

Monday, 11.09.2023; 4:15 - 6:00 pm CEST

Claudia Bernardi, University of Perugia, Italy

“¿Que es un bracero?”. Questioning dependency and desires from the perspective of Mexican contract workers.

Abstract:

In late nineteenth century, the term *bracero* was employed in North America for identifying landless peasants who were temporarily employed in the fields in the United States. During the Second World War, the term gained attention as it identified Mexican contract workers who were recruited under the bilateral agreement between Mexico and the United States, which went on record as “Emergency farm labor agreement” in the US and “*Convenio de trabajadores*” in Mexico, and lasted from 1942 to 1964. Despite the formal names, it became popular as *Programa Bracero/Bracero Program* and was largely contested by unions, public opinion, even growers or institutional actors, on both side of the border, for its coercive way of operating and poor conditions suffered by Mexican workers. The lecture will analyze the definition and use of the term *bracero* to question the dependency and asymmetrical relations that the labor mobility program established during its lifetime and throughout its legacy. Various actors and sources will be explored for understanding the meaning and use of the term. Through primary sources collected in the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City, and the oral sources published on the public history website, Bracero History Archive, the lecture will assess the perspective of workers, growers, unions, public opinion, state and federal representatives about the dependency relationships established by the program. The workers' perspective on being a *bracero* will be privileged for exploring their desires, their use of the term, and their opinion on the program.

Bio:

Claudia Bernardi is associate professor in 'History of the Americas' at the University of Perugia, and Principal Investigator of the project *The Mobility Regime across Mexico and United States: the case of farmworkers from Tabasco and Oaxaca (1930s-1970s)* at the University of Padua. Her first monograph *Una storia di confine. Frontiere e lavoratori migranti tra Messico e Stati Uniti (1836- 1964)* won the Prize for First Work 2019 of the Italian Society for the Study of Contemporary History- SISSCO. She has recently edited the Special Issue titled *Mobility, labour, rights: trajectories and interactions in the Americas and Europe (XVII-XX centuries)* for “Annals of Luigi Einaudi Foundation. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Economics, History and Political Science” (2022). She is board member of the Italian Society for Labour History-SISLAV, *Profesora visitante* at Centro de Estudios Históricos-CEH of Colegio de México (2023, 2024), visiting affiliate (2023) and postdoctoral Fellow (2014/15) of the Weatherhead Initiative on Global History at Harvard University; *guest researcher* at the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut-IAI of Berlin (2022); research associate (2021/2022) and *visiting Fellow* at the History Department of Ghent University (2018, 2021); *visiting Fellow* at the European Institute for Global Studies of Basel University (2016).