



# Researching the History of the Informal Sector Methodological Challenges and Opportunities

A Workshop at Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek, June 9-10, 2015

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History research is dependent on the sources available, oral or written. In Sweden, research on labour history usually relies on written documents from the archives. Our labour market has been formalized over the years; we have access to data from governmental bodies and protocols from union meetings. The high level of literacy among workers from quite early days gives us access to their thoughts and actions. But there are gaps in this material. Certain branches, where the unions were not so successful in organizing the workers, like household workers, or where the work force was always more temporary and unskilled, like dock workers, did not leave behind archive material in the same way as did branches heavily organized.

And now, when the labour market in the industrialized world is becoming more informal, the rate of unionisation is dropping, these voices are less likely to be heard. Those are for instance employees of temporary work agencies, migrant workers (documented or undocumented) or foreign workers recruited for temporary work. How do we retrieve information on these sources, when they do not leave any written material behind?

In the global south, our colleagues write on labour history with limited access to records and written sources. Written sources from their labour organizations are scarce. They have to rely heavily on oral history methods and other ways to collect and secure the source material needed for their research. This means that they have more experience from working as researchers on the informal sector of the economy. We need to learn from them.

In order to discuss research on labour history using primarily oral methods, ARAB - Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek (Labour Movement Archives and Library) hosts a two day workshop. The purpose of the meeting is to create a forum for in depth discussions on methods useful for researching working conditions on the informal sector of the labour market. In this way we would like to contribute to the development of research methods and methodology. The discussions will not only touch on the needs of research on these matters within humanities and social sciences, but also address the need of a change in approach among memory institutions. The workshop will connect to recent research in archive science theory as well as ethical and methodological considerations when researching subordinate groups in society.

The workshop is generously funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond.

The working language will be English, and the meeting is open to researchers, students and labour activists. However, due to limited seats, registration is required.

Email [jonas.soderqvist@arbark.se](mailto:jonas.soderqvist@arbark.se) for more information.

# Program

## Tuesday, June 9

09:00-09:30

*Welcome, introduction and practical information*

Nina Sjöberg, Silke Neunsinger and Jonas Söderqvist

09:30-10:00 *Coffee*

10:00-11:00

*Continuities and Changes: Labor Migrants Coming through "open doors" or stuck before closed fortress gates*

Dirk Hoerder, former Arizona State University

Chair: Silke Neunsinger

11:00-11:05 *Poetic intervention*

Tim Seibles

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

11:05-12:00

*Methodological and Ethical Implications of Doing Research with Undocumented Migrants*

Ilse van Liempt, University of Utrecht

Chair: Jonas Söderqvist

12:00-13:00 Lunch

### METHODS IN CURRENT RESEARCH

13:00-14:00

*(Re-)Defining the Problem: Forced Labour as a Form of Work-based Harm*

Sam Scott, University of Gloucestershire

Chair: Johan Svanberg

14:00-14:05 *Poetic intervention*

Tim Seibles

14:05-15:00

*Living without Rights: Undocumented Migrants and the Boundaries of Citizenship*

Heidi Moksnes, Stockholm University

Chair: Pernilla Jonsson

15:00-15:30 Coffee

15:30-16:30

*Coercion and Formal Freedom in Contemporary Slavery in Brazil: Concepts under Dispute*

Giselle Sakamoto Souza Vianna,

Universidade Estadual de Campinas

Chair: Dirk Hoerder

16:30-17:30 *Comments and discussion*

## Wednesday, June 10

09:00-10:00

*Navigating the Boundaries of Scholar-Activist Research with Migrant Workers*

Jennifer N. Fish, Old Dominion University

Chair: TBA

10:00-10:30 *Coffee*

### NEW METHODS FOR ARCHIVES

10:30-11:30

*The World of Informal Labour in India*

Rana P. Behal, former University of Delhi

Chair: Kostis Karpozilos

11:30-11:35 *Poetic intervention*

By Jenny Wrangborg

11:35-12:30

*Research Circles and Oral History*

Lars Hansson, Centrum för Arbetarhistoria

Chair: TBA

12:30-13:30 Lunch

13:30-14:30

*Social Movements in Times of Social Crisis: Informal Forms of Social Protest and the Archives of the Present*

Kostis Karpozilos, ASKI - Contemporary

Social History Archives-Greece

Chair: Rana Behal

14:30-14:35 *Poetic intervention*

By Jenny Wrangborg

14:35-15:30

*Project presentation: Not Documented in the Files*

Jonas Söderqvist, Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek

Chair: Jennifer Fish

15:30-16:00 *Coffee*

16:00-17:00 *What needs to be done? Concluding discussion*

Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek

Elektronvägen 2

141 49 Huddinge

Pendeltåg/Commuter train: Flemingsberg

# Presentations

## **Continuities and Changes: Labor Migrants coming through “open doors” or stuck before closed fortress gate**

By Dirk Hoerder

”I will discuss human agency along the trajectory of departure – travel – arrival in frames ranging from self-willed to forced departures (slaves, forced laborers, refugees) via travel or prevention of travel (permanent refugee camp lives) to entry into a or a sequence of receiving societies with easy entry or narrow, heavily controlled pathways. The approaches will include human, social, and cultural capital as well as segmented and stratified labor markets. In conclusion I will discuss stateside or IO frames as facilitating or restraining.”

*Dirk Hoerder, emeritus, taught at University of Bremen and Arizona State University and held guest positions at Canadian and French universities. His main interests are labor migration in the Atlantic world, global migrations since the Middle Ages, and gendered migrant acculturation. He has published Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium (2002) and, as coauthor of What is Migration History? (2009)*

## **Methodological and Ethical Implications of Doing Research with Undocumented Migrants**

By Ilse van Liempt

”My presentation draws on my earlier research -- focusing on document analysis (police files and court cases), expert interviews and narrative interviews with smuggled migrants -- indicated that there is a strong need for a deepened debate on methodology when researching human smuggling, trafficking and other forms of irregularity and precarity. I will discuss difficulties that researchers working with migrants in precarious situations have to contend with and hopes to contribute to the development of methodological and ethical discussions in the field.”

*Ilse van Liempt completed her PhD research on human smuggling at the Institute for Ethnic and Migration Studies (IMES) at the University of Amsterdam in 2007. She is the author of Navigating Borders. Inside perspectives on the process of human smuggling into the Netherlands. And the editor of Ethics of Migration Research Methodology (2009). Currently she works as an Assistant Professor in Qualitative Research Methods in the Urban Geography Department, Utrecht University.*

## **Informalisation in the UK Food Industry: Looking Beyond Worst-Case Scenarios**

By Sam Scott

”This presentation argues that labour exploitation in the UK has, of late, been conceived as involving ‘worst-case scenarios’ (modern slavery, forced labour, human trafficking, and so on). This approach to labour exploitation, whilst valuable, misses many processes of ‘informalisation’ taking place in the UK labour market. Informalisation, here, is taken to mean the retrograde changes that are taking place in employment that are causing work in the formal economy to become more akin to work in the informal economy. Whether or not informalisation can be equated to actual labour exploitation is a point in need of urgent discussion and debate and the aim of the paper is to open up space for this debate by outlining six major informalisation dynamics.”

*Dr Sam Scott is a human geographer who specialises in international migration research. He studied (BA and PhD) at the University of Sheffield and as part of this spent ten-months in Paris, at the Sorbonne, examining skilled labour migration within the EU. Sam’s principal research after this has centred on low-status international labour migration. In particular, he has worked on labour supply and demand issues within the UK food industry and has critically examined the need amongst the UK’s low-wage employers for migrant workers from central and eastern Europe. Recently Sam has carried out work for the ESRC and Joseph Rowntree Foundation on forced labour and before this evaluated the role of the Gangmasters Licensing Authority. Currently Sam works at the University of Gloucestershire where he teaches migration and population geography.*

## **Living without Rights: Undocumented Migrants and the Boundaries of Citizenship**

By Heidi Moksnes

”My work focuses on undocumented labor migrants from Latin America, living in the Stockholm region in Sweden, and to what extent they become social and political participants in a Swedish society of which they are de-facto members but formally excluded from. Their ”unauthorized” presence in Sweden commonly demand that they move in a “grey area” partly outside the Swedish legal sphere to find work, housing and, sometimes, work permits. Similarly, they usually cannot seek, or find, protection by Swedish law when facing abuse from employers or

others. In my presentation, I will address the difficult questions of methodology and ethics this implies for my own work as a researcher. How do I document and write about the strategies of undocumented migrants in ways that do not close off the fields where undocumented migrants move and make a living? Should I disclose any of the abuse I learn about, mixing my role as an anthropologist with that of an informer?"

*Heidi Moksnes is a senior lecturer at the Department of Social Anthropology at Stockholm University. Until 2014, she was a researcher at Uppsala University. In her previous research, she has focused on how marginalized indigenous people in Mexico, in both rural and urban areas, form politicized identities and claims on rights, political participation and effective citizenship. See for example her monograph Maya Exodus: Indigenous Struggle for Citizenship in Chiapas (2012).*

### **Coercion and Formal Freedom in Contemporary Slavery in Brazil: Concepts under Dispute**

*By Giselle Sakamoto Souza Vianna*

"My presentation examines the disputes over the concept of coerced labor in the Brazilian context of the last decades, combining theoretical discussion, archival research and oral testimonies. The condition analogous to slavery, as currently defined by Brazilian law, comprehends forced labor, debt bondage, exhaustive working days and degrading working conditions, but the scope of this concept is under debate in National Congress. Acknowledging coercion is constitutive of employer-employee juridical relations, the article analyzes the categories of labor contract, formal freedom and legal subject and poses the question of whether contemporary free and unfree labor are opposite social forms. The paper presents partial results of my ongoing doctoral field research. The discourses of different social actors and the analysis of Inspection Reports from the Ministry of Labor and Employment's Special Mobile Inspection Unit show to what extent the transition from political dominance to the economy-based exploitation of consolidated capitalism breeds to systemic violence, which prevail over direct forms of violence. Amidst theoretical and juridical controversy, the points of view of workers who have been submitted and who have resisted to coerced labor, as well as other social actors such as labor inspectors, labor prosecutors, and members of social movements, contribute to a clearer understanding of the phenomenon and may suggest that what is in dispute is not only the contemporary definition of slavery, but also the role played in contemporary enslavement by formal freedom."

*Giselle Sakamoto Souza Vianna is currently a Sociology doctrate student at the University of Campinas - UNICAMP, conducting research on contemporary slavery in Mato Grosso. For the past 6 years, she has been working as a workplace inspector at the Ministry of Labour and Employment, in Mato Grosso – Brazil. From 2011 to 2014, she was the regional coordinator of rural inspection and forced labour repression, participating as a member in Mato Grosso's State Commission for the Eradication of Forced Labour (COETRAE) and contributing to projects such as "Ação Integrada", which provides vulnerable workers (including those rescued from situations analogous to slavery) with job training and access to decent work. She is the author of the article "Subject in law and capitalist subjectivation: the invention of the responsible man" (2010) and the poetry book "Interpeles" (2008).*

### **Navigating the Boundaries of Scholar-Activist Research with Migrant Workers**

*By Jennifer N. Fish*

"This presentation draws from fifteen years of scholar-activist experiences with migrant domestic worker unions to discuss the potential to serve human rights movements while documenting history and producing grounded research. The newly formed International Domestic Workers Federation and the established South African domestic workers national union form central exemplars of this approach to action-based inquiry. A focus on long-term research relationships, applied ethics and expanded approaches to data collection provide content for an analysis of how social investigators can "give back" to local, national and global movements, while capturing original data for scholarly publications."

*Jennifer N. Fish is Chair of the Department of Women's Studies and a member of the faculty of the Graduate Program in International Studies at Old Dominion University in Virginia, USA. For the past fifteen years, she has worked with the South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union to promote domestic workers rights and collective organization capacity. Her book publications include Domestic Democracy: At Home in South Africa (Routledge, 2006) and the co-edited collection Women's Activism in South Africa: Working Across Divides (University of KwaZulu Natal, 2009). She is a member of the Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organization (WIEGO) research policy institute at Harvard University, and has held visiting research appointments at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, the University of Cape Town and the Kigali Institute of Education in Rwanda. Most recently, she has served as a consultant to the International Domestic Workers Federation and the International Labour Organization during the process of establishing the Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention 189.*

## The World of Informal Labour in India

By Rana Partap Behal

The dichotomies of the world of formal and informal labour in the South Asian context have been commented upon by anthropologists, economists and sociologists during the past over three decades. Many participants have been emphasizing on the blurring distinction between the formal and informal sector labour. Apart from the theoretical and conceptual contribution on the subject there is now a growing emphasis on micro studies of diverse urban informal labour. This presentation is an overview of the nature of research on informal labour in India. It also presents information on the institutional efforts and initiatives for archiving this growing knowledge and documenting the lives of informal labour in urban India.

*Rana P. Behal taught history at Deshbandhu College, University of Delhi. He has also held teaching assignments at Cornell University, Syracuse University and Oberlin College. He was a fellow at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi; South Asia Centre, Cambridge University; Re:Work, Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History, Humboldt University, Berlin; and Centre for Development Studies, Geographic Sciences, Free University, Berlin.*

## Research circles and Oral history

By Lars Hansson

”My presentation is based on my experiences of oral history and research circles in labor and migration history work, and will look into future possibilities of development of the field.”

*Lars Hansson is labor and migration historian at Center for Labor History at Lund University and Deputy Head at The House of the Emigrants in Gothenburg.*

## Social Movements in Times of Social Crisis: Informal Forms of Social Protest and the Archives of the Present

By Kostis Karpozilos

”This presentation will highlight how ASKI (Contemporary Social History Archives-Greece) initiated a project to collect, preserve and research expressions of social and political protest during the contemporary Greek crisis. This project ascribes to a broader shift of ASKI towards the contemporary dimensions of the social question and the undocumented realities of social movements and immigrant communities. The presentation aims to start a discussion on the particulars of this shift and contribute to the ongoing debate reg on the construction of archives of the present.”

*Kostis Karpozilos is a postdoctoral research fellow at Princeton University and the Head of International Projects at ASKI. His research focused on revolutionary diasporas in the United States and the trajectory of Greek-American radicalism in the 20th century. He is the scriptwriter of the documentary Greek-American Radicals: the Untold Story (2013), the author of a book on the Cretan socialist intellectual Stavros Kallergis (Benaki Museum, 2013), and he has a forthcoming book titled Revolutionary Diaspora. Kostis Karpozilos was (2012-2014) a postdoctoral fellow at Columbia University and has taught at the University of the Peloponnese, at Sciences Po and at Columbia University.*

## Project presentation: Not Documented in the Files

By Jonas Söderqvist

”I will present a project we hope to be able to launch at the Swedish Labour Movement Archives and Library, (ARAB). The project aims, through field interviews with migrant workers from the informal sector, to create an archive material open to researchers. I will discuss our work with preparations, theoretical considerations, methodological challenges, the importance for a memory institution to do this kind of work and the historical importance of the material we hope to create. I will also discuss our troubles with funding.”

*Jonas Söderqvist works at the research department at the Swedish Labour Movement Archives and Library (ARAB) and with the editorial of Arbetarhistoria.. He has a background as a documentary film maker and has worked with migrants in previous projects.*

## POETIC INTERVENTIONS

*Jenny Wrangborg is a garde manger and a poet. She lives in Stockholm and have for the last 9 years been working in kitchens all over Sweden, Canada and Norway. Her poetry and prose concerns working conditions in the restaurant industry, solidarity and shortcomings of the struggle to unionize a sector of the economy where few of the workers are organized and the employers are ruthless. The collection Garde Manger (Kallskänkan) was released in 2010, a huge success both, praised by reads and critics alike. Here latest collection ”What should we do with each other” (Vad ska vi göra med varandra) was released spring 2014.*

*Tim Seibles is the author of several poetry collections including Hurdy-Gurdy, Hammerlock, Buffalo Head Solos. and the most recent 2012 U.S. National Book Award finalist, Fast Animal. His first book, Body Moves, (1988) has just been re-released by Carnegie Mellon U. Press as part of their Contemporary Classics series. He lives in Norfolk, Virginia, where he is a member of the English and MFA in writing faculty at Old Dominion University.*

# Participants

*Dirk Hoerder, former University of Arizona*

*Jennifer Fish, Old Dominion University, Norfolk*

*Sam Scott, University of Gloucestershire*

*Giselle Sakamoto Souza Vianna, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, São Paulo*

*Rana Behal, former University of Delhi*

*Kostantinos Karpozilos, ASKI – Contemporary Social History Archives, Athen*

*Ilse van Liempt, Utrecht university*

*Lars Hansson, Centrum för Arbetarhistoria, Landskrona*

*Heidi Moksnes, Stockholms universitet*

*Jonas Söderqvist, ARAB*

*Silke Neunsinger, ARAB*

*Catalina Benavente, ARAB*

*Nina Sjöberg, ARAB*

*Zoran Slavnic, REMESO, Linköpings Universitet*

*Harald Runblom, Hugo Vallentin-Centrum, Uppsala*

*Marinette Fogde, Arbetets Museum, Norrköping*

*Johanna Överling, Arbetets Museum, Norrköping*

*Andreas Nilsson, Arbetets Museum, Norrköping*

*Pernilla Jonsson, Stockholms universitet*

*Samuel Edquist, Södertörns Högskola*

*Andrea da Silva, Gävle Stadsarkiv*

*Ann-Kristin Karlsson, Gävle Stadsarkiv*

*Hannes Rolf, Södertörns Högskola*

*Johan Svanberg, Stockholms Universitet*

*Jenny Wrangborg, Stockholm*

*Tim Seibles, Old Dominion University, Virginia*

*Seipideh Nekomanesh, Uppsala Universitet*