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VIOLLAB - Violence and Labour Discipline in Early Modern Britain

A 2010 report by the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work (EU-OSHA) notes that work-related violence is a 'serious issue' facing workers today. It also results in 'substantial' economic losses, through workers' demoralized absenteeism and reduced productivity. Work-related violence, however, is not a new phenomenon; it has a history. VIOLLAB seeks to provide the first analysis of the causes and consequences of one type of work-related violence in Britain, c. 1550-1800: disciplinary violence. It defines 'disciplinary violence' as fatal and non-fatal physical violence (e.g., beatings) that employers or managers used to correct workers' infractions and to instil a sense of discipline in them. Combining methods from social, economic, and labour history with analytical insights from the sociology of work, VIOLLAB uses a range of sources to shed new light on how disciplinary violence influenced contemporary practices and theories of labour management; (gendered and aged-based) experiences of work; and the legal system's mediation of worker-employer relations. By analyzing the causes and consequences of disciplinary violence across different sectors of the British economy as it was transitioning to agrarian and industrial capitalism and becoming increasingly reliant on unfree labour for the production of colonial commodities, VIOLLAB aims to make transformative contributions to scholarship on work, labour relations/discipline, and the law in a period before the existence of modern labour protection laws and workers' organizations, and to raise public awareness about problems of work in the 21st century.

UNIPD Supervisor: Andrea Caracausi

MSCA Fellow: Hillary Taylor

Department: Department of Historical, Geographical and Ancient Sciences

Coordinator: Università degli Studi di Padova (Italy)

Total EU Contribution: Euro 172.750,08

Call ID: HORIZON-MSCA-2022-PF-01

Project Duration in months: 24

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