Primorska villages such as Škofije, Dekani, and Marežige, women earned income through paid laundry work and carrying ash to Trieste, activities shaped by border proximity. In the Goriška region, especially Soča and Trenta, women gathered and sold forest products and alpine plants, navigating the limits of legality. In Dolenjska and Central Slovenia, women relied on seasonal fieldwork, barter-based spinning and weaving, and small-scale exchanges to sustain rural households. Across these regions, women’s everyday economic strategies formed interconnected hidden economies that sustained rural households while remaining largely invisible in official records.

**Brina Kotar** is a doctoral researcher at the Department of History, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). Her PhD research focuses on the work of female farmers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the North-Eastern Adriatic region. She is a member of the MOONLIGHTING research project. Her research interests include rural women’s labour, especially forms of work situated at the margins of social recognition and valuation, as well as memory studies, motherhood and work, everyday life in agrarian environments, and the history of war invalids.

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**Dagmar Wernitznig: “Roxanne [...] you don't have to sell your body to the night:” Prostitution and Sex Trade during the Longue Durée in Austria – An Explorative Approach**

*Gesetze und Behörden allein können aber einem Übel, das wie der Mädchenhandel seine Wurzel in der Gesellschaft selbst hat, nur entgegenwirken, gänzlich beseitigt kann es nur durch eine mächtige gesellschaftliche Organisation werden, die den Kampf gegen den Mädchenhandel zur gesellschaftlichen Tradition werden lässt.* Bericht der Oesterreichischen Liga zur Bekämpfung des Mädchenhandels (Vienna, 1911), p. 37.

Starting off by contextualizing the work and activism of the so-called Oesterreichische Liga zur Bekämpfung des Mädchenhandels (established in 1902) with their chair Cölestine Truxa (\*1858 Verona; †1935 Vienna), this contribution aims to analyse the socio-political as well as the socio-economic narratives regarding red-light districts and issues in Austria from approximately 1870 to 2000. At the intersections of urban and rural spaces, Austrian discourses about reform or regulation of the ‘oldest trade in the world’ were not simply characterized and determined by (post)war times or transition processes from monarchy to democracy but also by altering cultural expectations and ideological attitudes.

Oscillating between il/legality and precariousness, labour conditions in what is nowadays generally referred to as the sex industry indicate more than simple patriarchal power dynamics or exploitative hierarchies. Especially from a transnational perspective, the complexities of ‘purchasable love’ lend

themselves to unpacking gender-related aspects of market economies on a broader scheme. Therefore, topics discussed in this paper will, for instance, include but are not limited to: the age of globalization and neoliberalism in conjunction with borderland territories; grooming gangs and human trafficking throughout the short twentieth century and their topicality for the new millennium; VD legislature in (para)military settings; de/criminalization of ‘supply versus demand structures’ in brothels.

CV

**Dagmar Wernitznig** is a researcher for the Moonlighting project, led by Professor Marta Verginella at the University of Ljubljana. Dagmar earned her doctorate in history from the University of Oxford, where she used to be a Postdoctoral and, subsequently, an Associate Fellow at the Rothermere American Institute and obtained a business certificate from Oxford’s Saïd Business School. With an additional Ph.D. in American Studies, she has also worked as a university lecturer for literature, culture, post-colonial, and gender studies in Austria for several years and published extensively in the field of cultural criticism and critical theory. For her publications, please see <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8680-2957>.

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### **Nora Maria Lehner: Hidden in Plain Sight – Women’s Sexual Labour in Post-War Vienna (1945 to mid-1970s)**

“You always pick on the poorest. How am I supposed to make a living?” asked 56-year-old Luise Gugg in 1968 when questioned for “prostitution in a prohibited zone.” Her rare direct voice in a nearly 200-page police file reveals the hidden, precarious economy sustaining the Viennese commercial sex market. Drawing on police and court records, this paper examines women’s sexual labour in Vienna from the 1940s to the 1970s, when commercial sex was governed by nineteenth-century legislation that enabled extensive police discretion and blurred the boundaries between legality and illegality. It reconstructs working conditions, income strategies, and everyday experiences within this irregular labour market, and analyses how women navigated the class and gender-specific measures of control. By foregrounding sexual labour as a form of invisible, highly regulated female work, the paper offers new insights into Austria’s social, gender, and welfare history.

**Nora Lehner** is currently finishing her PhD on women’s sexual labour in Vienna from 1945 to 1975. Her focus is on police and judicial perspectives on sex work, the experiences and agency of women who engaged in it, and the changing sexual geography of Vienna. After fellowships at the GHI (Washington, D.C.), the Temple University (Philadelphia) and Freie Universität (Berlin), she now works as a historian at Institut für Historische Sozialforschung (Vienna).

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### **Urška Strle: Rations, Risk, and Rebellion: The Female Faces of Illicit Trade between 1917-1920**

The paper will present preliminary insights based on a review of criminal case files from the Provincial Court in Ljubljana during World War I and the early post-war years. Due to the general mobilization (including the conscription of civil servants), the number of criminal trials decreased significantly compared to previous years, while the proportion of female defendants increased markedly. There were several cases of theft and a few involving prostitution, but most convictions related to material gain from the sale of food, cigarettes, energy sources, and clothing, which individuals offered on the black market at prices higher than those legally established.

Penalties for reselling food at excessive prices during a time of scarcity were relatively severe. There were also many cases of false testimony and denunciation, which in their own way reflect the tense social relations during the war and the immediate post-war period. Criminal records thus highlight the capillary nature of social relations on a broader societal level: they reveal the increasing struggle for survival among the civilian population, particularly women, resulting from the paralysis of social institutions and the specificities of the wartime and postwar economy.

**Urška Strle** is a historian specializing in the social and cultural dimensions of contemporary history. Her research explores migration and labour history, women’s and gender history, oral history, memory studies, and biographical approaches. In her

work, she pays particular attention to the significance of social networks in both personal and collective contexts.

She works at the Institute of Cultural History at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Ljubljana. She was a member of the ERC-funded project *EIRENE*, led by Prof. Marta Verginella. Also, she is part of the ERC-funded project *OPEN BORDERS*, led by Prof. Borut Klabjan at the Koper Scientific Research Centre.

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### **Teresa Bertilotti: Black Market in Italian Novels and Autobiographical Writings**

My contribution focuses on Italian novels, short stories, diaries, and memoirs that deal with the black market and smuggling. My aim is to analyse how these different forms of writing contextualize these phenomena and thus offer specific and diverse perspectives not only on the black market and smuggling themselves, but more broadly on society. Consider, for instance, Carlo Levi's *L'orologio* (1950) and Elsa Morante's *La Storia* (1974), two novels that situate the black market within similar historical contexts yet draw entirely different implications from it. For Levi, the poor—figures such as Teresa, the cigarette seller—can be redeemed through political action; for Morante, no such possibility exists. A different kind of contrast emerges from autobiographical writings which, as we will see, present entirely divergent perspectives on access to the black market.

**Teresa Bertilotti** is a historian, who received her PhD at European University Institute (Florence). She has worked extensively on Women's and Gender History focusing on historiography, women's education in XIX century Italy in relation to Nation Building, and on the Italian feminism in the 1970s. Currently, with Simona Bonsignori, she runs a book series for the Italian publisher ManifestoLibri: *In breve. Parola di donna*. In the field of public history, she has participated in the making of some documentaries.

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### **Sára Bagdi: Emotional Labor and Gender Inequalities in Avant-Garde Networking**

Jolán Simon was one of the central figures of the interwar Hungarian avant-garde. Despite being an autodidact with a working-class background, she and her partner, Lajos Kassák, built an extensive international avant-garde network that engaged both the working class and traditional intellectuals. When Horthy's authoritarian counter-revolutionary regime, with the help of the Entente allies, overthrew the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, intellectuals sympathetic to the Commune were forced into emigration. Kassák also had to leave for Vienna and could not return to Budapest until 1926. Since Simon had no formal position at Kassák's periodical or any Commune-affiliated institution, she was able to stay in Hungary without repercussions. The financial struggles of emigration, rising production costs, and the official ban on Kassák's periodical – which prevented its legal distribution in Hungary – forced Simon to take on a larger role in supporting Kassák's work. The couple built networks in former Hungarian territories, where Hungarian-speaking audiences could legally access *Ma*, and Simon often smuggled copies back to Budapest.

**Sára Bagdi** is a research fellow (PræDoc) in the project *Tackling Empires*, at the Department of Contemporary History at the University of Vienna. Within this project, she focuses on Austria's and Hungary's engagement with regions outside Europe in the years between the two World Wars. Simultaneously, in her PhD research, she examines how workers

of the global peripheries and their work appeared in the cultural production of the Hungarian labour movement in the 1920s. She is also a member of the Working Group for Public Sociology "Helyzet" and a junior Research Fellow at Kassák Museum where she is working on the publication of the Digital Critical Edition of the Correspondence of Lajos Kassák and Jolán Simon between 1909 and 1928.

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## **Giulia Brunello: Women Behind the Scenes of Nineteenth-Century Italian Theatre**

This paper explores the backstage of Italian theatre during the Nineteenth century, with particular attention to the roles assigned to women. Studying behind-the-scenes theatrical activities allows us to shed light on dynamics of work segmentation, internal career hierarchies within different working environments, based on the type of task, gender relations, level of visibility of artists and artisans, and career formation. Given the importance of the theatre as a key site of urban sociability throughout the century, and the widespread proliferation of theatrical spaces across the Italian peninsula, looking at the backstage of a theatre makes it possible to bring to the foreground “invisible” forms of labour that have so far been little studied, yet are essential to the success of the performance. Finally, an analysis of the presence or absence of female figures offers insights into gender roles, social organisation, and the influence of broader cultural frameworks.

**Giulia Brunello:** After earning a Master’s Degree in Foreign Languages and Literature at the Ca’ Foscari University in Venice, I completed a PhD in Contemporary History at the University of Padua and the University of São Paulo in Brazil. From 2020 to 2024, I was a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of the Arts in Bern. Through a micro-historical analysis, the project shed light on the phenomenon of provincial theatres in 19th century Italy (Italian Provincial Theatre and the Risorgimento: The Organization, Repertoire, and Original Stage Décor of

Feltre’s Teatro Sociale, 1797–1866). In 2025, I obtained a MSCA European postdoctoral research grant at the University of Ljubljana with the project On Stage and Backstage. Gender, Empire and Nation in the Theatres of a Cosmopolitan City (Trieste 1814-1914), that analyses the ways in which theatrical activities in Trieste – a cosmopolitan city and the main port of the Habsburg Empire throughout the 19th century – shape collective identities and imagined communities linked to the concepts of nation, empire and gender.

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