

# Engendering the History of Capitalism

Posted on April 5, 2018 by Eileen Boris

Joint Session International Federation for Research in Women's History (IFRWH) and International Social History Association (ISHA): CISH in Poznan, Poland, August 2020.

FINAL DEADLINE APRIL 15

Over the last decade, scholars have rediscovered capitalism as economic process, analytic, and historical force. This “new” history of capitalism emerged in response to developments of our time, including neoliberalism and uneven and the unequal globalization and financialization that appeared to have reshaped the world economy. As Jürgen Kocka underscores in *Capitalism: The Reemergence of a Historical Concept* (2016), the end of the Cold War, the prominence of ideological market liberalism, the Great Recession, and growth of capitalist development within all sorts of regimes has sparked renewed interest. We now have robust reconsideration of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the violence of primitive accumulation, and the continuum between free and unfree labor. The significance of banks, risk-taking, speculation, and other means of financing capital have joined studies of labor conflict, commodification, and appropriation of resources. Waged labor no longer seems as central to the definition of capitalism as it once did, though it retains a prominent place in historical scholarship.

While some question whether a “new” history of capitalism is more than a repackaging of business, labor, and economic history, we argue that it has the potential to explain the relationship between regions and sectors as well as between people. Rich research under its rubric, however, too often stands apart from women's history, the history of sexualities, and gender analysis. It is not just that the working (or capitalist) class has two sexes, but that sexual divisions of labor, gender definitions, kinship and family formation, and normative sexuality have shaped even as they have reflected the mode of production. Indeed, reproductive labor stands as part of but also as its own force in the making of capitalist social relations. Reproductive labor refers to those activities that make people through the tasks of daily life necessary to develop and sustain labor power. These activities are both material (like feeding), emotional (like love), and assimilative (like transference of norms and values), whether occurring in the family, school, church, workplace, or community.

Conflated with the unpaid, usually intimate, duties of mothers, wives, and daughters, reproductive labor, when commodified as employment, rarely has commanded adequate wages or even recognition as work. Women's responsibility for caring for and maintaining households has justified low pay, irregular working hours, short-term jobs, and exclusion from labor law. But such unwaged, low-waged, or non-waged work has served capitalist economies in multiple ways over time and space.

For this joint session, we seek papers that intervene in the various debates surrounding the history of capitalism through gender analysis. Papers might be micro or macro, looking inside the firm or shopfloor, the community or family, or global processes. We invite historians of sexualities and gender to consider how their research intersects with the history of capitalism and we ask historians of capitalism to consider the place of gender, sexualities, and reproductive labor in their analysis. The resulting session will thus serve two purposes: first to present new empirical research, whether social, economic, cultural, or intellectual history in orientation; second, to advance the engendering of the history of capitalism and reinforce the materialist (re)turn in the history of gender and sexuality that is connecting the discursive to social and economic processes.

To be considered, please send short abstract to

Eileen Boris, [eboris@ucsb.edu](mailto:eboris@ucsb.edu)

IFRWH/FIRHF is an affiliated organization with the ICHS/CISH. Participants in the IFRWH Congress must register centrally for the ICHS/CISH 2020 Congress. The online registration form for the ICHS 2020 can be found at <https://ichs2020poznan.pl/en/>. All participants need to register through this online form but payment can be made at a later date. If you have any questions about the registration, please contact [CongresCISH@gmail.com](mailto:CongresCISH@gmail.com)

## Author



[Eileen Boris](#)

