

A woman wearing a headscarf and glasses, smiling slightly, in a crowd. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent brown filter.

Labour Migration between East and West

Guest Workers in Europe from
the 1960s to the 1980s

27-28/2/2018



**ústav pro studium
totalitních režimů**

CWRG

Cold War Research Group
Institute for the Study of Strategic Regions
Charles University

Programme

Tuesday, February 27, 2018

Place: Hadovka Office Park, Evropská 2588/33c, Praha 6.

10:00 – 10:15

Introduction

10:15 – 12:30 1st session

Marcia C. Schenk (Humboldt University Berlin)

Mozambican and Angolan Guest Workers in East Germany? The Working Life of African Worker-Trainees in the German Democratic Republic 1979–1990

Alena K. Alamgir (University of Leipzig – University of Exeter)

The Hostel, the Pub, and the Prison: Vietnamese and Cuban Workers in 1980s Czechoslovakia

Bálint Tolmar (University of Exeter)

Performing 'Cubanness': Racialized Perceptions of Migrant Workers in Late-Socialist Hungary

12:45 – 13:45

Lunch

14:00 – 16:15 2nd session

Ljubica Spaskovska (University of Exeter)

Building a Better World? International Construction, Labour mobility and the Pursuit of Collective Self-Reliance in the 'Global South,' 1950–1990

Sara Bernard (University of Glasgow)

Migration, Internationalism and Domestic Cooperation on Economic Development (in Socialist Yugoslavia)

Karolina Novinščak Kölker (University of Regensburg)

Boon and Bane: Transnational Migrant Networks between Yugoslav Exceptionalism and the German Political Self-Description of Being a Non-Immigration Country

Coffee break

16:30 – 18:00 3rd session

Francesca Rolandi (University of Rijeka)

At the Crossroad of Different Migration Paths: Refugee Issues and Labour Migration in Socialist Yugoslavia

Vladimir Ivanović (Humboldt University Berlin)

The Yugoslav Factories of the Good Taste: The Yugoslav Restaurants in the Federal Republic of Germany

Dinner

Wednesday, February 28, 2018

Place: Hadovka Office Park, Evropská 2588/33c, Praha 6

10:00 – 11:30 4th session

Ondřej Klípa (Charles University Prague, Faculty of Social Sciences)

Labour Migration within the Soviet Bloc: Polish Workers in Czechoslovakia and the GDR

Ondřej Vojtěchovský (ÚSTR – Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Arts)

„Our Workers Temporarily Employed“ in the Socialist Czechoslovakia. Yugoslav Workers in the ČSSR, 1969–1989.

Coffee break

12:00 – 13:30 5th session

Discussion

Lunch

Alena K. Alamgir

The Hostel, the Pub, and the Prison: Vietnamese and Cuban Workers in 1980s Czechoslovakia

In this paper, I analyze dossiers of 43 criminal cases, amounting to some 4,200 pages of text altogether, in which foreign workers in 1980s Czechoslovakia in the 1980s figured as suspects. I use the dossiers as a source of information about the lives of the migrant workers. The source material may seem like an odd choice for gathering information about day-to-day lives, however, in a situation when direct ethnography is impossible (lest one had a time machine), these files turn out to be an interesting and valuable data source. This is because during the investigations, all sorts of details were treated as potentially pertinent and thus large amounts of information were gathered, and as a result, the files become now, some 30 years later, windows into the lives of people touched by the investigations, not just the accused and the victims but also their friends, acquaintances, and larger social circles.

Most – 30 – of the cases, feature Vietnamese suspects; 13 revolve around alleged perpetrators who were Cuban, and three include Poles. The cases range from heartbreakingly tragic (stabbing to death of a roommate in the moment of rage, a suicide) through mundane (theft of costume jewelry, pushing onto the ground of a bus ticket inspector by a free rider, run-of-the-mill pub tiffs), to the almost amusing (an attempted theft of 50 kg of vitamin C to give out to friends that was uncovered before it was even truly carried out).

I structure the analysis around three spaces. Two of them appear to have been among the most salient for the experiences of foreign workers in state-socialist Czechoslovakia: the hostels in which they lived and (beer) pubs, in which many spent considerable amounts of time when not working. And a third space, one that most did not come in contact with but a space that, nonetheless, offers us important glimpses into (at least some of) the workers' Czechoslovak experience: prisons.

My analysis focuses on several aspects of the day-to-day lives of overseas migrant workers' in state-socialist Czechoslovakia: the degree to which the workers were subjects to surveillance, the racial politics and tensions in the pubs and the manner in which these were understood by the courts and the Czechoslovak justice system, as well as, using letters to and from prison, the relationships within the Vietnamese workers' groups, their relationships with the members of local population in Czechoslovakia, as well as their relationships with their families back in Vietnam.

Sara Bernard

Migration, Internationalism and Domestic Cooperation on Economic Development

The temporary employment of Yugoslav citizens in Western countries was one of the most important migration phenomena in socialist Yugoslavia. In the early 1970s one in every four Yugoslavs employed outside agriculture and craft work was a Gastarbeiter. Legalised in 1963, the temporary employment abroad made Yugoslavia an exceptional case since no other socialist country in Cold War Europe allowed its citizens to work in the capitalist west. Yet, in spite of the Yugoslav leadership's commitment to the return and reintegration of its migrant workers, Yugoslav migration policies were much more successful in sending migrants abroad than in reintegrating them in the Yugoslav socio-economic system. This weakness of Yugoslav migration policies was of great consequence to the whole conception of the Yugoslav system as a federal and socialist experiment. This is because return migration revealed a number of unsolved dilemmas between economic needs and ideological principles that temporary employment abroad had served to exacerbate.

My contribution will focus on some of these dilemmas and ambivalences. It will elaborate on the relevance of external migration to understanding Yugoslav internationalism on the one hand, and domestic cooperation on economic development on the other. In doing so it will draw some conclusions which propose starting points for further research on the study of Yugoslav migration which have been disregarded so far.

Vladimir Ivanović

The Yugoslav factories of the good taste: The Yugoslav restaurants in Federal Republic of Germany

This article try to spread light of other aspect of the migrant history. The history of Yugoslav labor migration is viewed through the lenses of the food history. The Yugoslav labor migrants` history restaurants in the FR Germany and Austria, their migrant history, the emerge of the „Yugoslav kitchen“, general framework and transnational connections make thorough the food are in the focus of this article. These restaurants are represented in terms of representation of Yugoslavia in the minds of local population and of labor migrants themselves.

The research was conducted on life course interviews, oral history, press, visual sources and partly also on written documents. The aim of this article is to provide answers to how the Yugoslav cuisine came about, who created it, how the Yugoslav restaurants were opening and multiplying, what can be said about typical Yugoslav cuisine, diet, and dishes based on a menu in a Yugoslav restaurant. It also tries to explain a sharp decline of their number today and the present day perception of Yugoslav cuisine.

Ondřej Klípa

Labor migration within the Soviet Bloc: Polish workers in Czechoslovakia and the GDR

In my paper, I will focus on female migrant workers from Poland who were employed in Czechoslovakia and the GDR on conditions of intergovernmental agreements from 1960s to 1980s. I will focus on similarities and differences between the “co-operation in labor forces”, i.e. the employment program within the Soviet bloc, and guest worker programs in open market economies of the West. I will also look at the differences between the two receiving states that employed Polish workers. In both perspectives I will analyze the role of the “market forces” as well as some specific phenomena of states socialism, namely the shortage of labor and goods, the long-term economic plans, and a strict border regime, as the driving forces of the studied employment program. Among the questions I wish to answer are following: Why was East Germany more economically attractive for the Polish workers? And why Czechoslovakia employed significantly more of the Polish workers despite lower economic incentives?

Karolina Novinščak Kölker

Boon and bane: Transnational migrant networks between yugoslav exceptionalism and the german political self-description of being a non-immigration country

The freedom of travel and labour migration were prominent markers of socialist Yugoslavia and the most obvious proof that Titos communist regime did not fit the paradigm of an isolated totalitarian system. Still the regime of SFR Yugoslavia tried to control its citizens abroad by various, even constitutionally doubtful means. Moreover the state of origin started to support the maintenance of transnational networks of labour-migrants, as remittances were a huge source of income in the Yugoslavian economy.

The german host country, that in the war and postwar period got a second homeland for refugees and anti-communist political exiles who had fled from the Tito regime, welcomed the transnational migration-policy of Yugoslavia targeting on labour migrants, not least due to the political assumption that the guest workers stay would be of temporary nature and Germany would stay a „non-immigration country“.

In this paper I will discuss the evolvment of transnational networks of migrants between socialist Yugoslavia and the „non-immigration country“ Germany against the background of bilateral relations, ideological presumptions, the legal and social status of the migrants and their various and entangled groups, by presenting some of the findings of my PhD project that examines the history of immigration and transnational networks of political and labour migrants from Croatia in Munich since WW II until the present.

Francesca Rolandi

At the Crossroad of Different Migration Paths: Refugee Issues and Labor Migration in Socialist Yugoslavia

Despite the fact that international scholarship has focused primarily on the unique attitude of socialist Yugoslavia toward external labor migration, legalized in the early 1960s, the Yugoslav Federation participated in other different flows that characterized Cold War Europe.

The 1951 Convention on the status of refugees impacted Yugoslavia doubly. First, the Yugoslav citizens – especially until the mid 1960s – availed themselves of the right to claim asylum in neighboring Italy and Austria, waiting to be either resettled by the relief agencies or to reach the countries in need of labor (in particular the Federal Republic of Germany), dropping their status as asylum seekers and turning into economic migrants. Moreover, as the only socialist country which joined the 1951 Refugee on the status of refugees, it acted as a springboard for citizens of the Soviet bloc countries, eager to claim asylum in the West. Despite involving low numbers – both the Yugoslav asylum seekers abroad and Eastern European fleeing through Yugoslavia were a few thousands every year – these phenomena can provide us with an insight into the ambiguous and multifaceted role that Yugoslavia played in refugee and migration flows during the Cold War. Furthermore, this case study allows us to investigate wider dynamics such as the process of categorization of refugees and migrants and the impact of international and bilateral relations on the refugee regime.

Marcia Schenck

Mozambican and Angolan Guest Workers in East Germany? The Working Life of African worker-trainees in the German Democratic Republic 1979 – 1990.

This paper examines two particular movements of labor migration in the socialist world, namely blue-collar contract labor from Angola and Mozambique to the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) between 1979 – 1990. Both Angola and Mozambique were priority-trading partners of the GDR. In this context, agreements governing exchanges of people, goods, capital, knowledge and technology wove a tight net between the geographically distant countries. This contract labor program was as much destined to assuage East German labor needs as it was meant to contribute to the socialist development of these African states through providing skilled manpower for the industrialization of both economies. The paper first asks whether, and in what way, the contract laborers can be considered African guest laborers to East Germany.

Next, rather than focusing on the inter-government level, this paper draws on the diverging memories emerging from 268 life history interviews with returned former Angolan and Mozambican laborers. It explores how they remember their every day work routine, what place they accorded to the meaning of work in their lives, and how they came to identify as blue color workers, and identity they upheld long after their re-integration in Mozambique's and Angola's informal economies.

Ljubica Spaskovska

Building a better world? – international construction, labour mobility and the pursuit of collective self-reliance in the 'global South', 1950-1990

With the onset of decolonisation, the newly independent and non-aligned countries forged transnational alliances within the United Nations that have represented the collective interests of the developing world in the realm of economic cooperation and development for more than fifty years. This paper situates Yugoslavia's global role and its labour force mobility in the Global South within a broader story about economic and technical cooperation in the non-aligned world, the project of 'collective self-reliance', and the endeavour to 'democratise' international economic relations. These occurred within a framework of nesting hierarchies, both at the global and at domestic level and they were not directed at a radical transformation of the existing 'transnationalised economy'. Rather, Yugoslavia and its non-aligned partners strove to redefine the nature of the economic relations/hierarchies in place and their initiatives reflected an aspiration to partake in the international division of labour and economic exchange as equal partners. The paper also addresses the specificities of the migrant labour experience that accompanied these

projects, with workers internalising some of the postulates of socialist self-management and Yugoslav construction companies acting as vehicles for the export of the self-managing welfare state abroad.

Bálint Tolmar

Performing ‘Cubanness’: Racialized Perceptions of Migrant Workers in Late-Socialist Hungary

Joining a series of studies on overseas labour migration to European COMECON countries, this paper asks how racialized thinking was operating under a state-socialist regime that ubiquitously endorsed the idea of internationalist solidarity with developing nations. The case study of the training and employment of predominantly female Cuban temporary workers in the Hungarian textile industry offers an analysis of processes of othering, orientalism and xenophobia in the era of ‘socialist disintegration’. Although many have noted the rise of both symbolic and actual forms of racism in late-socialist societies, few addressed this in terms of a dynamic interaction between multiple actors in the creation of intersecting hierarchies of race and gender.

This paper demonstrates that by the late 1980s, no longer was erotic Cuban multicultural femininity and white masculine heroism used to embody the ideas of the Cuban revolution and to entice Hungarians into a warm if distant embrace of the ‘free island of the Americas’. Rather, ‘Cubanness’ – the perceived mentality of a multiracial Caribbean nation – was recast through the values of an emerging global order in which migrant workforce became a byword for the ineffectiveness of socialist economic cooperation. Conversely, the Cuban diplomatic corps tended to regard Hungary’s market-socialist reforms as the breeding ground for capitalist tendencies and attempted to preserve the proper ‘socialist consciousness’ of their citizens. Focussing on the micro-politics of labour migration, the paper argues that local intermediaries (factory managers, trade union representatives) included ‘guest workers’ in the system of (in)formal bargaining and were generally responsive to their claims and grievances. Yet in evaluating the work performance and conduct of Cubans, racial stereotypes appeared in the factory-discourse.

Ondřej Vojtěchovský

“Our Workers Temporary Employed” in Socialist Czechoslovakia. Yugoslav Workers in the ČSSR, 1969–1989.

As a highly industrialized country, Czechoslovakia belongs to those European economies that suffered a permanent lack of labor force in their postwar history. Already shortly after 1945 the Czechoslovak government tried to attract foreign laborers to work in the industry sector and signed several bilateral agreements with countries such as Italy or Bulgaria. In the late 1960s, Czechoslovakia turned its attention to Yugoslavia which offered its surplus labor force to developed west European countries. This need for recruiting foreign workers even grew in the early 1970s as the Czechoslovak communist leadership strove to overcome the 1968 political crisis and disillusionment by accelerating economic growth and improving the living standard of its citizens. On the other hand, Yugoslav authorities at the time were looking for alternatives to sending their unemployed workers to the countries of the capitalist west. They considered signing a contract on labor force exchange programs with socialist countries of the Soviet Bloc. Czechoslovakia and the GDR were addressed especially. During the 1970s, Yugoslavs employed on big construction projects provided by Yugoslav companies were one of the most numerous groups of foreign laborers in Czechoslovakia.

The paper focuses on arguments mentioned in the internal discussion of Czechoslovak governmental bodies for or against the recruiting the labor force in Yugoslavia as well as the reasons which led Yugoslav representatives to consider, and eventually support this way of employing the country’s citizens abroad. The impact of this phenomenon on both socialist regimes is taken into consideration.

