

Laura Lee Downs

European University Institute (Florence)

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES A BORDER
MAKE? WORKING WOMEN AND
MIXED ECONOMIES OF WELFARE IN
EUROPEAN BORDERLANDS 1900-1980

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Teacher in Italia Redenta's preschool in Puntamica giving her young pupils a lesson in personal hygiene. © Archivio Civico Museo di Storia Patria - ONAIRC

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Laura Lee Downs is Professor in the Department of History and Civilization at the European University Institute in Florence and Directrice d'études at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, where she holds the chair 'La Gestion sociale: France-Angleterre, XXe siècle.' She is the author, for example, of *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender division in the French and British metalworking industries, 1914-1939* (Ithaca & London, 1995), which won the Pinckney Prize for the best book in French History written by a North American; *Childhood in the Promised Land: Working-class movements and the colonies de vacances in France, 1880-1960* (Durham & London, 2002); *Writing Gender History* (3rd edition, revised and expanded, forthcoming, London, 2025). In March 2020, Prof. Downs received an ERC Advanced Grant for her project "Social Politics in European Borderlands, 1870s-1990s: A Comparative and Transnational Study" (Sociobord).

What Difference Does a Border Make?

The keynote opens with a brief presentation of a special issue in the making on Working women and mixed economies of welfare in European borderlands 1900-1980s, which emerges from the ERC Advanced Grant project "Social Politics in European Borderlands, 1870s-1990s: A Comparative and Transnational Analysis" (SOCIOBORD). The project initiates a dialogue between gender, welfare, and borderland studies by exploring welfare provision for working-class women in four European border regions: the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands, the Franco-Belgian borderlands, the Italian-French-Swiss border region, and the Alps-Donau-Adria border region. Laura Lee Downs' case study focuses on social welfare schemes for preschool teachers in Italy's Northeastern Borderlands, 1920-1940. Preschools were a vital source of basic welfare to needy children in these impoverished lands, and the teachers were the providers of these social services. But who looked after the well-being of these young women whose job was to provide education and socio-medical care to the region's children? The lecture explores the fate of some 250 young women who were sent to remote villages along the Italo-Yugoslav frontier, where they struggled to accomplish their mission under difficult conditions. Analyzing these conditions will allow us to evaluate the teachers' welfare needs, to understand how their needs were shaped by the border, and how those needs were (or were not) met by their employer.

Organisation

Ana Kladnik (Soziologie/Gender Studies), Heidrun Zettelbauer (Kultur- und Geschlechtergeschichte), Katharina Scharf (Cluster Gender/HuK)

Contact

ana.kladnik@uni-graz.at

Online Participation:

<https://unimeet.uni-graz.at/b/sch-zxk-gm8-nkt>



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