

Mednarodna konferenca
International conference

REPRODUKTIVNE POLITIKE IN MATERINSTVO V ZGODOVINSKI PERSPEKTIVI

Program konference in povzetki referatov

REPRODUCTIVE POLITICS AND MOTHERHOOD IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Conference programme and abstract booklet

LJUBLJANA, 25.–26. SEPTEMBER 2025



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Reproduktivne politike in materinstvo v zgodovinski perspektivi

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INTRODUCTION

Our two-day symposium will be opened with a reference to the artwork *Plei-emødre i lagmannsretten* (*Foster Mothers in Court*), by the renowned Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, reproduced on the cover of our book of abstracts. The narrative behind Munch's work is the real trial of foster mothers that took place in Oslo in 1902. These were women who had taken in infants for money but were accused of neglecting them or deliberately allowing them to die. Munch depicts them not as individualized figures, but as a row of distorted, mask-like faces, underscoring both the collective social stigma and the grotesque spectacle of the trial. The painting is less a documentary record than a biting commentary on the intersection of poverty, crime, and motherhood.

The central theme is social injustice: the women are at once perpetrators and victims, condemned by the law yet also products of poverty and desperation. The stylized, almost caricature-like treatment underlines the tension among satire, social critique, and tragedy.

The symbolism of Munch's work can also be read in a much broader sense. In fact, it reveals precisely the motifs that form the guiding thread of our conference. How and why, throughout history, have mothers been judged? Who were the actors that judged them? Who acted as their allies or advocates, and who as their accusers? Which systemic circumstances and socio-political barriers contributed to mothers finding themselves symbolically in the dock – or perhaps managing to avoid it? How did mothers themselves experience these infamous processes?

The conference papers will seek answers to these and other questions related to motherhood and reproductive rights in a variety of sources, ranging from court records to oral testimonies, and across a broad chronological spectrum, from the eighteenth century to the present. They will also address diverse geographical settings, from our own Slovenian context to, for instance, the Ottoman Empire and India.

PROGRAMME

DAY 1: Thursday, September 25, 2025

09:00–09:30	Registration
09:30–10:00	Welcome speeches / Introduction Sašo Jerše , Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies (3rd Cycle) and Research at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana Rok Stergar , Head of the research program Slovenian History (ARIS) at the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana Ana Cergol Paradiž , Principal Investigator, Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana
10:00–11:00	Keynote lecture Susan Grayzel : Writing the Pregnant Body into the History of Modern War
11:00–11:10	Coffee break
11:10–12:00	War and motherhood Meta Remec : The Dead Who Might Return: Widows and Families in Legal and Emotional Limbo After the First World War Kornelija Ajlec : Reproductive Politics and Public Discourse on Women's Fertility in Slovenia During the Post-World War II Reconstruction Era
12:00–12:20	Coffee break
12:20–13:30	Single mothers Dragica Čeč : Experiences of Motherhood Among Unmarried Mothers, 1780–1840: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Care of Illegitimate Children Dunja Dobaja : Unwed Mothers in the Occupation Legal System in Slovenia 1941–1945 Tanja Buda : When Violence Leads to Separation: Social Work and the Silencing of Perpetrators in Slovenia, 1955–1980
13:30–14:30	Lunch break
14:30–15:20	Demography, politics and ideology Marta Botiková : The Contradictory Nature of Restricted Reproduction from a Historical-Ethnological Perspective Victor Strazzeri : "Motherhood as Social Value": Italian Communist Women's Conception of Motherhood in the 1970s

15:20–15:40	Coffee break
15:40–16:30	<p>Abortion</p> <p>Alena Lochmannová: “<i>Vybánění dítěte</i>” – Abortion Practices, Public Discourse, and Women’s Strategies in Czechoslovakia in the First Half of the 20th Century</p> <p>Ivana Dobrivojević Tomić: From “Assistance that Society Provides” to Women’s Right. Discussions on Abortion in Socialist Yugoslavia</p>
DAY 2: Friday, September 26, 2025	
10:00–11:10	<p>“Unfit” parents and science</p> <p>Martin Kuhar: Eugenics in the Independent State of Croatia</p> <p>Ana Antić: Schizophrenia and Bad Motherhood: Globalising the Diagnosis</p> <p>Shilpi Rajpal: Motherhood and the Mental Hygiene Movement in India</p>
11:10–11:30	Coffee break
11:30–12:40	<p>Childbirth</p> <p>Katarina Keber: The Emergence of Midwives in Carniola within the 19th Century Habsburg Public Healthcare System</p> <p>Lisa Füchte: Giving Birth to the New Soviet Man: Mother and Infant Protection as Biopolitics after the Russian Revolution of 1917</p> <p>Almira Sharafeeva: Pain Relief in Childbirth or Military Strategy? Obstetric Anesthesia as a Soviet Biopolitical Project in the 1930s</p>
12:40–13:40	Lunch break
13:40–14:50	<p>Childcare</p> <p>Nilab Saeedi: Muslim Milk, Jewish Blood: The Case of Milk Kinship in Ottoman Mosul</p> <p>Urška Bratož: A Thin Line Between Survival and Premature Death: On Infant Mortality in Koper (1880–1919)</p> <p>Ganna Zarembo-Kosovych: Reproductive Experiences of Women with Disabilities in Ukraine in the First Quarter of the 21st Century</p>
14:50–15:50	<p>Closing remarks</p> <p>Ana Cergol Paradž, Principal Investigator</p>

ABSTRACTS & AUTHORS

Reproductive Politics and Public Discourse on Women's Fertility in Slovenia During the Post-World War II Reconstruction Era

Armed conflicts profoundly impact fertility through multiple interconnected mechanisms, including psychological stress, nutritional deficiencies, exposure to violence, and socio-economic disruption. These factors can influence fecundity, pregnancy outcomes, and overall demographic patterns. The specific effects of conflict on fertility vary based on the type and duration of the conflict, the forms of violence endured, and the resulting changes in local economic and social structures. This presentation investigates the Slovenian experience during and after World War II. Using fertility and miscarriage statistics, official reports, and contemporary academic resources, the study analyses the reproductive politics and public discourse in the period of reconstruction, spurred on by conflict-induced changes.

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Kornelija Ajlec, PhD, is an associate professor at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts. She is currently engaged in the project *Maternity and Reproductive Politics in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, as well as a bilateral project titled *International Solidarity: Yugoslavia as a Recipient and Donator of Strategic and Humanitarian Aid between 1945 and 1990*. Her fields of research include the history of foreign aid, reconstruction, diplomatic history, history of borders and borderlands, history of welfare and history of the future. She is the editor-in-chief of the academic journal *Retrospektive*, a vice-president of the Historical Association of Slovenia, and Chair of the Department of History at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

Schizophrenia and Bad Motherhood: Globalising the Diagnosis

This paper explores how the concept of good and bad motherhood shaped debates about schizophrenia, its causes and course in the 20th century, and asks why certain qualities of “bad motherhood” attracted so much sustained attention from schizophrenia researchers. Starting in the first half of the 20th century, discussions about schizophrenia and its aetiology were closely linked to parental behaviour, and motherhood in particular. Psychodynamic interpretations of the illness placed the responsibility squarely on mothers’ shoulders, while a number of progressive theories focused on different ways in which mothers’ emotional responses and contradictory messages could cause permanent psychological damage to their children and push them into schizophrenia. The concept of “schizophrenogenic mothers” was extremely influential in mid-20th-century psychoanalytically oriented psychiatry, but was gradually discarded as an overarching paradigm for understanding the condition. However, psychiatric research in the second half of the 20th century, which distanced itself from this paradigm and critiqued its lack of evidentiary basis, still arguably perpetuated some core assumptions from this earlier research. This paper focuses on the concept of expressed emotion in families, which aimed to measure the emotional atmosphere in families of schizophrenic patients across the globe. It analyses how this research produced ideas about good and bad parents, and how an emotionally appropriate motherhood was debated and defined in psychiatric circles in dialogue with broader social and cultural concerns. While the original research on schizophrenogenic mothers was primarily based on Western (British and US) families, expressed emotion researchers went on to apply their methods and concepts more broadly, and their ideas about the relationship between motherhood and schizophrenia rested on a diverse set of assumptions regarding differences between Western and “developing world” mothers and families. The global aspects of expressed emotion research tended to romanticise and idealise parental behaviour and emotional relations in the non-Western world, while their portrayal of highly critical and/or emotionally “overinvolved” mothers in the West continued to be informed by earlier theories about schizophrenogenic mothers (and families).

Ana Antić, PhD, is a social and cultural historian whose research focuses on the history of modern Europe and its global connections, the history of war and violence, and the history of the “psy” sciences. She has authored two monographs, *Therapeutic Fascism: Experiencing the Violence of the Nazi New Order* (OUP 2017), and *Non-aligned Psychiatry in the Cold War* (Palgrave Macmillan 2022), and is currently completing the third one, *Schizophrenia, “Primitivism” and Modernity: Reimagining the twentieth century*. Her research interests revolve around the relationships among psychiatry, politics and violence, as well as the decolonisation of psychiatric practices and concepts in the second half of the 20th century. She is a Professor of European History and Medical Humanities at the University of Copenhagen, where she heads the DNRF Centre for Culture and the Mind, and an ERC-funded project *Decolonising madness: Transcultural psychiatry, international order and the birth of a “global psyche”*.

The Contradictory Nature of Restricted Reproduction from a Historical-Ethnological Perspective

The regulation of fertility and birth rates, recorded by demographic sources and later also by ethnographic research, was strongly manifested in the villages of south-central Slovakia in the 1920s and 1930s. The practice of controlled fertility functioned in entire communities. Historical, religious, cultural and economic conditions created a preference for one offspring within one marriage. Interestingly, none of these four domains alone provides a sufficient explanation for the emergence and persistence of this phenomenon. The earliest reports are found in the homeland literature during the 19th century, although the more significant manifestations do not appear until the first third of the 20th. Narrow reproduction has been demonstrated in several regions of Hungary, and we also have evidence of the practice of “this sinful custom” among the Slovaks in the lowlands of historical Hungary. The sources also vary from ethnography, sociography and demography to popular educational writings.

Although we do not want to explicitly associate constricted reproduction with Protestantism, the data suggest that it occurs among members of the Lutheran and Calvinist denominations. The clergy of these churches, who judged the situation to be a threat to their congregations, were also involved in the propaganda against constricted reproduction. Among the harmful consequences they noted, the demographic and ethnic situation was also pointed out. Birth control is also observed as a manifestation of social and economic changes that temporarily led to the prosperity of individual families.

It will also be useful to challenge the notion that large families represented the general pattern of reproduction in the wider region, against which the single-child model stood out. This argument also touches on the still high infant mortality rate in the first half of the 20th century, and the termination of pregnancies not only within marriage but also in the case of those outside marriage. Changes in family structure, ways of protection against pregnancy,

as well as the enjoyment of the desired family welfare and the possibilities of its economic reproduction are addressed. The contradictory nature of the phenomenon under study has usually already manifested itself within two generations, in depopulation, as well as health consequences for women who have (not) survived unprofessional abortion interventions.

*

PhDr. Marta Botiková, CSc, is a Professor of Ethnology at the Department of Archaeology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava. Her main research interests are family studies, ethnicity, gender studies and visual ethnology. She has lectured at universities in Europe and the US. She is a member of major professional associations and editorial boards. She has published in both Slovak and English, and her personal bibliography has more than 300 entries.

A Thin Line Between Survival and Premature Death: On Infant Mortality in Koper (1880–1919)

This paper will examine infant mortality in Koper across several time periods, from the final decades of the 19th century (when mortality was already decreasing but still remained high) to the period of the First World War. The data will be drawn from death registers and available municipal health reports and, to some extent, compared with information on child mortality in Trieste. Special attention will be given to causes of death in children during their first year of life that could be linked to social status, deprivation, and inadequate nutrition in early childhood. In this context, the broader discourse surrounding bodily care for children (and mothers) will also be examined, particularly the imperatives that, since the late 19th century, emphasised the importance of breastfeeding. The analysis will include recommendations on “good mothering” that appeared in midwifery manuals, popular science and professional publications, as well as didactic literature. One of the paper’s key questions will also be what data on neonatal and postnatal mortality, stillbirths, and similar indicators can tell us about living conditions – even in extraordinary times such as the war years.

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Urška Bratož earned her PhD in 2010 at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska. She works as a research fellow at the Science and Research Centre Koper, within the Institute for Historical Studies. She is the author of a scholarly monograph on cholera outbreaks in northwestern Istria between 1830 and 1890, also published in Italian translation. Her research focuses on the history of medicine and healthcare practices, epidemic diseases, public health prevention, hygienisation, the history of everyday life, social welfare, and other topics within the scope of social and cultural history, with an emphasis on the period from the 19th century to the First World War. Between 2020 and 2024, she led a basic research project (ARIS) titled *Cultural-Historical Aspects of Aging: Experiences, Representations, Identities*, and she is currently heading the Slovenian-Croatian bilateral project *Life Stages and Intergenerational Relations (16th–19th c.)*.

When Violence Leads to Separation: Social Work and the Silencing of Perpetrators in Slovenia, 1955–1980

This paper investigates historical social work responses to domestic violence against women who became single mothers as a consequence of such violence in Slovenia between 1955 and 1980. Drawing on a qualitative archival analysis of more than 30 case files from the Centres for Social Work (CSD), the study examines how welfare institutions engaged with family violence, what forms of support were offered, and – critically – how the perpetrators were (or were not) addressed within administrative procedures.

The central research question is: How did welfare institutions identify and respond to violence against women who became single mothers, and what role did male perpetrators occupy within these processes?

The analysis is based on case records including social work reports, patronage nurse notes, committee decisions, and administrative rulings. These documents provide insights into institutional practices, criteria of assessment, and the gendered allocation of responsibility in cases involving violence.

In most of the reviewed cases, domestic violence was not recognised as the primary issue but was instead recorded indirectly – typically described under broader categories such as “family conflict”, “alcohol abuse”, or “unstable living conditions”. Violence was often first identified by patronage nurses, who observed physical or psychological signs. However, their ability to intervene was limited to reporting, as no formal mechanisms existed for direct institutional action.

Once a case reached the CSD, the institutional focus shifted almost entirely to the mother. Evaluations concentrated on her economic stability, parenting ability, and willingness to cooperate with the institution. The male partner’s role – regardless of abusive behaviour – was generally peripheral or left unaddressed.

In many cases, the perpetrator was not named in the case file, nor considered the subject of any administrative or legal procedure. Where support services

existed, they were directed toward the mother and child – such as referrals to shelters or emergency accommodation. Sanctions or mechanisms of accountability for the perpetrator were not part of the procedural standard. Even in instances involving unacknowledged paternity, unpaid child support, or ongoing abuse, institutional responses were minimal or entirely absent.

These findings reveal a systemic pattern in which the burden of resolution fell overwhelmingly on women, while male perpetrators remained largely invisible within institutional records. This gendered asymmetry was not solely the outcome of individual decision-making, but rather reflected the structural logic of the socialist welfare system. Institutions functioned not only as sites of care provision, but also as spaces where norms of legitimacy, responsibility, and social order were reproduced – often to the detriment of those seeking protection.

By foregrounding the institutional silence surrounding perpetrators, this paper contributes to the historical understanding of how domestic violence was managed – or overlooked – within state systems, and raises critical questions about the gendered dynamics of care and accountability embedded in the social policy frameworks of the time.

*

Tanja Buda is a doctoral researcher at the Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana. Her research focuses on the social history of single motherhood in socialist Slovenia, with particular attention to welfare institutions, gendered norms, and the role of social work. Her dissertation combines archival research with feminist theory to examine how responsibility, legitimacy, and care were distributed within state systems. She has participated in several interdisciplinary research projects addressing gender, care, and social policy in the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav context.

Experiences of Motherhood Among Unmarried Mothers, 1780–1840: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Care of Illegitimate Children

Shame – as an especially intense emotion – and blame as a principle of social control, were deeply gendered in cases of illegitimate pregnancy and the lives of mothers with illegitimate children: although both parents could experience such emotions, women experienced them far more intensely due to the physical realities of pregnancy and childbirth. The same could be applied to mechanisms of social control. These constraints, imaginaries, and social stigmas were, among other things, the consequences of (1) financial limitations faced by (urban) early modern communities, (2) conflicts over family interests, inheritance, and property, and (3) moral attitudes toward extramarital sexuality.

Historians have pointed out both the institutional disciplining of unmarried mothers and the support offered to them and their children. It is clear that unmarried mothers navigated physical and social constraints, intense emotions, social stigma, informal forms of punishment, legal penalties by lower or criminal courts, ecclesiastical punishments, and on the other hand the opportunities offered by various institutional and legal frameworks – as well as social control mechanisms that allowed them to exert pressure on the fathers of their children.

Unmarried mothers should therefore not be viewed merely as “victims” who ended up in extreme poverty, alone and abandoned, as their life experiences were far more complex. At the same time, the social stigma, shame, social control, and punishment to which unmarried mothers and their children were subjected should not be underestimated.

Enlightenment rationalism, with its emphasis on population growth as a political ideal and on freedom of choice and equality, sought – at least on a declarative level – to break with older institutional, legal, and cultural practices associated with illegitimate pregnancies and the care of illegitimate children. Through normative and intentional reforms, it aimed to address the stigma surrounding illegitimate pregnancy, the excessive punishment of unmarried

mothers, and to advocate for financial and institutional support for unmarried pregnant women and their children. These reforms also extended to marriage, property, and inheritance practices.

Yet despite these declared breaks with the past, elements of stigma and even (unconscious) systemic violence toward unmarried mothers and their children persisted.

Changes to the penal system placed even greater pressure on unmarried mothers and pregnant women who did not give birth in hospitals or abandoned their infants in life-threatening conditions. These changes reinforced the mechanisms of social control, surveillance, and punishment. Increasingly, mothers whose illegitimate children died due to premature birth, complications during delivery, or weakness were punished – particularly if they had concealed their pregnancy or childbirth.

The very act of reporting these cases also reveals elements of social responsibility and solidarity toward mothers with illegitimate children during childbirth, the extent of social stigma, and the perceived familial duty of care for such children.

*

Dragica Čeč, PhD, is a Senior Research Fellow at the Science and Research Centre Koper and an Assistant Professor. Her research focuses on the cultural and social perceptions of the life cycle among different social groups, methodological analysis of court records, and protest culture. She studies these topics in the early modern period and the 19th century.

Unwed Mothers in the Occupation Legal System in Slovenia 1941–1945

Based on the occupation legislation and archival sources, this article presents the situation of illegitimate mothers in the context of the Fascist and Nazi social systems in occupied Slovenia. The Nazi occupation authorities also exercised strict control in the area of illegitimate births in order to establish the origin of the parents and the resulting rights. In this respect, the legislation in Ljubljana Province under the Italian occupation system focused primarily on the social rights of illegitimate mothers. In both occupation zones, however, the judicial system provided for the establishment of paternity and the obligations arising therefrom. The paper confirms what has been said with practical examples from archival material that bear witness to everyday life under war-time conditions. Even during the Second World War, unwed mothers struggled to have paternity recognised and to pay maintenance for an illegitimate child. The archival documents show that some paternity proceedings were complicated by the defendant's refusal to acknowledge paternity. The absence of modern methods of proving paternity made it difficult for the defendant to prove paternity. In these cases, witnesses and any letters between the mother and the father of the illegitimate child were important.

*

Dunja Dobaja, PhD in History, was born in 1971 in Ljubljana and completed her studies in history at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. In 2002, she began working at the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana. For several years, she participated in a project compiling a database of war casualties in the territory of the Republic of Slovenia during and immediately after the Second World War. She is currently employed as a researcher with the title of Research Fellow.

Her research focuses on the social and medical history of the interwar period and the Second World War in Slovenia, with a special emphasis on maternal and child welfare, particularly the care of children with special needs. She has

published several academic and professional articles on this topic and has presented her work at scientific conferences.

She is the author of the monograph *For the Well-being of Mothers and Children: Maternal and Child Protection in the Years 1919–1941*, published in 2018 in the series *Razpoznavanja*.

From "Assistance that Society Provides" to Women's Right. Discussions of Abortion in Socialist Yugoslavia

Unlike in many Western countries, Yugoslav women did not have to fight for the right to access abortion or contraception, as the state granted these rights. However, this does not mean that abortion and its legal framework were not subjects of intense debate among state officials, medical professionals, and women's organisations. This paper focuses on these discussions as they unfolded between 1948 and 1974.

In the early postwar years, abortion was not framed as a woman's right to bodily autonomy. Influenced by Soviet interwar policies and practices, abortion in Yugoslavia was initially viewed as a temporary measure, permitted only until the establishment of a fully realised socialist society, at which point the state would assume responsibility for maternal and child welfare.

The first step toward liberalising abortion came in 1952, with the adoption of the Regulation on the Execution of the Allowed and the Completion of a Started Abortion. In the years that followed, although physicians were guided by strict criteria for authorising abortions, harsh living conditions, widespread poverty, and severe housing shortages led approval commissions to adopt more flexible decision-making standards. Nevertheless, this more lenient approach sparked resistance. At the Second Gynaecological Congress in 1953, participants called for stricter enforcement of the abortion regulation, although this then faced a backlash from mass organisations. Vida Tomšič publicly criticised the congress's resolution in the daily newspaper *Borba*. She argued that stricter prosecution reflected "an old, and for a socialist country, wrong and impossible way". Accusing gynaecologists of "double standards" for proposing to punish women but not their partners, she asserted that "comrade doctors" should remain within the realm of medical science and not treat women as "a major threat to the lives of children".

The views expressed in the article largely shaped Yugoslav abortion policy until the adoption of a new regulation in 1960. In an effort to curb illegal abortions, the authorities introduced a new Regulation on the Conditions

and Procedure for Allowing Abortion in February 1960. This recognised social circumstances as sufficient grounds for granting an abortion. Although legislators framed the regulation as “a form of assistance provided by society to a woman” facing difficult social conditions, it was widely interpreted by the public as a broad recognition of abortion as a universal right. The Family Planning Resolution, adopted by the Federal Assembly in April 1969, marked a further step toward full abortion liberalisation. It functioned as both a prelude to legislative change and a national initiative aimed at ensuring that every child born was wanted. The Resolution defined the right of parents to determine the number of children and the spacing between births as one of the “basic human rights”, to be facilitated by access to contraception.

By the late 1960s, Yugoslav society had reached a tentative consensus on family planning, although it did not go unchallenged. Many physicians continued to insist that abortion should be permitted solely on medical grounds. Scepticism also surrounded the use of contraceptives, with some advocating that it be limited to married women or those over the age of 40. The Roman Catholic Church remained resolutely opposed, demanding a total ban on abortion – even for medical reasons – and calling for the inclusion of a “conscience clause” in the law. This clause would allow Catholic medical professionals to abstain from participating in abortion procedures without facing professional repercussions.

Despite these objections, the legislature remained committed to liberalising abortion access. In 1969, Yugoslavia adopted the General Law on Termination of Pregnancy, which allowed for a range of indications – including individual choice – as legitimate grounds for abortion. This trajectory culminated in 1974, when the right to freely decide on the number of children was included in the Yugoslav Constitution.

*

Ivana Dobrivojević Tomić, PhD, is a Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of Contemporary History in Belgrade. She graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, Department of History of Yugoslavia. At the same department, she defended her master’s thesis *Državna represija u doba diktature kralja Aleksandra 1929–1935*, and then earned her doctorate with the topic *Village and city. The transformation of the agrarian society of Serbia 1945–1955*. She deals with research on state repression in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the industrialisation of socialist Yugoslavia, the standard of living of

ordinary people, rural-urban migrations, the life of youth in socialist Yugoslavia and family planning. She has been a visiting researcher at the Imre Kertes College in Jena, the Institute for the Study of the History of Eastern and South-eastern Europe in Regensburg, and the Institute for the History of Eastern and Southeastern Europe in Graz. She is the author of three monographs and over 70 articles published in national and international journals.

Giving Birth to the New Soviet Man: Mother and Infant Protection as Biopolitics after the Russian Revolution of 1917

This contribution explores the new regulations for the protection of mothers and children after the October Revolution as a vehicle for the implementation of Soviet population policy. From a feminist governmentality perspective, it argues for an intersectional view of power relations in order to conceptualise the politics of childbearing as integral for negotiating the connections among race, class and gender. By employing a visual lens and subjecting scientific and popular publications of the Soviet State Department for Mother and Infant Protection (*Ochmatmlad*) founded in early 1918 to a discourse analytical framework, it traces how the production, dissemination and utilisation of knowledge and images about pregnancy, birth, infant care and child rearing contributed to the establishment and ensuing changes of a gendered biopolitical regime. The text traces how giving birth and caring for children were linked to femininity, thereby framing biological motherhood as every woman's duty for the building of socialism. As nothing less than the fate of humanity lay on their shoulders, the Soviet government considered it necessary to teach women proper mothercraft guided by scientific principles to combat superstition and ignorance, thereby fundamentally changing reproductive practices.

For the Soviet state, the protection of the child began in the womb and was considered a central building block for the creation of the New Man. The scientific *Ochmatmlad* debates were influenced by socio-hygienic and eugenic ideas that saw childbearing as the central function of the female body for the preservation of the socialist collective. The department succeeded in positioning itself in the pan-European discourse on demographic decline and framed the protection of mothers and children as a vehicle against the "degeneration" of the national body, which was conceived in increasingly racial terms. With the expansion of the *Ochmatmlad* institutions to the non-Russian territories and republics of national self-administration in the Caucasus and Central Asia, racialised alterity was framed as an indicator of pathological deviations from a standardised norm not only in terms of birth rate and infant mortality, but also

for the prevalence of diseases. The department's modernising impetus gradually accelerated into a racialised civilising and ultimately transformational mission with the goal of erasing difference by applying practice-oriented eugenic concepts and gaining full reproductive control over all women.

*

Lisa Füchte has a professional background in Slavistics, Political Science and history. She graduated from Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich in 2019. From 2020 until 2021, she worked at the Leibniz Institute for Jewish History and Culture – Simon Dubnow in Leipzig as a scientific assistant. Since 2021, she has been a PhD researcher at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of East Central Europe (GWZO) in Leipzig. Her PhD project examines mother and infant protection in the Soviet Union as biopolitics in the period from 1917 until 1937. Her research interests include, but are not limited to, the history of gender, childhood and medicine as well as visual culture and modernity studies.

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Writing the Pregnant Body into the History of Modern War

Pregnant bodies have always figured in the war story, posing problems for war-making entities, especially the modern state. Pregnancy offers the closest equivalent to armed service as a life-risking activity with huge social, communal, and in modernity national, stakes. For those encountering armed forces in zones of invasion, occupation, and battle, as well as in support roles for combatants, the risk/fear of pregnancy and the desire to manage this led to new kinds of state intervention in the lives of pregnant women. While scholars have robustly investigated the rhetorical uses of wartime motherhood, they have paid far less attention to pregnancy itself. What would it mean to put the pregnant body at the centre of a history of modern war, especially the total wars of the first half of the 20th century? How might it change our understanding of the new stakes of armed conflict? To inhabit a pregnant body in wartime was to embody the antithesis of death, but even as concern over what to do with pregnant women became an object of heightened state and cultural concern between 1914–1945, the feelings and sensations of pregnancy in such a fraught time defied easy categorisation. This paper explores these issues by using a series of case studies from the Second World War.

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Susan R. Grayzel, PhD, is a Professor of History at Utah State University, where she researches and teaches modern European history, women's and gender history, the history of the world wars, and war and culture. Her publications in these areas include *Women's Identities at War* (1999) and *At Home and Under Fire* (2012). Her latest books are *The Age of the Gas Mask: How British Civilians Faced the Terrors of Total War* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) and *Women and the First World War* (Longman, 2002; revised second edition, Routledge 2024).

The Emergence of Midwives in Carniola within the 19th Century Habsburg Public Healthcare System

The Habsburg Health Act of 1770 began the process of integrating midwives into healthcare alongside doctors, surgeons and pharmacists. In the Habsburg province of Carniola, women who wished to practise midwifery were also given the opportunity to receive training and practise legally. As part of Maria Theresa's healthcare reforms, a midwifery school was founded in Ljubljana in 1753. Despite the gradual increase in the number of trained midwives in Carniola, by the end of the 19th century the region still had a shortage of these professionals in the Habsburg context. One reason for this was the poor accessibility of the Ljubljana midwifery school for women in rural areas, since midwifery courses in the second half of the 19th century lasted six months. This paper will present a statistical analysis of the number of midwives in Carniola and their integration into the public health system in the 19th century. It will also present the structure of candidates for provincial scholarships in the 1880s, which enabled even the poorest women from peripheral areas of Carniola to attend school and become midwives.

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Katarina Keber, PhD, is a historian at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU). She specialises in the social history of medicine, health, and social conditions between the 18th and 20th centuries. Her research focuses on epidemics, the history of vaccination, the development of public healthcare, the history of hospitals and women in medicine and healthcare professions. She is currently leading the project *Epidemics and Healthcare in Interaction. Epidemics as a Public Health Problem in the Slovenian Territory from Plague Epidemics to the 20th Century* (2021–2025).

KUHAR, Martin

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Eugenics in the Independent State of Croatia

The Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was established in 1941 as a puppet state by the Ustasha regime, allied with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Given the genocide perpetrated against Jews, Roma, and Serbs during the NDH's existence, it is natural to question the extent to which eugenic practices – such as marriage prohibitions, sterilisation, and euthanasia – were present. This presentation will explore the eugenic activities of several physicians involved in such practices during the NDH. It will also examine the rare psycho-anthropological tests conducted, which aimed to establish correlations between physical characteristics and intelligence. A key emphasis of the presentation will be the continuities of eugenic thought in relation to preceding periods. Notably, the most prominent eugenicist during the NDH, Milan Gjukić of the University of Zagreb's School of Medicine, synthesised the eugenic ideas of his predecessors. These included the Slovenian biologist Boris Zarnik and the pioneer of public health, Andrija Štampar. Furthermore, the presentation will investigate the reasons behind the distance that Croatian eugenicists maintained from more radical variants of negative eugenics during this period. Among these reasons were demographic problems of high infant and child mortality, a focus on quantitative rather than qualitative population policy, socioeconomic factors such as the conservatism of the dominant rural population, and the influence of the Catholic Church.

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Martin Kuhar, PhD, is a Senior Research Associate at the Division for the History of Medical Sciences of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. His professional interests include the history of medicine, history of eugenics and medical ethics. He also teaches the philosophy of medicine at the School of Medicine, Catholic University of Croatia.

"Vyhánění dítěte" – Abortion Practices, Public Discourse, and Women's Strategies in Czechoslovakia in the First Half of the 20th Century

The phenomenon of abortion, frequently referred to as "*vyhánění dítěte*" in contemporary sources, constituted a legally proscribed yet socio-culturally entrenched reproductive practice in Czechoslovakia during the first half of the 20th century. Despite its formal criminalisation under successive legal codifications, abortion persisted as a clandestine yet widespread intervention, shaped by intersecting socio-economic determinants, medico-legal discourses, and state-enforced reproductive policies. While legislative frameworks classified abortion as a prosecutable offense, the implementation of punitive measures was frequently inconsistent, revealing a complex negotiation between judicial enforcement, medical complicity, and extralegal reproductive strategies employed by women. The discursive landscape surrounding abortion was contested, with medical professionals, legal theorists, and social commentators advancing divergent narratives informed by religious morality, evolving bioethical principles, and emergent discourses on population management and national health.

This study adopts a multidisciplinary historiographical approach, integrating legal hermeneutics, medical epistemology, and gendered socio-historical analysis to examine the interplay between institutionalised reproductive control and women's agency in navigating reproductive constraints. Through a critical examination of juridical records, medical periodicals, forensic case studies, and public discourse, this research reconstructs the material realities of abortion practices and their broader societal implications. The analysis foregrounds the methodological plurality of abortion induction techniques, encompassing phytotherapeutic abortifacients, mechanical interventions, and physician-supervised procedures, while interrogating the liminal positioning of midwives and underground practitioners as both facilitators and enforcers of reproductive discipline.

Furthermore, this study interrogates the ideological constructions of abortion

within interwar public discourse, wherein competing frameworks of medicalisation, criminalisation, and maternalist rhetoric intersected with state-driven demographic imperatives. While segments of the medical community advocated for controlled access to abortion under strictly regulated conditions, pronatalist policies and conservative socio-political currents sought to reassert reproductive governance over the female body. Women's testimonies, juridical proceedings, and medico-legal deliberations illustrate the inherent dissonance between prescriptive legal codes and the lived reproductive realities of those compelled to circumvent institutional constraints.

By situating the Czechoslovak case within a broader Central European reproductive paradigm, this research contributes to historiographical debates on biopolitical regulation, gendered governance, and the contested terrain of reproductive autonomy. The findings underscore that abortion was not merely a medico-legal or bioethical issue, but a profoundly politicised phenomenon, reflective of entrenched struggles over bodily sovereignty, state interventionism, and the dialectical negotiation of reproductive agency in a modernising society.

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Alena Lochmannová, PhD et PhD, is a Czech ethnologist and researcher at the Faculty of Medicine, Charles University. She holds two doctoral degrees – one in Ethnology from Charles University and another in Industrial Engineering from the University of West Bohemia. Her research focuses on medical anthropology, body modifications, pregnancy, and childbirth from anthropological and cultural-sociological perspectives. She explores how different cultures and individuals perceive and practice bodily changes and reproductive processes in various historical and social contexts. Additionally, her work examines perinatal loss, women's perinatal health, and the phenomenology of suicide. Through an interdisciplinary approach, she seeks to provide deeper insights into the interplay among culture, medicine, and human experience.

The Dead Who Might Return: Widows and Families in Legal and Emotional Limbo After the First World War

This paper examines the profound disruptions to family life and intimate relationships brought about by the First World War and its immediate aftermath. Drawing extensively on judicial sources – including inheritance proceedings, petitions for declarations of death, and marriage annulment cases – it investigates how women navigated the uncertain legal and social terrain left in the wake of war-related absences, deaths, and disappearances.

The historiographical concept of a “fatherless society” has often been used to describe this period, emphasising both the physical absence of men – many of whom had been conscripted, killed, or gone missing – and the symbolic displacement of masculine authority. Men who remained on the home front were often viewed with suspicion or contempt, while women assumed new, often burdensome roles within their families and communities. They became the primary caretakers of children and the managers of farms and households, struggling to maintain continuity in a world that had lost its social and legal anchors. For women whose husbands were confirmed dead, the transition, though emotionally traumatic, was at least legally navigable. But for the many whose husbands had disappeared without a trace, the situation was far more complex. Legal proceedings to declare a missing man dead could only begin after a set period had passed since the last contact, and even then required considerable time, expense, and effort. Women were expected to prove that they had made exhaustive efforts to locate their husbands, that their marriages had been stable, and that they would not have voluntarily abandoned them. Testimonies from eyewitnesses who had seen the husband dead were crucial, but often impossible to obtain.

Even when successful, such legal declarations did not automatically grant women full control over family property. Nor could they remarry unless the original marriage was also formally annulled – an additional bureaucratic hurdle. Many women and their children thus remained trapped in legal limbo

for years. In this fragile legal and social position, entering new relationships – especially those resulting in children born out of wedlock – exposed women to stigma, gossip, and, at times, outright violence, particularly from their absent husbands' families, who felt compelled to defend the honour and social standing of the missing men.

While rare, some men did in fact return, especially from Russian POW camps, years or even a decade after their last contact with their families. These unexpected returns often led to social conflict, estrangement, and sometimes violence.

By grounding its analysis in court records, this study sheds light on the entanglement of legal institutions, gender norms, and postwar uncertainty, and highlights the ways in which women bore the structural and emotional burdens of wartime rupture long after the armistice.

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Meta Remec, PhD, is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana. She is the author of two scholarly monographs, which examine hygiene and sanitation in the bourgeois era, as well as attitudes toward food, alcohol, tobacco, and sexuality in the long 19th century. She has also published several academic articles.

Her research spans a variety of topics, including the socio-economic issues of rural Slovenia in the 19th and 20th centuries, the history of advertising and consumer culture, bilingualism and national conflicts in the ethnically mixed Slovene-Italian borderland at the turn of the 20th century, and the issue of rape and sexual violence during the First World War.

She is currently leading the research project *Sin, Shame, Symptom: Suicide and its Perceptions in Slovenia (1850–2000)*.

SAEEDI, Nilab

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Muslim Milk, Jewish Blood: The Case of Milk Kinship in Ottoman Mosul

In May 1905, the Ottoman judicial court in Mosul faced a deeply contentious case centred on a Jewish boy who had been sent to a Muslim wet nurse after his mother was unable to breastfeed him. When the child's family attempted to reclaim him, local Muslim religious leaders and community members opposed the return, arguing that breastfeeding by a Muslim woman established a religious and legal bond, effectively rendering the child Muslim. This dispute then rose to the Ottoman court in Istanbul, revealing the complex intersections of wet nursing, religion, and legal authority.

Wet nursing holds significant importance in Islam, as it is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an and creates a recognised bond (*radā'a*) between the child and the wet nurse, which carries both religious and legal consequences. Drawing exclusively on four archival documents from the Ottoman Imperial Archives (BOA), this paper examines the practice of wet nursing within the Islamic legal and religious context of the Ottoman Empire. It explores how motherhood was intricately linked to religion and identity, with wet nursing creating bonds that challenged conventional understandings of family and belonging. Through a close analysis of these documents, the study highlights the ambiguous legal status of wet nursing and its profound implications for religious identity and maternal rights in a multi-ethnic imperial setting.

By focusing on this single, emblematic case, the paper offers a detailed investigation into how reproductive practices were socially and legally constructed within the framework of Islamic law, shedding light on broader questions of motherhood, religious identity, and authority in the late Ottoman period.

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Nilab Saeedi holds a PhD in History from Ibn Haldun University (2025), where her dissertation on Islamic intellectual history was awarded "Best Doctoral Thesis of the Year". She also earned an MA in Turkish Literature and a BA in

Linguistics. Since 2023, she has been working as a Research Associate at the Institute of Habsburg and Balkan Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences. Her research focuses on early modern Ottoman history, Persian historiography, and Islamic thought. She also serves as a contributing editor for the *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Her first book, *Three Empires and Persian Historiography: The Thought of Muṣliḥ al-Dīn Lārī*, will be published by Routledge in January 2026.

Pain Relief in Childbirth or Military Strategy? Obstetric Anaesthesia as a Soviet Biopolitical Project in the 1930s

In the mid-1930s, the Soviet government launched an ambitious campaign to introduce obstetric anaesthesia, officially proclaimed at the IX Congress of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in 1935. Promoted as a means of ensuring “joyful motherhood”, this initiative was framed as a progressive step in socialist medicine. Pamphlets, medical journals, and literary publications disseminated the idea that childbirth should be painless, portraying anaesthesia as both scientifically advanced and ideologically necessary.

However, this campaign was not solely motivated by concern for women’s well-being. This paper argues that obstetric anaesthesia was part of a broader biopolitical strategy aimed at standardising medical interventions and asserting state control over reproduction. In medical discourse, labour pain was not merely a physiological phenomenon but a disciplinary issue requiring systematic intervention. Doctors perceived women’s responses to pain as irrational and sought to suppress their autonomy during childbirth. Many aesthetic methods involved rendering women unconscious, transforming them into passive subjects of medical procedures.

Furthermore, the campaign had a concealed military dimension. Soviet health-care officials emphasised the need to develop a universal, inexpensive, and easily applicable anaesthetic method – not just for childbirth, but for wartime surgery and battlefield medicine. Archival records reveal that obstetric anaesthesia research was closely linked to military medical planning, with Soviet doctors explicitly discussing its relevance for treating wounded soldiers.

Using discourse analysis and drawing on archival materials from the People’s Commissariat of Health, Soviet medical journals, and public health pamphlets, this paper examines medical debates, state policies, and clinical practices to situate the Soviet campaign for childbirth anaesthesia within a broader framework of biopolitical control and wartime preparedness. It reveals how women’s bodies became testing grounds for larger medical and

political experiments, exposing the contradictions at the heart of “Stalinist humanism”.

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Almira Sharafееva received an undergraduate degree in History from the Kazan Federal University in 2018, and an MA in History from the Higher School of Economics in Moscow in 2022. She is currently a PhD student at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. A Fellow of the Gerda Henkel Foundation, her current research focuses on the concept of “women’s health” in early Soviet biopolitics, with a particular interest in the history of medicine, gender, and social history. This research attempts to trace the nature and main trends of the process of objectifying women’s health in the Soviet Union, as well as its transformation into a political and social tool. She addresses the concept of “women’s health” in the biopolitics of the early Soviet period as part of the process of establishing disciplinary practices and incorporating the population “into more economical and efficient systems of control”. In this study, she focuses on the ways in which doctors, hygienists, obstetricians and gynaecologists, as well as representatives of the Soviet authorities, talked about women’s health. What did they understand by women’s health, and who were the experts on women’s health? She was also interested in how women’s health issues, which were considered “shameful”, were moved from the private to the public sphere, and how these global processes in Soviet medicine affected the lives and health of Soviet women.

Motherhood and the Mental Hygiene Movement in India

Indeed, it is now a well-established fact that the most serious disturbances in mental life are undoubtably associated with severe deprivations in the suckling period.

Owen A. Berkeley Hill

Motherhood and childhood experienced medicalisation by the beginning of 20th century.

Motherhood was constructed in light of the new paradigm called “mothercraft”. Advice on breastfeeding and infant care was influenced by the New Zealand physician Truby King, who advocated medical supervision by nurses, doctors and, above all, clocks. Feeding by the clock became indispensable to the infant care. King worked as the medical superintendent of the mental hospital of Seacliff Mental Asylum, and was deeply concerned with the racial degeneration. The belief was that a lack of regularity can cause imbecility and epilepsy. Historians have argued that child welfare propaganda frequently deployed the widely “pervasive doctrine of maternal ignorance” to demand the education of “ignorant” mothers, often blamed for creating “houses of illness”. This propaganda was highly racial and colonial in nature. With the rise of scientific motherhood in the metropolis, Indian mothers were targeted as ignorant and incapable of taking care of their children.

The 20th century was a period of reimagining the gendered roles, and endorsements often came from psychiatrists. Banarasi Das was the superintendent in charge of the Agra Mental Hospital. Das provided a psychiatric survey of life in which he addressed and discussed a psychiatrist’s approach to “how to live a balanced life”. The mental hygiene movement was a didactic programme of teaching the public the ways of healthy living. The paper discusses how the fear of “unruly” women who could become “disobedient wives” and “wicked mothers”, and thus incapable of being ideal mothers/homemakers, was present in the discourse of hygienists.

Shilpi Rajpal, PhD, is primarily a social historian of psychiatry at the Centre for Culture and the Mind at the Department of English, Germanic and Romance Studies at the University of Copenhagen. Her project *Decolonising the Mind: Birth of the Global Mental Health Movement in India, 1920-1980s* traces the local, national and global histories of psychiatry in colonial and post-colonial India. Her book *Curing Madness? A Social and Cultural History of Insanity in North India, 1800-1950s* was published in 2020 by Oxford University Press. It focuses on both institutional and non-institutional histories of madness in colonial North India. In her work, the terms “madness” and “cure” are explored as shifting categories, which travelled across cultural, medical, national, and regional boundaries, thereby moving beyond asylum-centric histories.

STRAZZERI, Victor

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"Motherhood as Social Value": Italian Communist Women's Conception of Motherhood in the 1970s

To the women activists of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), and the majority communist but fairly autonomous Union of Italian Women (UDI), motherhood was a strategic concept during the reproductive and gender equality struggles that marked Italy in the 1970s. Framed through the banners of a "free and responsible motherhood" and "motherhood as social value" they aimed to both guarantee women's right to choose but also to overcome notions of family-making as a strictly private matter. Mostly overlooked in historical treatments of Italian women's struggles after 1968, the paper reconstructs that understanding of motherhood and considers its value as a resource for ongoing struggles for reproductive rights. More specifically, it examines how Italian communist women activists' understanding of motherhood and reproduction shifted during the 1970s as a result of 1) their reception of feminist debates, and 2) due to a wide-ranging survey on motherhood, sexuality and abortion led by the UDI which canvassed some 30,000 women in 1976 and 1977. The resulting study, published under the title *Sesso Amaro (Bitter Sex)* in book form in 1977, provides precious insights into how women of various backgrounds throughout Italy experienced reproduction and sexuality. It is also a window into the strategies (and contradictions) of the Italian communist movement and its allies within a contested reproductive sphere.

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Victor Strazzeri, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana (MSCA Fellowship; REDFEM; 2025–2027). His research examines the relationship between communist party politics and the feminist movement in the 1970s across several contexts, mainly Italy, Spain and Brazil. On these topics he has published the papers "Beyond the Double Blind Spot: Relocating Communist Women as Transgressive Subjects in Contemporary Historiography" (*Gender and History*, 2022) and "The Interweaving: Communist Women and Feminism in 1970s Italy" (*Contemporary European*

History, 2023). These were the result of postdoctoral fellowships at the Universities of Berne (2017–2019) and Geneva (2020–2021) and a residency at the Swiss Institute in Rome (2020–2021). More recently, he was a Postdoctoral Fellow in Social Sciences at the Federal University of São Paulo (2023–2025), which included stays at the University of Alicante (April 2024), the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana (June–July 2024) and at IFK – International Research Center for Cultural Studies in Vienna, where he was a Research Fellow (March–June 2025).

Reproductive Experiences of Women with Disabilities in Ukraine in the First Quarter of the 21st Century

This presentation draws on the initial findings of a qualitative research project conducted between December 2024 and April 2025. The study explores the reproductive experiences of women with disabilities in Ukraine, focusing on two interrelated analytical categories: (1) medicalisation – experienced in a dual form due to both pregnancy/childbirth and disability – and (2) stigmatisation. The analysis highlights how these processes generate intersecting barriers, including educational, economic, physical, social, psychological, and institutional obstacles.

The empirical basis of the study consists of semi-structured interviews with 14 women with diverse disabilities, including physical, visual, hearing, and mental disabilities. Given the challenges in accessing participants with intellectual disabilities, the study also includes two expert interviews with human rights advocates working in the field of intellectual disability.

The presentation examines the lived experiences of control, pressure, and institutional regulation that women with disabilities encounter in relation to pregnancy and childbirth. Simultaneously, it analyses the “special” attitudes displayed by medical professionals towards pregnant women with disabilities, often marked by paternalism and ambivalence.

Particular attention will be given to the barriers faced during pregnancy, childbirth, and the early stages of motherhood. The presentation concludes with reflections on how reproductive experiences shape gender identity and foster practices of solidarity among women with and without disabilities.

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Hanna Zaremba-Kosovych holds a PhD in Sociology and is a Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Social Anthropology at the Ethnology Institute,

National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. She was a research analyst in the projects: *WARPATH: stories of the rescue of people with disabilities during the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine*, *Art for all: the situation with observance for the cultural rights of people with disabilities in Ukraine*, *You can believe: the history of people with disabilities from 1945 to 2020 (Germany, Ukraine)*, and *Be the first: stories of civil activists for the rights of people with disabilities due to intellectual disabilities in Ukraine in the 1990s*, among others. She is also the co-author of the book *History Is Not Without Us: The formation of the movement for the rights of people with disabilities in Ukraine* (in Ukrainian). Her research interests include social (in)justice, disability studies, and intellectual disability studies.

Motherhood and Reproductive Politics in the 19th and 20th Centuries

From a historical perspective, the project addresses the topic of motherhood and analyses the development of various, closely intertwined and overlapping issues that can be placed within the framework of the concept of reproductive politics. Covering the period from the early 19th century to the late 20th, which witnessed revolutionary changes in this field, it comprehensively addresses the themes of motherhood, abortion, contraception, eugenics, and infertility. Geographically, it focuses on the territory of present-day Slovenia, while also considering these phenomena from a transnational perspective.

By analysing institutional development, changing legislation, discourse, and social norms and cultural representations related to reproductive issues and motherhood on the one hand, and the private strategies of the reproductive practices of individuals on the other, the project sheds light on both the public and private aspects of reproductive questions. Acknowledging that reproductive experiences, even from a synchronic perspective, are multifaceted and highly dependent on social, generational, ethnic, racial, class, and religious backgrounds, as well as sexual orientation and identity, the research also employs an intersectional approach.

Because of its use of multiple approaches (public and private perspectives, intersectionality, transnationality), and in view of the most significant historiographical gaps in Slovenian scholarship, the project addresses the subject primarily within the following problem areas:

- the cultural and social capital of unmarried mothers in the 19th century;
- the medicalisation of childbirth (midwifery, the first maternity hospitals) up to the First World War;
- a fatherless society under the specific circumstances of the First World War;
- health, social, and legal protection of motherhood after the First World War;
- representations of the reproductive body during the Second World War;

- the experience of abortion from the end of the First World War to the 1970s;
- abortion providers;
- the promotion and legalisation of abortion and contraception from the late 19th century to the 1970s;
- reproductive and abortion-related migration between Italy and Yugoslavia in the 1970s;
- the decline of eugenics after the Second World War;
- ideologies and representations of motherhood (and fatherhood) in parenting manuals, memoirs, and art;
- the social protection of working mothers (legislation and practices related to maternity leave) from the 1880s to the late 20th century;
- the history of infertility from the early 19th century to the late 1990s.

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