

ROUND TABLE

# 'EVEN A MAN MUST BE MADE OF IRON...'

MASCULINITY, GENDER RELATIONS, AND WORKING-CLASS POLITICS  
IN PORT-CITIES IN MODERN TIMES

15 MAY 2025  
2:30 P.M.

Department of Historical Sciences and  
Cultural Heritage – University of Siena  
Via di Fieravecchia, 19; Aula D

Remote link:  
<https://unisi.webex.com/meet/fabio.deninno>  
For info: [erica.mezzoli@uniroma2.it](mailto:erica.mezzoli@uniroma2.it)



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Image: Otto Griebel, Der Schiffsheizer, 1920 © Privatsammlung, Foto: Christian Wirth, München © Matthias Griebel, Dresden

The workshop is co-organised in the framework of the NextGenerationEU Project 'OnLine. Women's Labour and Everyday Life on the Upper and Eastern Adriatic Waterfronts, mid-19th century—mid-20th century' (Funded by EU, CUP E53C22002420001) hosted by the Department of History, Humanities and Society of the Tor Vergata University of Rome.

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### PROGRAMME

#### Keynote Lecture

**Peter Cole**, Western Illinois University (Illinois, USA)

##### *Dockers, Gender, and What a Waterfront Novel Tells Us about These Workers*

**Abstract:** My lecture will begin with a discussion of the historiography of dockers, gender, and sexuality, particularly in the United States. As in ports worldwide, U.S. dock work historically was performed by men, almost entirely, which was also typical of seafarers and shipbuilders. I will focus on the history of the International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU), representing dockers along the U.S. Pacific Coast, and to a lesser extent, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), which represents dockers on the U.S. Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. Male-dominated U.S. dockworker unions, like the entire U.S. labor movement, were built upon the socially constructed image of hegemonic masculinity. However, in recent decades, some suggest a "crisis of masculinity" has emerged among longshoremen. The second part of the presentation will discuss *Presente: A Dockworker Story* (2024), a novel written by Herb Mills, a now-deceased ILWU longshoreman, and edited by me. I will examine what *Presente* illuminates issues about gender and social life among dockers at work and outside of it, i.e. on the waterfront and off it, the latter of which too often is ignored. While this presentation will focus on the United States, the history of dockers and their unions elsewhere has followed similar trajectories and will be incorporated.

**Chiara Fantozzi**, University of Siena (Italy)

##### *Becoming the Tenth Port: GIs and Italian Women during the Allied Occupation of Livorno*

**Abstract:** From 1st September 1944 to 1st January 1947, Livorno hosted the headquarters of the 10th Port Battalion – the U.S. Army's branch for overseas operations – becoming the strategic capital of Allied military operations in the rest of Italy and the Mediterranean for a long period. The city and the nearby Tombolo pine forest, made famous by neorealist films, were involved in the arrival and departure of thousands of military personnel, weapons, logistical material and supplies. In this context, the familiarisation of women, local and from other parts of Italy, became a subject of public discussion and was treated as a matter of public order. Taking the Livorno case as a starting point and privileging a gendered perspective that combines archival documents, journalistic accounts and fiction, my talk aims to focus on some of the difficulties and contradictions of the transition to democracy: impatience with the Allied presence and the perception of the Allies as "allied enemies"; the persistence of the imaginary of the nation as a gendered community, in which women are the guardians of the community's honor; the critique, especially by the local and national social-communist press, of the American consumerist model; and the structuring of nation building by contrast, centered on the condemnation of "immoral women."

**Erica Mezzoli**, NextGenerationEU Project 'Ondine' – Tor Vergata University of Rome (Italy)

##### *Engendering the Working-Class Hero: Seafaring, Breadwinning, and Masculinity in the Austrian Maritime Space, 1850-1920*

**Abstract:** During the last decades of the 19th and the first of the 20th centuries in the "West," a direct interdependence between industrial capitalism and patriarchal gender relations was established: the bourgeois male sole-breadwinner paradigm became the dominant family model even within the working class. The development of industrial (i.e., steam) navigation and the subsequent formation of social relations shaped by industrial capitalism exposed seafarers more to the norms and conventions of the shore communities. In that context, even seafarers—and other maritime workers—embraced the male sole-breadwinner bourgeois industrial capitalist diktat. The presentation aims to highlight the characteristics of this process within the Austrian seafaring class from the Gründerzeit to the post-WWI period

**DISCUSSANT: Fabio De Ninno**, University of Siena (Italy)

**Bio profile:** Fabio De Ninno is Associate Professor of Contemporary History at the Department of Historical Sciences and Cultural Heritage of the University of Siena. His research focuses on modern maritime, military, and naval history and explores the relationship between history and artificial intelligence. He is the principal investigator of the PRIN project Italian Cold War Borders. He co-directs the "Cultural Heritage" area within his Department's excellence project and coordinates the Italian bibliography of military history project. He is a member of the Second World War Research Group (King's College) and the Occupation Studies Network (King's College-Maastricht University). His most recent publications include the edited volume *Il Mediterraneo allargato e l'Italia* (2024) and the monograph *Mancò la fortuna non il valore* (2025).

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